

Worship God with Fear

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[0:00] 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.

As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin and do not protest to the temple messenger.

My vow was a mistake. Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.

[1:12] Therefore, stand in awe of God. Let's do that as we hear his word. Is God dead?

That was the question Time Magazine asked in the spring of 1966. It was in response to a theological fad suggesting that the idea of God was dead.

There was simply no room for him in modern man's secular, scientific mind. Despite the theologians, the idea of God did not die.

If anything, the secularization of our culture has made the idea of God even more attractive, even than it was in the 60s. All kinds of people want to include God in their lives.

They sit in front of their computers or their TV screens, and something is not right. They sit with their cars in their garage, and their ever bigger houses, and they long to escape from this soul-numbing reality of living in a world where everything is tasteless.

[2:36] And so they flock to religion. They want to manage Havel, the meaninglessness of life, with worship.

With worship. And we see it today. Coalesce saw it then. Men have always tried to manage Havel to numb that sense with what J.I. Packer called hot tub religion.

Where man feels empty, he feels sick inside, and he looks around at his life, and he says, I need something here. I need something tasteful.

I need some flavor. And so I know I will add a little God to the mix. So religion, light, is the order of the day.

They want to feel like their life has meaning. They want to feel like I'm connected to something bigger than myself. I want to connect to something transcendent. And so I know what I'll do.

[3:35] I'll add a little worship to my life. Well, we see it today. Coalesce saw it then. But let me ask you, do you see it in your own heart?

Tonight, God, through Coalesce, is speaking to us. He's speaking to the folks within these four walls. And you need to see that this, what Ecclesiastes 5, 1 through 7 talks about, isn't someone else's problem.

Religion, light, isn't just other people's problems. It's our problem. This is the tendency of your heart. This is the tendency of my heart.

I want to numb the havel by trifling with God. So in Ecclesiastes 5, Coalesce comes broadside to this whole idea of worship, of trifling in worship.

And he unloads all his cannon onto our ship because he doesn't want us to escape down some other rabbit hole into more vanity.

[4:45] He doesn't want us to be fooled. And this is an area where we can be so easily fooled. And religion, light, is precisely that, vanity and foolishness.

It's not the way out of havel. It's actually the pathway to go further and further down into it. It's the path deeper into havel. And worse than that, it actually sabotages one of God's remedies for

dealing with havel.

It actually makes the problem worse and it ruins one of the solutions that God has given to us. Well, tonight, Coalesce teaches us how to worship God in a way that actually eases havel.

And he gives us three commands for us to follow. And you see the first command there in verse 1. Guard your steps when you go into the house, when you go to the house of God.

This is a comprehensive statement. This is an all-embracing statement about what our heart should be like, what our life should be like when we go to the house of God. Guard your steps. So a man's steps are his life.

[6:00] It's the way he lives. And Coalesce's first command then is watch your step. Watch your step. Why would he say that?

Why would he command us to watch our step unless this was a place where we could easily fall? We can never say, oh, I'm safe here.

We need to watch our step here because worshipping God is like crossing an icy pavement.

And you don't go traipsing out into an icy pavement and saying, I don't have to worry about falling. Because what happens if you don't worry about falling is that you fall. And so Coalesce isn't wasting his breath.

The worship of God is a sheet of ice. And we can never feel comfortable here. We can never say, oh, I got this covered. I know what to do.

[7:02] I know what the right things to say. I know what the right things to do. We sing out of the Trinity hymnal. We follow the regulative principle of worship. And so no worries. No worries.

Brothers and sisters, the worship of God is not a place to feel safe or like you have arrived. Oh, look what they're doing. Look what they're doing.

They're doing it all wrong, but I have it all right. This is a place to watch your step. When you are crossing the ice, you don't look out for other people, first of all.

You make sure of your own feet. You make sure that you're not falling. And sure, if you have the opportunity, you'll help someone after they've fallen, and you'll help them from falling.

