

If there is perhaps one word to describe the cultural direction of America in the past 15 years.... it would have to be **CASUAL**....

We are casual about relationships;..... casual about work..... casual about recreation..... casual about religion..... we are casual about **life**....

and we **like** it that way.....

After all..... Casual and Cool go together..... and both are indications that we are in complete control of the situation....with nothing and no one....to fear.

There's only ONE (rather large) problem with that world view

That is,.... that the Bible tells us very clearly that **GOD**is **not** casual.

By that... I don't mean God doesn't like jeans.... or flip flops..... and that you have to dress like your in a **Royal Wedding** to come to church.....

- I mean..... God is not into **superficiality**.... or into being INDIFFERENT....
- God is not casual about His relationships.... in any degree...
- full bore blessings.... mother load of lovingkindness... .. or the unimaginable fury of His wrath...
- He is not half-hearted in His commitments....or His resolve....
- God isn't **nonchalant**..... about ANYTHING.

God **CARES**.... about everything....

And it PLEASES Him when you take worshipping Him SERIOUSLY.

Careful Worship

Last week....we saw the beautiful illustration of how this COMMUNITY of people... called the household of God.... is like a **cord** of three interwoven stands of rope.....it is **relationally capable** of holding together under great strain....and stress ...

Today.... we want to hear the Holy Spirit admonish us in regard to how we are to **approach** this gathering of God's Community..... when we come to worship Him.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

" **Guard** your steps when you go to the house of God. To **draw near to listen** is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear."

Israelite worship was anything **but** casual. Each element of their worship was prescribed by God in order to be an **outward display** of His **holiness**.....

Everything from the clothing, to the furniture, the rituals and the architecture itself was specifically commanded by God through His Word...

To demonstrate to Israel and to the foreigner among them... that God was **NOT like them**... He was Holy.

Any violation of His prescription for how to worship Him..... was to be punished.....sometimes by **death**.

While we would not want to go back to those types of outward constraints.....and forms.....

We do need to remember that we are worshipping the same God... the one who met Moses in the wilderness with these words....

Exodus 3:2-6

"And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "**Do not come near**; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was **afraid to look at God**."

Anywhere GOD shows up..... becomes Holy Ground.....

Even... when it is a school cafeteria....

the first step in...

Careful Worship

1. Recognize God's **Holiness**

Solomon's life work.... (in **visible** terms) was the Temple which he had been chosen by God to build.... according to exact specifications....

Each element of the Temple worship was designed to show forth the holiness and the glory of God.....

Much like the original intent behind **Cathedrals**.....

But worship (Solomon shows us here) is not about the building you are in..... but about **the God** who is in the building....

Remember, they had worshiped God in **tents** for hundreds of years....

V. 1 is a direct allusion to the prescribed steps Levites were to take when approaching the Holy of Holies..... but Solomon here applies it to **all** God's people:

v. 1 "Guard your steps...when you **go** to the house of God."

Remember that for Israelites (esp. for those in outlying areas) getting to the house of God for worshipwas not a matter of a 20 min. commute each way....

It was a **TRIP**...that took planning and intentional preparation....

As part of that preparation..... they underwent **ritual cleansings**.....AND they had to be CAREFUL about where they went and what they did.... prior to entering into God's presence...

Whereas the Prophets regularly lambasted Israel for their overt hypocrisy and blatant rebellion

Solomon here seems to be addressing **hapless** worshipers who are simply **careless** out of ignorance..... they simply have not yet learned **just how** HOLY God is.....

If you are my age....you will recall that an age old plot line for movies and TV scripts used to be that the characters would unwittingly stumble upon an old Indian burial ground....

Suddenly, their attitudes and actions would become solemn.... and guarded...

They would begin to be CAREFUL about where they stepped and how they walked... lest they **offend** any Indians who happen to be watching from the hills.... or any spirits "residing" in that place.....

That must be something like the Muslims in **Abbottabad** , Pakistan felt the day it was discovered that OBL had been living next door..... He was right there?!!

That is something of the idea.....God wants **us** to get..... **this** is HOLY GROUND... because the true **God** has promised to gather with His people....wherever we assemble in His Name....

Recognize that..... **not just** once you get in here and find your seat....

But on Saturday night..... when you are deciding what types of things you are going to put before your eyes on TV.....

At the beginning of the month....as you are planning out your activities.....and filling out your calendar....

If God is FIRST in your life.... (or you want Him to be) then fill in your Sunday mornings....to be in His Holy Presence with His people....

