

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Analysis

This verse introduces the theme of approaching God with reverence and caution: 'Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.' The phrase 'keep thy foot' (Hebrew 'shmor raglekha,' שְׁמֹר רַגְלֶךָ) means watch your step, be careful—approaching God requires mindful intentionality, not careless routine. 'The house of God' refers to the Temple (in Solomon's era) or synagogue worship. The command prioritizes hearing over sacrificing, echoing Samuel's declaration: 'to obey is better than sacrifice' (1 Samuel 15:22). The 'sacrifice of fools' describes ritualistic religion—external religious activity disconnected from internal devotion and obedience. Fools 'consider not that they do evil'—they're unaware their empty religiosity offends God. This verse teaches that authentic worship requires humble receptivity to God's word rather than presumptuous religious performance. It anticipates Jesus's condemnation of Pharisaical religion (Matthew 23) and His teaching that true worshipers worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).

Historical Context

Israel's temple worship included elaborate sacrificial systems, yet the prophets repeatedly condemned sacrifices offered without covenant obedience (Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8). The tension between ritual and righteousness runs throughout Scripture. Ancient Near Eastern religion was predominantly ritualistic—correct performance of ceremonies pleased gods.

Israel's faith uniquely emphasized that God desires obedience, justice, and humility over mere ritual correctness (Micah 6:8). The phrase 'be ready to hear' recalls the Shema: 'Hear, O Israel' (Deuteronomy 6:4), foundational to Jewish worship. New Testament parallels abound: James's exhortation to be 'swift to hear, slow to speak' (James 1:19-22); the parable of the sower emphasizing receptive hearing (Matthew 13:1-23); and Paul's warning against worthless religious activity (2 Timothy 3:5). The Reformation recovered this emphasis: worship centers on hearing God's Word proclaimed, not merely performing religious rituals.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does your approach to corporate worship demonstrate 'keeping your foot'—coming with intentional reverence and receptivity rather than casual routine?
2. In what ways might you be offering 'the sacrifice of fools'—external religious activities disconnected from internal obedience and transformed character?

Interlinear Text

שְׁמֹר	כְּגִלְיֹךְ	כְּאִשְׁרֵךְ	תֵּלֶךְ	אֶל	בֵּית	הָאֱלֹהִים
Keep	thy foot				to the house	of God
H8104	H7272	H834	H1980	H413	H1004	H430
וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה	וְהָיָה
and be more ready	to hear	than to give	of fools	the sacrifice		
H7138	H8085	H5414	H3684	H2077		
אֵינָם	יֹדְעִים	לַעֲשׂוֹת	רָעָה:			
	for they consider	not that they do	evil			
H369	H3045	H6213	H7451			

Additional Cross-References

James 1:19 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

Proverbs 15:8 (Sacrifice): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Psalms 89:7 (References God): God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

Proverbs 21:27 (Sacrifice): The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?

Exodus 3:5 (Parallel theme): And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Joshua 5:15 (Parallel theme): And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

Hebrews 10:26 (Sacrifice): For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

Isaiah 66:3 (Sacrifice): He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.

1 Corinthians 11:22 (References God): What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

Leviticus 10:3 (Parallel theme): Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.