

Avoiding The Worship Of Fools by Jeff Strite

Ecclesiastes 5:1-5:7

OPEN: A Missouri couple decided to build a luxury home in Florida. But they accidentally constructed a \$650,000 house on the lot next door to the one they owned... on property land belonging to someone else. The initial survey of the property was wrong. In a similar story, a Rhode Island developer mistakenly built a \$1.8 million house on public park land. Again, the survey was wrong. The Rhode Island Supreme Court ordered the house removed from public land.

The moral: When you build a home... you better make sure you build in the right place. (Daily Heartlight for 11/12/2014 by Tim Archer)

Now here in Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon is offering a slightly different kind of moral to his readers:

He's saying: If you're going to worship God... better make sure you do it in the right way. There is a right way, and a wrong way to worship God.

Solomon said: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of FOOLS, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

Solomon is saying there's a right way and wrong way to worship God. The right way is that of wise men. And the wrong way is the way of fools.

As I was preparing for the sermon this week I thought it would be interesting to ask: What is the WRONG way to worship God? What is the way of fools?

From the first 2 verses of chapter 5, Solomon tells us that fools...

1. don't even KNOW that they do wrong in worship
 2. they are quick and hasty in what they say: They talk without thinking
 3. and they SAY A LOT... but they MEAN LITTLE of what they say. They're hypocrites.
- Solomon very clearly says: "Guard your steps when you go the house of God."

Now, I don't want to worship like a fool, so I want to know what a fool's worship looks like. And what caught my attention in this text was that Solomon said fools don't KNOW that they "do wrong" in worship.

Solomon says: "Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong." Ecclesiastes 5:1b

Now, what could a fool do in worship that would be “wrong”?

As I thought about that, my mind drifted back to three stories in the Old Testament.

First, I thought about Nadab and Abihu (the sons of the 1st High Priest – Aaron). They had many jobs in the Tabernacle, and one of those jobs was to offer incense to God at the altar of incense in the Tabernacle. Now, God’s word was very explicit on HOW they should offer that incense, but these boys couldn’t be bothered by the details. They didn’t think it mattered how they did - what they did – in the presence of God. They thought they could improve on the things of God.

BUT THEY WERE WRONG.

Leviticus 10:2 tells us “fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”

Nadab and Abihu offered the sacrifice of fools.

They did what was wrong.

And they died.

Then there’s the story of King Uzziah.

King Uzziah started out as a fairly righteous King. But as time went on, and he became more powerful and successful, he decided he was important enough that he didn’t need the Levitical priests to do his worship for him. He decided he had the right to go into the Temple and offer incense at the incense Altar. He thought he could improve on the things God had commanded.

BUT HE WAS WRONG.

2 Kings 15:5 says “The LORD afflicted the king with leprosy until the day he died...”

Uzziah offered the sacrifice of fools.

He did what was wrong.

And he went to his grave stricken with leprosy.

Then there’s the story of King Manasseh.

King Manasseh didn’t even start out right. Almost from the beginning of his reign, he did all kinds of bad things.

One of the things he did was to “re-arrange” the furniture at the Temple.

He took the altar of sacrifice and replaced it with a pagan altar.

And, possibly worst of all, he offered up his son as burnt offering to one of those pagan gods.

Now, eventually, Manasseh repented of all the evil he had done, and God forgave him.

But 2 Kings 23:26 tells us: “The Lord’s “... fierce anger... burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to arouse his anger.”

Manasseh had offered the sacrifice of fools.

He did what was wrong.

And it hurt his nation. He had led his nation into false worship and there was no way of pulling them back out of their heresy. And this evil ultimately led to destruction of that

nation.

So one of the aspects of the worship of fools is when they decide they have the right to change things. When they "re-arrange" the furniture because they think they can.

ILLUS: I remember talking with a denominational preacher once and sharing our brotherhood's conviction that God had set things up in His church in the New Testament, just the way He wanted it. And that we believed it was unwise to try to "improve" on that pattern.

He scoffed at that: "Of course you can improve on the church of the New Testament. The church of the New Testament was a primitive thing, and the church has had to change to meet the times."

And that's why so many churches "tinker" with stuff.

They think they're smart enough to improve on the things of God.

They believe they're entitled to set up the church the way they want to.

For example, did you know that when you became a Christian, the Bible says that became a PRIEST? It's true (I Peter 2:9).

And did you know that when you became a Christian, the Bible also said you had become a SAINT? It's true (Romans 1:7).

