

Ecclesiastes 5:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Analysis

Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin—the Hebrew basar (בָּשָׂר, flesh) means your whole person, not just physical body. Careless speech (peh, פֶּה, mouth) leads to guilt requiring sacrifice or judgment. Rash vows create obligations one cannot fulfill, thus causing sin.

Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error—the mal'akh (מֶלֶךְ, angel/messenger) may refer to the priest who received vow-offerings (Malachi 2:7) or to God's angelic witness. Claiming shegagah (שְׁגָגָה, error/mistake) doesn't excuse broken vows—they were voluntary commitments. **Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?**—unfulfilled vows provoke divine qatsaph (קָצֵף, anger/wrath), resulting in cursed labor. This echoes Haggai 1:6-11, where disobedience brought frustration to work. The warning is severe: treat God's name and your word with utmost seriousness.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite worship involved priests who mediated between people and God. When someone made a vow, they would eventually bring the vow-offering to the priest. Attempting to retract a vow by claiming it was a mistake would not be accepted—the vow had invoked God's name as witness. Leviticus 5:4-6 addresses rash oaths requiring guilt offerings. Numbers 30 allows fathers and husbands to nullify certain vows immediately, but personal vows stood. The seriousness of

God's anger at broken vows reflects covenant theology: God keeps His word absolutely, and His people must reflect His character. New Testament parallels appear in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), who lied about their offering and faced immediate judgment. The principle remains: God takes His name and our word seriously.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Have you ever tried to excuse a broken commitment to God by calling it a "mistake" or minimizing its importance?
2. How does the warning that God might "destroy the work of thine hands" motivate careful speech and promise-keeping?

Interlinear Text

אֵל	בָּשָׂר	בְּ	אֵת	לְחַטָּאת	אֵת	לְחַטָּאת	אֵל
H408	Suffer	H853	not thy mouth	to sin	H853	to cause thy flesh	H408
H5414		H6310		H2398		H1320	
תֹּאמֶר	לְפָנֶיךָ	כִּי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁגַגְתָּ הַ	לִפְנֵי	תֹּאמֶר	לְפָנֶיךָ
neither say	thou before	the angel	H3588	that it was an error	H7684	H1931	H4100
H559	H6440	H4397					
בָּאָהָרָךְ	עַל	קֹלְךָ	לִ	וְחַבֵּבְךָ	אַתָּה	מְשִׁיחָה	
be angry	wherefore should God	H5921	at thy voice	and destroy	H853	the work	H4639
H7107	H430		H6963	H2254			
דָּבָרָךְ:							
of thine hands							
H3027							

Additional Cross-References

James 1:26 (Parallel theme): If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

2 John 1:8 (Parallel theme): Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

James 3:2 (Parallel theme): For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

Malachi 2:7 (Parallel theme): For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

Genesis 48:16 (Parallel theme): The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.