But the first thing to do when you're crossing the ice is to watch your own step. And that's what he tells us. We all have a tendency to take the awe out of worship.

[8:02] We all have the proclivity to go through the motions, don't we? And so this warning is for us. The worship of God is a place to watch your step.

And if we don't, then what happens? Coalesce says, well, if you don't, you're going to offer up the sacrifice of fools. We offer up a sacrifice of praise, and it's foolish.

It's worthless. Well, what is that sacrifice of fools that he's talking about? Well, it's exactly the opposite of the kind of worship that comes from a person who is ready to listen, and who is watching his step.

The sacrifice of fools is unguarded. It's unthought out. It's the unthought out worship of people who don't have their minds in what they're doing.

They're there, but their minds are not there. So the fool isn't thinking about God. He isn't ready to listen to God. He is ready to talk.

[9:10] He just wants to do his thing, and he wants to get out. So the fool might say all the right things, and he might do all the right things, and he might sing all the right songs, but the whole time he isn't thinking.

He's talking. Talking, talking, talking. And isn't that what Jesus said? The pagan thinks that they will be heard because of their many words. Those foolish pagans are the kinds of people that add lots of words to their worship, and they add more and more words, and the whole time Coalesce says they don't even know that they're doing wrong.

And isn't that the way of a fool? A fool never responds to correction because everything they do is right. They don't even know that they're doing wrong.

They're blind to their own folly. They go into worship and think, just because I'm here, just because I have some feeling of wanting to bless God, that that's okay.

It doesn't matter if God's commanded it or not. It doesn't matter if I am in awe of God. I am here, and that is enough. And it doesn't matter what they do because they're always right.

[10:20] And so the fool thinks if he says the right words and sings the right songs and responds in the right way, then God will accept it. God has to accept it because I, you know, I have this feeling about it.

And so God has to do it. God has to receive it. And Coalesce says that is folly. That's folly. That is human worship.

So instead, he says, go near to listen, not to speak. Do not be quick with your mouth. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God.

There should be a hesitancy. There should be a hesitancy to say anything in the worship of God, before God.

And so the second commandment is be quick to listen and be slow to speak. The first commandment was watch your step. And the second commandment is be quick to listen and slow to speak.

[11 : 20] Brothers and sisters, the worship of God is a place to think. It's a place to reflect, to hear, to ponder.

It is not the place to talk, talk, talk. Our posture, the posture of our heart, should be receptive. We shouldn't be waiting on the edge of our seats, waiting to give our every thought and our every comment, ready to sing and sing and sing just for singing's sake.

And of course, there's nothing wrong with singing. There's nothing wrong with praying to God. You know that. But do you ever, brothers and sisters, say amen after a brother has prayed and you did not hear a single word he said?

And there you go. Amen. Well, what is that? That's speaking before God without thinking. That's a sacrifice of a fool. That's speaking without listening.

And so, brothers, when you're called on to pray, what are your prayers like? Are they verbose? Are you thinking about your many words, that the length of the prayer makes it better?

[12 : 39] When Jesus said, this is how you should pray. Our Father in heaven, hallow be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

How fancy was that prayer? How long did it take to say it? Jesus was teaching us to pray exactly how Koalath is teaching us to do worship.

There should be simplicity and there should be brevity. Why? Because who we're talking to. God is in heaven and you are on earth.

And so let your words be few. So imagine that you're going to a state dinner. And that's probably a big stretch for your imagination, but imagine it. And there, the United States, the president of the United States there is the prime minister of Great Britain is there.

[13 : 43] Would you go to that dinner ready to comment on everything? Would you go ready to tell them how excited you were to watch the latest episode of The Biggest Loser?

And would you be excited to tell them of what kind of things that your kids were up to and how the latest, the baseball game went or whatever? And you say, no, of course not. Well, why?

Well, what would you do? Well, you would speak when you're spoken to, wouldn't you? And you would keep your comments as brief as possible.

