

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*The Fear of God.*"

This will be our last sermon on Ecc 12 and it will transition us into some sermons I'd like to preach on wisdom.

Look at **verse 12**...

Ecc 12:12 My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

We looked at this over two sermons.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a fitting picture of the end of the end of this verse. Solomon said **much study is a weariness of the flesh**, and if you're familiar w/ Ecclesiastes, you know Solomon seemed very weary as he tried to find meaning in life.

After all the weariness he experienced throughout the book, look what he finally says in **verse 13**...

Ecc 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

He said **all has been heard** – or everything's been considered – and he meant it. He tried, tasted, and experienced anything you could try, taste, and experience.

When he said this is **the end of the matter**, this is a pretty big deal, b/c Solomon wrestled with the most important issues of life, and he finally reached his conclusion.

The wisest man who ever lived – second only to Christ – is about to tell us what life is about. This is one of those moments you just want everyone to be quiet so they can hear what he has to say.

Everything has been very fragmented for Solomon. He's been confused throughout the earlier chapters, unable to make sense of this life, but now he can finally share what he's learned after all his searching. All his uncertainties are behind him, and it boils down to this...

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Let me get you to think about something that reveals why these words are so dramatic...

The main question Solomon's been wrestling with is: "How does man experience satisfaction and fulfillment in life?" or as he frequently says, "Under the sun?"

He considered what this world offers physically:

- Money
- Power

- Knowledge
- Relationships
- Parties
- Gardens
- Possessions
- Fame

But when He figured out what's important – when he finally learned how to experience satisfaction in this life – he didn't mention anything physical.

He said **fear God and keep His commandments**, which is spiritual.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: MEANING IN LIFE IS FOUND IN FEARING AND OBEYING GOD.

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes and most of Proverbs.

Although they're separate books, I want to invite you to see a close relationship between them. You can almost think of them as one book w/ Proverbs picking up where Ecclesiastes left off.

Here's why I say this...

Solomon concludes Ecclesiastes by saying we should fear God, and this is where Proverbs picks up...

Pro 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Solomon probably wrote Ecclesiastes at the end of his life, which means that's when he finally showed himself to be wise.

What does it mean to **fear God**?

It means having an attitude of reverence and awe toward Him b/c we respect His power and greatness, and – as the next verse says – we know He's going to judge us.

Some people might look at this and say, *“Well, this is Old Covenant. Judgment. Wrath. Anger. Of course we're told to fear God and keep His commandments. But we're under the New Covenant. Grace. Mercy. Forgiveness.”*

The problem is Jesus – who is the Mediator of the New Covenant – said the same thing...

Matt 10:28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Regarding [**keeping**] **his commandments**, Jesus said...

John 14:15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

It is as fitting for us to **fear God and keep His commandments** in our day as it was in Solomon’s day when he wrote these words.

Notice Solomon said this is **the whole duty of man**.

When I first looked at this, I found it very surprising. I thought, *“This is it? This is my whole duty? I have all these responsibilities. I have so many things to do and keep track of. How can my **whole duty be bound up in fearing God and obeying Him?**”*

Then I found this very encouraging, b/c it provides such beautiful simplicity for us.

We live in such a confusing and chaotic time, I hope it can bless you too.

In the two sermons on the previous verses we talked about the overwhelming amount of information coming at us daily:

- All the information
- All the news
- All the opinions
- All the voices

We can start to feel confused about what we should and shouldn’t do. Do I listen to:

- The article, or Facebook post, or blog I read...
- The advice from my friend...
- The interview or podcast I heard...
- The YouTube video I watched...

For the person who fears God, they figure out what to do by asking one question: *“What does God want me to do?”*

That’s very simplifying isn’t it?

In the prophet Isaiah’s day there were lots of conspiracies circulating around...just like in our day.

Listen to what God said is the remedy...

Isa 8:11 For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: 12 “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls

conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isaiah told them to take their minds off the conspiracies, and put their minds on Him. If they feared Him it would drown out all the conspiracies.

So let me encourage you...

When you start to feel weary as we talked about in the other two sermons come back to this one thing that your **whole duty is found in fearing God and keeping His commandments.**

It might look like fearing God and keeping His commandments are two separate things, but they go together...and this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: FEAR OF GOD PRODUCES OBEDIENCE.

Psa 112:1 Blessed is the man who fears [God], who greatly delights in his commandments!

Keeping God's commandments is the fruit of fearing Him.

Let me give you a few examples from Scripture. Mark your spot in Ecclesiastes as we'll come back to it and turn to Gen 22...

Gen 22:2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

Since God commanded Abraham to sacrifice the son he loved we'd think that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac for God, b/c he loved God so much...even more than the son he loved.

But look at **verse 11** to see what the Angel said when he stopped Abraham...

Gen 22:11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that YOU FEAR GOD, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Interestingly, Abraham's fear of God caused him to obey.

Turn to **Exo 1.**

The Hebrew midwives are another example. When the nation of Israel multiplied in Egypt, Pharaoh became afraid of them. He commanded the Hebrew midwives:

Exo 1:16 “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” **17** But the **MIDWIVES FEARED GOD** and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

The Hebrew midwives obeyed God b/c they feared Him...more than they feared Pharaoh.

