Question: What is the meaning of the verse Ecclesiastes 5:1?

> *Ecclesiastes 5:1 – “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.” (NIV)*

Answer: Amen, may the great name of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised forever.

In this passage, the Preacher (the writer of Ecclesiastes, often attributed to Solomon) offers wisdom on how we are to approach God’s presence, particularly in the context of worship and service. The phrase “guard your steps” carries the idea of approaching God with great reverence and awareness, understanding the seriousness of coming into His presence. The Bible frequently stresses the holiness and majesty of God (Psalm 29:2; Isaiah 6:3), and this passage is a reminder that our approach to God should reflect this truth.

The first part of the verse emphasizes the importance of listening over offering. “Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools” means that God values our attentiveness more than our hasty actions. Sacrifices in the Old Testament were meant to demonstrate devotion and repentance (Leviticus 1-7), but the Bible also warns that not all sacrifices are acceptable to God. As we see in

> *Isaiah 1:11 (NIV), God says,* “The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?”

This suggests that not all religious actions are pleasing to God if they are done without sincerity or true devotion.

The “sacrifice of fools” refers to ritual acts that are done thoughtlessly or without understanding. A fool, according to Scripture, is someone who lacks wisdom and discernment (Psalm 14:1, Proverbs 1:7). A “sacrifice of fools” could refer to someone who rushes to perform religious duties without first examining their heart and life. This is why Ecclesiastes calls us to listen—to receive God’s Word, reflect on it, and apply it in obedience, rather

than mindlessly offering empty rituals.

The New Testament further reinforces this idea of careful, thoughtful worship. In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, saying,

> Matthew 15:8-9 (NIV), “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”

This points to the danger of external acts of worship without a corresponding change in heart.

Moreover, when we offer worship or service to God, it must be done in accordance with His will. As Romans 12:1-2 (NIV) teaches, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* True worship involves our whole being, not just outward acts.

Moving on to

> *Ecclesiastes 5:2 (NIV), i”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.”*

This is a direct warning against speaking hastily or flippantly before God. It emphasizes the need for reverence when addressing God, acknowledging His supreme authority and holiness. This ties in with Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:7,

> *Matthew 6:7 (NIV),* “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”

God does not require long, drawn-out prayers for the sake of quantity, but sincere, thoughtful communication with Him.

Theological Context of Vows and Offerings

The second part of the passage in Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 warns about making vows to God and failing to keep them. Ecclesiastes 5:4 (NIV) says,

> “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.”

In the Old Testament, making vows to God was a serious commitment (Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Failing to keep a vow was considered sinful, as it indicated a lack of integrity and dishonor to God.

The New Testament also addresses the importance of keeping one’s word. In James 5:12 (NIV), we are reminded:

> “Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; otherwise, you will be condemned.”

This reflects the idea that God desires sincerity over empty promises.

The Importance of Holiness in Offerings

Another point the passage makes is about the source of the offerings. Ecclesiastes 5 warns against bringing offerings to God that come from sinful or immoral sources. Deuteronomy 23:18 (NIV) clearly states:

> “You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the Lord your God detests them both.”

This teaches that God does not accept offerings that are tainted by sin or unclean practices. Such acts dishonor Him, and they are an abomination in His sight.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, Ecclesiastes 5 teaches us to approach God’s presence with great reverence and discernment. If we are unsure

of God’s will for our lives, it’s better to do nothing than to offer mindless acts of worship. We must first seek to know His heart and understand His desires, and only then offer ourselves in service. God values holiness and obedience above all else, as we see in

> *1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV):* “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

When we approach God, it should be with a heart full of reverence, a life in alignment with His will, and a sincere desire to honor Him in all that we do. Our worship, prayers, and offerings should reflect our obedience and holiness, not just external acts of service.

Shalom.

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Guard your steps when you go to the house of God

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