And the whole time you would be saying, don't make a fool out of yourself. Don't stick your foot in your mouth. You've got to be quiet. If you can just make it through this without making a fool out of yourself, that is the thing.

And Kola says, if you know how to act like that when you're around people who are more important than you, then how much more should you act that way around God?

[14 : 43] Remember, God is in heaven and you are on earth. The Lord isn't the prime minister and he isn't the president who's here today and gone tomorrow. Before there was a world, God was.

He's the creator and you're the creature. He's forever and you live your 70 years and you're gone. And God is big and he's very big and you're very small. He isn't like you. He isn't like you. Before you were.

So think of the day you were born. Going back nine months. Before you were. God is. And a billion years before there was even time.

That makes any sense. God is. And he made the whole world out of nothing. Does that reality grip you as you come to worship?

[15 : 48] You're coming to a God who made the whole world out of nothing. So before the world was, what was there? There was nothing. Except God.

There was no light. There was no dark. There was no space. There was no time. There were no people. There was only God.

And that's who you worship. He's completely different than you. Cornelius Fantil was a long time professor at Westminster Seminary. And every day he would come into his classroom and he would go up to the chalkboard and he would draw one big circle at the top of the board and one little circle at the bottom.

The big circle was God and the little circle underneath was everything else. That was us and the world and all everything that we know and see. And the circles never touched.

They were separate. See, God isn't like man and man isn't like God. God isn't part of the creation. He's the creator. And so he's completely other.

[16:55] He's completely exalted above all the little circle of our life and of the universe. And Fantil did that because he understood the truth of Ecclesiastes 5 that God is in heaven and you are on earth.

There's a big difference. God is holy. That means he's other. He's separate. He's pure. And so our words should be few. Brothers and sisters, if that is true, if that's true, pray for your pastors.

You have the luxury of not speaking. But we have to play with fire. And we have the same evil tongues as you do.

Remember what James said. Our tongue is set on fire by hell. There's a pipeline from hell straight into my mouth. Straight into every pastor's mouth.

And we have to speak in the presence of a holy, holy, holy God. And we have to speak a lot.

[18:09] So pray that we would not destroy ourselves with our own mouths. because it is a possibility when you come to the worship of God to destroy yourself with your own tongue.

Well, why else should we be quick to listen and slow to speak? Well, because the words of fools, the worship of fools, they're dreams. They're fantasies. They're havel.

As a dream comes, when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. And you can hear, you hear that, that that's a proverb. proverb. And so, the fool is, is full of words.

And all those words are just like a dream. There's nothing to them. What do they amount to?

Nothing but a fantasy that you wake up and you forget. So, you've had a terrible day.

You've had much care. You've had a lot on your mind and you go to sleep. And maybe you've had nights like that. What do you dream about that night? Well, you dream about your problems and how maybe you could solve them.

[19:15] And then you have these weird, varied alterations of those problems that are really bizarre and make you wonder if you're okay. And then, and then you wake up.

And the dreams are gone. And all your problems are still there. And that is exactly like the worship of a fool. Their dreams, they don't make sense.

And in the morning, they're gone and Havel is still there. That same emptiness is there. The same annoying feeling that this is futile is still there.

So, the worship of a fool is a dream. It's quickly here and it's gone. It's sound and fury signifying nothing. And so, beloved, don't be a fool.

Let your words be few when you come to the house of the Lord. Well, under this command to be slow to speak and quick to listen, he brings in the idea of vows.

[20:23] In the Old Testament, vows were part of the public worship of God. And a couple weeks ago, Pastor John talked about Hannah and she was in the public worship of God and she made a vow.

You remember that. She's Samuel's mother. And she said, O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life.

So, that's how a vow works. If I do such and such, God, then, or if you do such and such, God, then I will do this in response.

If you help me, I will give you something. But also included in these ideas of vows are these sacred promises. We talk about wedding vows. They're the same, the same word gets attached to both and he, I think he means both.