God delights in you taking Him **Seriously.**

Guarding your steps..... (Dads) also means that as you get in the car to come here.... you can expect **EVERY** evil thing to crop up.....

If it doesn'tthen PRAISE Him and thank Him.....

When that does happen to you.... you are not alone! Your brothers are all experiencing the same types of trials throughout the world....

Remind yourself that the reason you are making this effort.... is because we have been INVITED by God Himself.... to do so....

We have been given a MEDIATOR... a high priest.... who has absorbed all the wrath of God for our sin... into His body.... died on a tree.... and risen again to **CONNECT** us to God..... in His house.... so we could worship Him in Spirit and in Truth....

Hebrews 4:14-16

" Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

One Day....that Glorious Day that we sing about.... we are going to SEE this Jesus... face to face....

For now... He has chosen that we would relate to Him mainly by **HEARING** Him speak....

Careful Worship

2. Come Ready to LISTEN

There are several different types of listening.....

We can listen to the sound of a gentle **steady rain** on our bedroom window as we fall asleep....

We can "listen" to another person talk..... while figuring out when to launch out with something we want to **SAY**.....

I have actually sat in amazement as people repeatedly talked OVER top of one another....as if listening were not necessary at all.... only the act of getting to talk...

OR....there is the type of listening that means you are supposed to RESPOND in accordance with what is being SAID....

Like when a coach calls a timeout and says..... "Alright... **Listen up!**"

When the **Captains** voice comes over the loudspeaker on the Navy ship....
"Now Hear This!"

THAT is the sense which the Hebrew word in our text has....to LISTEN = is to hear with an intent to OBEY...

Ecclesiastes 5:1b

"**To draw near to listen** is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil."

How we worship says a TON about what we understand / believe about GOD.

If you come here... EXPECTING **God** to speak..... praying that He will open your ears.... give you a mind to understand and faith to believe what He says is trustworthy....

I assure you God will speak to you through His Word....

You WILL hear from God.... (if the preacher is faithful...)

So...ready yourself accordingly.... each week....

Deuteronomy 5:27

"Go near and **hear** all that the LORD our God will say and speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and **we will hear and do it.**"

Draw near with a view towards OBEYING what you hear...

That's **careful** worship!.....

Because you VALUE and esteem the HIGH COST of the sacrifice Christ made in order to bring you to God.....

You come to God (by faith) in Jesus's blood.....and in response to His death.....

you lay your heart on the altar of God as **a sacrifice**.... and say:... mold me according to your Word.... give me grace and I will **DO** what you say....

Careless worship...(by contrast)...approaches church more like a kindergarten student approaches education....

- This is somehow about **ME** right? What kind of FUN am I going to have today?

The "sacrifice of fools" (in our text) are those of people who are **flippant** about the God who is present in the room....

So.. in the OT.... the sacrificial animals which fools would bring to worship.... were often NOT the firstborn..... or they were lame..... or diseased...

Their "worship" was just going through the motions.... as if GOD did not know every thought and intention of their heart.....

In **our era**.... it is not much different....

These are the church goers... who Derek Kidner says..."listen with half an ear, and never **quite get around to** what he or she has **volunteered** to do for God."

Isaiah describes them this way:

Isaiah 29:13

"And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while **their hearts** are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,"

(Can you see **that** in last part of Eccl. 5:1?)...They don't KNOW that (this kind of worship) is **EVIL**.

They would never consider themselves as **FOOLS**..... (they go to church after all)... but they are not worshipping the HOLY God of Scripture....

But one in their own.... "**casual**" likeness.

Kidner goes on to say..."No amount of emphasis on grace can justify taking liberties with God...for the very concept of grace demands gratitude; and gratitude can not be casual."

Hebrews 12:28-29

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let **us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.**"

We come to God to **be MOLDED** by Him through hearing His Word with a view to obeying it....

He is the Potter we are the clay.....

But for the proactive.... type A's among us..... that is often easier said than done.....

Our sin nature tempts us to try and manipulate God.... like a rebellious child tells his parents what they can and can not do.....

Ecclesiastes 5:2

"Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few."

I have known people over the years who said that they "think by speaking..."

Consider that process for a moment..... whatever impulse or thought comes to your mind... you spit it out in verbal form for everyone to hear....

THEN you weigh what you have just said....

Given the fallen-ness of our minds.... that is dangerous enough in human relationships...

But when you are in the **manifest presence of a GOD** who does everything through WORDS..... whose Words never... ever return void without accomplishing exactly what He wants to happen....