But there are churches that say "No, no, no, no." They teach that only CERTAIN special people get to be priests and saints. These congregations teach that it is not enough for you to be Christian, you have to become something more to be priests and saints.

That's just not Biblical!

Now why would they do that?

Why would they redefine Biblical terminology?

Well, they do that because they feel they have the right to "improve" on what God has said.

But Jesus said: "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."
Matthew 15:9

When you start substituting your own rules and terminologies for God's stuff in Scripture, you change the meanings of words and ultimately change the way worshipers think about themselves as followers of Christ. And that ultimately warps the worship of those who like to honor God.

Sometimes churches don't stop at redefining the meaning of Biblical words.

Sometimes churches simply rearrange the furniture.

(I began moving the communion table off to the side of its usual position)

ILLUS: Some time back, I read about a church that moved its communion table into a side room. The Lord's Supper was no longer offered in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings.

Why would they do that?

I also read about huge church up north that completely did away with taking communion on Sunday mornings?

Why would they do that?

Well, at least for the church that stopped taking the Lord's Supper on Sunday, I heard this explanation: They stopped observing Communion on Sunday mornings because "Taking communion on Sunday mornings interferes with the flow of worship."

Seriously?

It interrupted the "flow of worship?"

According to Acts 20:7, the early church came together "on the first day of the week... to break bread..." They were taking communion. That's why they had gathered.

Now, it just so happened that Paul was there and was allowed to preach. But the main reason the church had gathered was to observe the Lord's Supper.

That WAS worship.

But, you know, a lot of trendy churches don't think like that.

They've redefined worship to mean something Scripture never intended.

Have you ever heard of a person at church called the "worship leader?"

What's the "worship leader do?"

He leads singing, doesn't he?

But singing is only a small portion of worship.

So is preaching.

So is praying.

And so is giving our offerings.

But you haven't really worshiped until you've taken of communion.

This is the center piece of what we do.

Did you know what we're doing at the Lord's Table?

We're eating with Jesus.

Now, I'm always flattered when people tell me they want to invite me to go out and eat with them after church.

It's always pleasant to go eat with you.

But, you know, I don't care how good my sermon might be.

I don't care how clever and smart you think I might be.

Sitting down to eat with me pales in comparison to sitting down with Jesus at His table.

This IS worship.

There is no "flow" to worship until you've eaten with Jesus.

In fact, every time you sit down to eat the Lord's Supper, you're preaching.

Did you know that?

Paul writes: "... whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's

death until he comes." 1 Corinthians 11:26

(PAUSE)

So, it's important that church doesn't redefine God's terminology, or rearrange God's furniture. When congregations get into the habit of doing stuff like, they often end up offering a "fool's worship."

But you know a church could do everything right.

They could have all their ducks in a row.

They could know and teach that all Christians priests and saints .

And make a big a deal about communion every Sunday.

They could DO all the right things every Sunday morning and still be offering up the worship of fools.

If they miss out on one certain thing in their worship, their worship would be the worship of fools? And do you know what that "one thing" might be?

Solomon wrote that in worship we need to "Go near to LISTEN." Ecclesiastes 5:1

And Jesus said: "Blessed... are those who HEAR the word of God AND OBEY it." Luke 11:28

So, we need to hear what Jesus commands us to do.

And Jesus said His PRIMARY command to Christians was this:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12

You know, the Bible is just full of "one anothering".

In my files, I have a list of 61 times in the New Testament where we are commanded to "one another" one another. I could read the whole list to you this morning... but I want to keep you awake a little longer, so I'll just give you a partial list of just of the "one anothers" found in the book of Romans.

"...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members ONE OF ANOTHER.
Romans 12:5

"Be devoted to ONE ANOTHER in brotherly love; give preference to ONE ANOTHER in honor ...
Romans 12:10

"Owe nothing to anyone except to LOVE ONE ANOTHER; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

"Therefore let us not judge ONE ANOTHER anymore, but rather determine this -- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." Romans 14:13

"So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of ONE ANOTHER."
Romans 14:19

"Therefore, accept ONE ANOTHER, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

Romans 15:7

"... I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish ONE ANOTHER." Romans 15:14

"Greet ONE ANOTHER with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." Romans 16:16

Now, my point is this: unless we "one another" one another, we will offer the worship of fools.

As a church we can do all the right things at just the right time.

And we can call Bible things by Bible names.

And we can have our doctrine just the way it ought to be.

We can do ALL that, and still displease God with our worship.

We can still be offering the worship of fools if you we don't learn to love one another as Jesus taught us.