Both aspects were fairly common in the worship of the Old Testament. And because they were so common, fools often and easily abused them.

[21:33] And that's why it comes up here. Kola says, but when you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He doesn't say, don't take a vow. He says, do what you're going to, do what you say you're going to do.

Why? Because he, God, has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill your vows. See, fools love vows. They love them. But God takes no pleasure in the fool.

See, a fool loves a quick vow. And you can tell a fool when he's always saying, I swear this and I swear that. He loves the vow. And in the worship of God, fools love to take vows because it enhances their reputation within the church.

When they're talking big, it makes them look good. Well, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 probably made a vow to give a part of the price of the property or the full price of the property.

We'll sell this property and we'll give it to you. This is a promise. But when it came time to pay, they weren't too keen on the idea of paying all of it. They saw the money, they wanted some of it, and so they lied.

[22:45] And what happened? God killed them because God takes no pleasure in fools. The Pharisees loved to take vows.

And Jesus hammered them for their hypocrisy and their foolishness. He says, blind guides, you say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he's bound by his oath.

You blind fools. Which is greater, the gold or the temple that makes the gold sacred. They were blind fools because they were trifling with God. They were taking this vow, and then when it came time to pay, they said, oh, no, I didn't mean that, and I didn't promise by the right thing.

I didn't take the vow by the right thing. If I promise by the temple, it doesn't mean anything. But the gold on the temple, now that would have been binding, but I didn't swear by that. So they come up with all these lame excuses not to carry out their word.

See, fools love to take a vow, but when it comes time to deliver, they're not ready to do what they said, and they come up with some excuse. It was a mistake.

[23:56] I can't do it now. Come back later, and I'll do what I said later. I can't do this. And they never mean to do what they said at all. Why is divorce so common?

Because people come to the altar, and they take vows, and they swear things in the presence of God and to God while God is listening, and they don't think about what they're saying.

They don't care that God is listening. They don't care that they swear to God in front of God that they will be faithful, and they will live as man and wife until death parts them, and when the going gets rough, they bail.

And it's not because marriage is so hard nowadays. It's because they don't take their vows seriously. Their vows don't mean anything to them.

And is God silent in this situation? Does he sit by while people break their marriage vows?

[25:06] do you see the spiritual sickness in divorced families? Do you see how destruction goes in those families?

families? And God is, in many cases, destroying the works of their hands. You might be saying, well, isn't that a bit strong? My answer is no.

We have too low of a view of how holy God is and how serious it is to take a vow in his presence. And so he will carry out his threat.

Our words are idle, but he is serious about his words. God is a consuming fire and he carries out his threats. So brothers and sisters, watch your step.

Guard your mouth when you're dealing with God. In a fit of joy or an anguish over some sin, don't promise God something that you're not ready to fulfill, not ready to deliver on.

[26:14] Don't rashly say after your sin, oh God, if you just help me to get over this sin, then I'll become a missionary, I'll read my Bible for a year, and God, I swear this and I swear that.

Why do that to yourself? All you're doing is opening your self up to more and further sin. Now there might be a place in your private life to take a solemn vow to God, but be careful.

And there might be, and there probably is, a place to take a vow and a fight, in your fight against sin, but be careful. This is slippery ground, this is an icy pavement, and the danger is God.

that you will fall into God's hands for your idle words. And then that brings us to the third command. Fear God, fear God.

Look at verse 7. Much dreaming and many words are havel. havel. Much dreaming and many words are havel.

[27 : 24] Therefore stand in awe of God. So Koh Leth steps back and he looks over this whole scene of religion light, of people traipsing into God's presence, and he says, you know what, this doesn't actually solve havel.

This doesn't make it better. This actually makes it worse. It actually creates more havel. It creates more frustration. It creates more confusion. It creates more pointless, useless, living. Therefore, fear God. Stand in awe of God. Remember, he is in heaven and you are on earth. Remember, your life is a mist. And yesterday and today and forever, he's the same. And your breath is in his hands. And he wouldn't be any poorer for taking it away from you. He doesn't need you.