Who promises to judge us for every careless word we speak.....

Make sure that your LISTENING to speaking ratio is very high.....

Be QUICK... eager to hear... and slow to speak.....

Because he expects **your words** to be accompanied by **ACTION**..... just like **His** are....

Proverbs 10:19

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent."

Fools (who do not fear God)... are known by their MANY...MANY words.....

Solomon here compares a creature who speaks empty things to his maker....to an incessant **DREAMER**.... who is constantly BUSY chasing after ideasnone of which bear fruit.....

Ecclesiastes 5:3

"For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words."

See the busyness of foolish worship? Spin up this.... spin up that....

Ian Provan says...."**Overproduction** here is the root problem in both cases...a heart that is attentive to God multiplies neither toil nor words...."

So....Here's the application:

Worship is God's idea. He has designed you (and redeemed you) specifically to be His worshiper!

He has commanded you to worship together with His people....for your **GOOD**....

Therefore..... **LET** God bless you as you become CAREFUL in your worship....

- **Cease striving**..... be still before Him... and KNOW (learn) that HE (alone) is God.

Well... if we draw near to God in worship.... Recognizing His Holiness..... so much so that we begin LISTEN to what He says.....

Then what is left is the OUTCOME of our obedience....

Careful Worship

3. Fulfill Whatever You Promise

Remember that worship is one of the means God has chosen to make you like Himself... So you must become a man or a woman of utmost **INTEGRITY**.....especially in what you say to God.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6

"When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?"

Vows were an integral part of OT worship. The Israelites would vow to consecrate some part of their lives.... or money....to God in return for Him answering a prayer request.

- You have done that haven't you?

LORD... "If you will get me out of this situation..".....

...I will serve you with my whole life..... I'll even change diapers in the nursery..

if you will just **help** me with this.....

....I will be baptized..

If you just help me get out of debt....

THEN.....I will begin to give you the first fruits of my income...

Or perhaps more pointedly..... in the context of this gathering.....

God has brought something to life which He wants to say to you through His Word.... and the Holy Spirit convicts you that you have been **sinning**.....

He convicts you that this practice is in fact **UNRIGHTEOUSNESS**.... and will lead you to ruin....

And so you utter in prayer..... Okay God, **I'll quit**..... (that is what I am calling a PROMISE)....

okay.... I'll start doing this....

Then... you hop in the car..... have a good lunch..... just happen to **not** have time for devotions all week.....

And show up again next week..... **UN-CHANGED**.

You try to coast along.... as if God is okay with that pattern.... because He knows that is just the way you are....

But **here**... **God says**.... not only is this EVIL...(it is sin).... but (listen)..... there is a **direct connection** between your disobedience ...and God destroying the work of your hands....

To say it another way..... If things are going **badly** in your life..... you ought to consider that God could very well be disciplining you for your lack of integrity before Him.....

v. 6b Why should God be angry at your voice and **destroy** the work of your hands? For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is **vanity**; but God is the one you must fear.

God is out to teach you the FEAR of Who He is.... so that you can worship Him (and enter into the fullness of His joy) in Spirit and in truth...

So... it is vital that you see this connection... between your disobedience and God's **anger** at your sin.....

It is vital for the ongoing prosperity of you and your family.....

Don't ignore it..... Don't just multiply 1000 other vain promises.....

Let God melt your stubborn heart..... and **REPENT**....

- Fulfill your Promise..... Keep your VOWs.

Some of you ... might be saying.... Oh that is OT.... or that is legalistic.....

No.... what happens in the NT.... because God has given you His very own Spirit to come and reside in your heart....

To speak... to convict... to encourage... to guide and to comfort.....

He **ups the anti** on you being true to your Word.....

Consider a husband a wife in the NT that loved their money more than being true to their vows to God...

Context... as God was pouring out grace on the church... people were voluntarily selling property and giving the proceeds to the church so they could serve the poor among them.....

Acts 5:1-11

" But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have **contrived this deed in your heart**? You have not lied to men but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."

Same Holy Spirit is here today.....

Same God....

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.....

the God who sent His only Son....to purchase your soul for Himself.....

Ian Provan: "The One **undivided God** who made the world, and redeemed Israel must be approached and related to by one **undivided human person**."

God wants your whole heart....so (together) we can worship Him in Spirit and truth....

Don't grieve Him..... Don't quench His voice.....

Fulfill your promises.....keep your vows....

Let us be conformed to the image of our Savior together.

And that INCREASINGLY..... we might offer up WORSHIP to Him.... with reverence and **awe**....