When he preached the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "... if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 5:23-24

Leave your gift there.

Don't try offering it to God till you've set things right with a brother or sister who dislikes you.

You see, if Christians don't show love to each other, if they don't forgive each other, and they don't pray for each other, and they don't try to fix what's wrong between each other - God doesn't want their gifts. He doesn't want their sacrifices. He doesn't want their perfect theology.

Because, if they don't show love to one another, all they offer to God is the sacrifice of fools.

Now, HOW do people get to the point where they do stuff like that?

Why would they feel they could rearrange God's furniture, redefine His terminology and abuse His people? Well, they get to that point because they missed a couple small details in Scripture:

1st detail is this - they forget who God is.

Solomon wrote: "God is in heaven and you are on earth..." Ecclesiastes 5:2

Where's God?

God's in heaven... you're not.

That means He's God and you're not.

He's higher than you are.

He's bigger than you are.

And He's smarter than you are.

But, you see, people tend to forget that.

They tend to forget who's in charge.

Whether they're into rearranging the furniture, or redefining terminology, or mistreating others - they've forgotten Who owns who. And they've slipped into the thinking that they can play God.

That doesn't work out real well.

God's in heaven... and you're not.

He gets to call the shots... you don't

Once we come to grips with that reality then we want to take care of what He owns.

- Does God own this church?
- Does God have the right tell us how to do stuff here?
- Does God own the person next to you?
- Did Jesus die for that person?
- Does Jesus have the right to expect us to love that person?

You see how easy that is?

Once you realize that God is in charge and that He owns everything, everything falls into place. It's that one small detail - realizing God is God and you're not - that makes all the difference.

The 2nd small detail is this - they forget that worship starts before you get here.

Solomon wrote: "Guard your steps WHEN YOU GO TO the house of God...." Ecclesiastes 5:1

You see, the problem for too many church goers is they tend to compartmentalize God. For them, God only shows up at church. From, Sunday afternoon on, they're on their own. God never enters their mind or their actions.

ILLUS: I went to a gathering recently and someone said: "Oh, we have to watch what we say, because the preacher's here."

Really, is God setting on my shoulder or something?

Does He only enter the room when I open the door?

Of course not. That's absurd.

But a lot of people think about God in that way. On Sunday, they PUT ON their Sunday go to meeting clothes and they'll be all pious and reverent while they're inside the building. But Monday thru Saturday... you could hardly tell they knew who Jesus is. They live immoral, greedy and selfish lives. Because for them Church is sacred... and everywhere else is secular.

ILLUS: Do you remember Moses was when God told him to take off his shoes for the place where was standing was holy ground? Was Moses inside the Tabernacle, or some other

"holy" building?

Noooo. He's on a mountain in front of a bush.

He's standing on rocks and dirt.

And there's nobody around.

There's no one there to impress ... just God

CLOSE: You see, true worship - wise worship - Godly worship - is where you and I want to be in God's presence so badly that a building can't hold Him. True worship is when we hunger and thirst to be in His presence every moment of every day. Sunday mornings just aren't enough time to really worship Him. We HAVE to spend time every moment of every day.

We can't wait to get up in the morning so we can talk to Him about our day.

We can't wait to get some alone time so we can share our thoughts and our dreams with Him.

We literally thirst to be in His presence.

One person put it this way: "Real worship is thirsty land crying out for rain." (D. Bradley)

CLOSE: After WWI, Lawrence of Arabia brought some of his Arab friends to Paris. He showed them the sights of the city: the Arch of Triumph, the Louvre, Napoleon's tomb. But none of these things impressed them as much as something they saw in their room. What really intrigued them was the faucet in the bathtub of the hotel room.

They spent much of time in the bathroom turning the faucets on and off. They found it amazing that one could turn a handle and get all the water he wanted.

Later, when they were ready to leave Paris and return to the East Lawrence found them in the bathroom with wrenches (pause for effect). They were trying to disconnect the faucet.

Now, why would they do that?

When Lawrence asked them that question they replied: "You see it is very dry in Arabia. What we need are faucets. If we have them, we will have all the water we want."

Now, you laugh at that.

But you laugh because YOU know where that water comes from.

In the same way, worship is only the faucet.

The true water of life comes only through Jesus.

And you can't get that water by just being satisfied with a part time worship.

Jesus said: "... whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:14

Without Jesus to supply for your thirst, you're never really going to be truly satisfied. And that's why offer a time of invitation for you to let Jesus into your life and allow Him to quench your thirst.