But in him, you live and move and have your being. So he's exalted. He's transcendent and pure. [28 : 27] And your feet are in the dust. Dust you are, and to dust you will return. And so as you remember who God is, as you remember how exalted and holy and transcendent he is, then you begin to understand what your position before him should be.

The basic position should be fear, reverence. And as you fear God, something very peculiar happens.

The havel of life diminishes. It doesn't go away completely, but it's not so pressing anymore. It's not so distressing. See, a little view of God, religion light, it creates more pointless, useless havel living. But when God is exalted in your sight, when you have a big view of God, then the mist clears away a little.

And the frustration and the confusion eases. So Asaph was having his fill of havel. Remember in Psalm 73, he's looking around and he sees the wicked and they're prospering and he sees the righteous and they're suffering and it was perplexing.

[29 : 44] It was confusing. It was havel. And then he went into the temple and things snapped into focus.

He got an exalted view of God and things were better after that. Right? Now, the wicked were still prospering and the righteous were still suffering, but God was exalted and so it was okay.

There was something, he could live with it now. And it comforted his heart. Remember Job's suffering. He's confused.

He knows God is in control, but nothing makes sense. His friends come and they do well for a while. And then they decide to open their mouth and talk.

And they start saying, Job, you must have sinned because in God's world, it's the sinners who suffer. Life always works that way.

[30 : 53] If something bad happens to you, it's because of sin. And they were saying this about Job, and they were wrong. So they tormented Job with their badgering and with their explanations and their explaining.

But in the end, they were just talking and talking and it was just Havel. It was useless. It was all still a confusing, perplexing mess.

Well, what made it better for Job? Well, I don't have to tell you. It was a view of the exalted God, wasn't it?

Have you ever given orders to the morning or shown the dawn its place? Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you?

Here we are. Job, is that true of you? And God went on and on and on. And after God's questioning, things were still the same in Job's life.

[31 : 56] He didn't have any of the answers. He didn't know why he was suffering. It was still all Havel, but that was okay. He says, surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me.

When Job saw God high and lifted up, he was able to take the low place. And he was able to lay like a baby in God's arms.

And there was no need to fret. There was no need to get all stirred up. God was majestic. God was exalted. And that was what his weary soul needed.

So, brothers and sisters, in your hours of confusion, when you don't understand life, and it's very perplexing, the worship of God can become an entryway into more Havel, or it can be the entryway in a part, to a degree, out of Havel.

It can be a remedy, or it could be the poison that kills you. It all depends on your attitude that you come to the house of the Lord with. If you all come here, and you're all worked up, and you come, and your car radio is blaring, and you pull in, and you're saying, let's go, let's get this thing going, I'm ready to go, let's do this, and you forget who you're worshiping, you forget what you're about, you forget who God is, then that actually makes it worse.

[33:29] When you're not prepared to come, when you're not prepared to think, not prepared to listen, life goes worse. Havel gets worse. And so, take some time on Sunday morning to prepare yourself.

And I know it is busy. I mean, I know it's busy. I know it's hard. But you must do it. You must do it because you're meeting with God. And He demands the reverence and the fear of your heart. Well, we've covered three commands. Watch your step, be slow to speak and quick to listen, and fear God. And now at the end, I want to talk about the glory of Jesus Christ.

The glory of Jesus Christ. I want you to see how glorious He is. Isn't it obvious from these three commands, when you compare your life to what Coalesce says, that you're a lawbreaker. You're a lawbreaker. We are all lawbreakers. We're too easily satisfied. We're too easily satisfied to add a little God to our lives, to roll in here with a thousand things on our mind, not thinking about what we're about, not having God on our minds.

[34:57] And so we've been satisfied with religion light, with hot tub religion. And so we've exposed ourselves to God's displeasure.

