

# Watch Where You're Stepping!

by Steve Pruitt

My dad was a farmer when I was a kid growing up. He and my granddaddy cultivated several acres of land together and my granddaddy had cattle and a chicken house. Together they owned all the land that surrounded our house; some woods, some farmland and some pasture. There was a pasture that separated our house from my grand parent's house and from time to time I would walk through it to go see them. Though the memories are fading some I feel quite certain that as I headed toward the pasture mom would have said to me, "You better watch where you're stepping."

King Solomon gave us this same advice when he wrote, *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.* (Ecclesiastes 5:1 ESV)

The King James Version begins Ecclesiastes 5:1 with, "Keep thy foot." The Hebrew word for keep in this verse means to take heed or to hedge about with thorns. Solomon seems to be warning us to "take heed and protect how we walk when we go to the house of God." "Go to the house of God" could be understood as approaching God in worship either personally (which includes worship as a lifestyle; not merely our expressions of worship) or corporately when the body of Christ gathers. It seems to carry with it the idea of approaching God the same way Moses approached the burning bush and Joshua approached the Commander of the Lord's army; by removing their sandals (Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15). The ground is holy as we approach God because God is holy.

God is our loving father and desires for us to come to him (Hebrews 4:16). Though we do not have to literally remove our shoes, we should approach God in a reverent manner and never with the attitude that we have earned the right to do so (Hebrews 10:19-20). We should approach him with humility, brokenness, in spirit and truth (Psalms 51:16-17; John 4:23); with our unworthiness and his holiness in plain view.

Solomon wrote that it is far better to draw near to God to listen than to come with the sacrifice of fools. What is the sacrifice of fools? I believe it is the offering of worship without being obedient to the commands of God. The Hebrew word for listen in Ecclesiastes 5:1 means to not only hear but also to obey. James touched on this truth when he wrote, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* (James 1:22 ESV)

King Saul offered the sacrifice of fools when he kept the best of the livestock instead of destroying the Amalekites and everything they owned as God had commanded. When the prophet Samuel arrived to meet Saul and learned what Saul had done Samuel said to him, *Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.* (1 Samuel 15:22 ESV) Saul made the mistake of thinking that offering the best of the livestock in worship to God would be more pleasing to God than obeying God's word. His error cost him the kingdom.

Through the prophet Amos, God rebuked Israel for disregarding his commandments. He told them to seek good and not evil, to love good and to hate evil, to do justice and righteousness. He also rebuked them for their sacrifices. He said, *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen.* (Amos 5:21-23 ESV) God took no pleasure in their worship because of their disregard for his commandments.

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of his day for the same transgression. He said to them, *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.* (Luke 11:42 ESV) The

worship of the Pharisees was not God honoring because they had rejected the commandments of God in order to establish their tradition. They honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from him (Mark 7:6-9). They sought to worship God in their own way and thought it was acceptable to God. Instead it was the sacrifice of fools.

We offer the sacrifice of fools when we approach God with our worship without living a life in obedience to his word and then act as if our worship will suffice as a pleasing sacrifice. The sacrifice of fools is the offering of our worship whether it is singing, preaching, tithing or ministering to the needy with the belief that it will be acceptable to God even though we are acting in rebellion toward his commandments. Approaching God in this way is irreverent because it makes a mockery of God as if he doesn't see how we live; that he is ignorant of our disobedience. It presumes his blessing on our worship in spite of our disobedience.

Solomon said that those who approach God in worship while disregarding his word do not know that they are doing evil. In other words they are deceived into believing their worship is acceptable to God, but God says that it's evil. Samuel conveyed that same message to Saul when he says, *For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.* (1 Samuel 15:23 ESV) So, in God eyes it is evil when we offer worship to him and do not live in accordance with his commandments. We presume that he will accept our offering when in reality we are offering the sacrifice of fools.

The way we can keep from offering the sacrifice of fools is by guarding our steps. Solomon tells us how to guard our steps; listen and obey the word of God. One psalmist wrote, *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* (Psalms 119:9-11 ESV) David wrote that the law of God is in the heart of the righteous so that his steps do not slip (Psalms 37:31).

Obedience to God's word is imperative to offering a pleasing and acceptable sacrifice of worship to God (Romans 12:1). Obedience to God's word is proof positive that we love and treasure him above all things (John 14:5). So, as we approach God let us guard our steps to insure that we come with a true heart not a deceptive one (Hebrews 10:22). Let us come with a repentant heart not cherishing our sin (Psalms 66:18). Let us come with a heart that is eager to listen and obey.