God takes no pleasure in fools. And we've exposed ourselves to His wrath. And we don't have any way of making it right on our own.

God's God's where we see the glory of Jesus. So God is in heaven, and we are on earth. And those circles could never touch, but in the person of Jesus Christ, God came down, and the circles came together.

And what we couldn't do, because we were powerless, we were guilty, and we were just going through the motions, God did in Christ for us.

So Emmanuel did it for us. God with us did it for us. And so what did he do? What did Emmanuel do? He didn't come bringing destruction and judgment for our broken vows, and our mindless worship, and the way that we just do this formally.

[36:12] He came to save. And he came to save fools like you, and he came to save fools like me. And he feared God perfectly all through his life.

He meant every word he said, every promise he made, without exception he fulfilled. He meant every prayer he prayed.

Do you ever pray at the dinner table and you just say it? Jesus never did. Everything that he did in worship was completely perfect.

And he watched his steps perfectly. He was quick to listen and slow to speak. He feared God perfectly. And then he took that perfect life to the cross.

And he died in the fool's place. And God poured out his anger for us, for us, for all this foolish worship that we do.

[37:17] He poured out his anger on his son for us and God's wrath has been pacified and our sins have been washed away. Just like that. Gone. All because of him.

And so now, to worship God, we don't go to some earthly temple. We don't go to the house of God. Do we? Because there's a new house of God.

There's a new temple. temple. Jesus Christ is the temple of God. And Jesus Christ is the person, is the temple where we go to meet God.

And he's the meeting place for God and man. We sang about how he's our mediator. And so in him we can worship without terror. In him we can worship safely in God's presence.

peace. Because in Christ, justice and mercy meet and they kiss. And heaven and earth come together. And God and man are reconciled.

[38:23] And so now we have peace with God. And so in that fear of God, there doesn't have to be a terror for our sins. Because our sins have been washed away. And so we don't have to play pretend at worship anymore.

We don't have to pretend. We don't have to hide our sin. And we don't have to drag God down. We can admit our sin and we can exalt God. Because in Jesus Christ, God has been reconciled to us and our sins have been forgiven and his holiness and his justice has been exalted.

And so we can look reality in the face. We don't have to pretend. We don't have to hide. And it's all because of Jesus. And so if you don't know Jesus here tonight, let me plead with you. wake up from your dreams. Because that's all they are. You're here and if you think you're doing something right just for being here, you're not. You're not.

God wants your heart. He wants the fear of your heart. He wants the love of your heart. And so stop playing at worship. You were made for the real thing and the real thing is so much better than the fake.

[39:32] you were made for an exalted God and you can have him in Christ. And you can meet him in Christ. And you were made for friendship and you were made for fellowship with God.

And the only way that you can have him is through Christ. So his life is enough. That perfect life is enough. And that death is enough.

Everything that we need to worship God is in Christ. So don't delay. If you delay, you're just going on in your fantasies.

So wake up. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we ask that you would forgive us for our many, many sins.

We have too often, even today, been mindless in our worship and we have trifled with you. You've demanded all the love our soul, strength, mind can give you.

[40:49] And we have been wandering. We've been cold. We've been thoughtless. Will you steer us into your truth?

Will you correct us with your word? Father, help us to be more mindful of your presence, more mindful of your greatness. Forgive us for thinking about so many things and not about you.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus. Without him, who could stand? Without him, who could be saved? he is all of our righteousness. He is everything that we need.

So I pray that we would find in him our all in all. For those who don't know you, Lord Jesus, will you exert your sovereignty, your command, and speak into their dead souls and raise them to new life.

Put the fear of God in them where there is no fear. Give them eyes to see where they are blind.

Give them a heart to repent and to believe. These are gifts from you, and so we ask that you would give them for your own great namesake.

[42:07] There are not enough people in this room worshipping you. There is not enough people in this room praising you and living their lives for you. Will you do something about it for your namesake?

And in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.