Turn to **Exo 20**.

God brought Israel to the base of Sinai. Considering everything He did to get them to this point—such as delivering them from Egypt and parting the Red Sea—we would expect Him to be friendly and welcoming.

Instead, listen to this...

Exo 20:18 Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off **19** and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

God was so terrifying they thought His voice would kill them.

Look at verse 20 to see Moses explain God’s motivation...

Exo 20:20 Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, **THAT THE FEAR OF HIM MAY BE BEFORE YOU, THAT YOU MAY NOT SIN.**”

Moses told Israel their fear of God was good, b/c it would cause them to obey.

I don’t want you to have to flip to the rest of these examples, so I’ll just read them to you...

When Moses gave the law to the new generation, he established the relationship between fear of God and obedience...

Deut 8:6 So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

Walking in God’s ways is synonymous with obedience, and it’s produced by fearing Him.

The psalmist said something similar...

Psa 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

Fear of God and obedience to God go together.

Deut 31:12 Assemble the people...that they may hear and LEARN TO FEAR THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND BE CAREFUL TO DO ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LAW,

If they learned to fear God, they would be careful to obey Him.

During Jeremiah's day the people forsook God. I would think they forsook Him b/c they didn't love Him, but listen to what God said...

Jer 2:19 Your evil will chastise you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to FORSAKE THE LORD YOUR GOD; THE FEAR OF ME IS NOT IN YOU, declares the Lord God of hosts.

God said Israel abandoned Him because they didn't fear Him.

And again...

Jer 32:40 I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, that they may not turn from Me.

We tend to think people forsake God b/c they don't love Him, but God said it's b/c they didn't fear Him.

Love might keep God's people near Him, but fear keeps them from departing from Him.

David Wilkerson said...

*"What produces a consistent, lasting obedience? I am convinced that godly, loving obedience springs from one source: the fear of the living God! I'm going to make a very bold statement: I believe it is impossible to consistently walk in obedience and holiness unless you have the fear of God in your heart. If you don't have the fear of God, you will eventually believe that God is easy on sin. You'll think that you can sin all you want. You'll get on a merry-go-round of 'sin, confess, sin, confess'—and you'll say to yourself, 'I'll just run back to Jesus and make it right. He'll forgive me at any moment!'"*¹

If fear of God produces obedience, then this tells us something about disobedience...and this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: LACK OF FEAR OF GOD PRODUCES DISOBEDIENCE.

The other side of this is we disobey God when we don't fear Him.

Sometimes you'll meet people and they say they love God, they say they fear Him, but their lives are characterized by disobedience. Regardless of what they say, they don't fear God.

Let me show you two examples...

Exo 9:27 Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. **28** Plead with the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.” **29** Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the Lord's. **30** But as for you and your servants, I know that you **DO NOT YET FEAR THE LORD GOD.**”

Moses said he would bring the plague to an end, but he also knew Pharaoh would return to his old ways – he would repent of his repentance – and disobey – b/c he didn't fear God.

Saul is another good example...

God commanded him to utterly destroy [the Amalekites and] all that belonged to them, but he only destroyed what he didn't want, and kept what he did want.

God sent Samuel to rebuke him, and listen to Saul's excuse...

1 Sam 15:24 Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I **FEARED THE PEOPLE AND OBEYED THEIR VOICE.**

Saul obeyed the people because he feared them more than God.

Whatever we fear has power over us:

- If we fear God, we will obey Him.
- If we fear man, we will obey man.

Since fear of God is so important, how do we develop it?

We do two things...

First, we read God's Word b/c fear of God comes from knowledge of God. The greater our knowledge of God, the greater our fear of God...

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

We develop fear of God by learning about Him, and we learn about Him in His Word.

Rare is the person who can read about the God of the Bible and not fear Him.

The second thing we can do to develop fear of God is remember the truth of **verse 14**...

Ecc 12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

This is a great reason to fear God and obey Him...and this brings us to lesson 4...

LESSON 4: GOD'S JUDGMENT PUTS THIS LIFE IN PERSPECTIVE.

We learn to fear God by keeping this truth in mind that all of our lives will be reviewed by the Lord.

Paul said something similar to **verse 14**...almost word-for-word...

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Paul said **we** b/c he's including believers. This might surprise some people, b/c we tend to think believers aren't judged, but we are...we give an account of our faithfulness.

The fact that **evil** we have done is mentioned leads me to believe the sins we have committed will result in loss of rewards. So:

- If you say, "I won't be punished for my sins," that's true...b/c our sins were punished on the cross.
- But it's also true that when we sin we forfeit eternal rewards.

We might think the discussion of judgment is opposed to the Gospel, but...

Rom 2:16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Judgment is Gospel-centered, b/c w/o judgment there is no Gospel...there's no good news w/o the bad news.

Here's what I'd like you to consider...

Some things in life seem huge:

- Maybe it's the Coronavirus
- Maybe it's the quarantine
- Maybe it's the rioting and looting
- Maybe it's financial problems
- Maybe it's health issues

But I can tell you this w/ complete certainty...

We're going to stand before the Lord someday, and all these things – and anything else we can imagine – will seem very, very small. All that will matter is what we have done, whether good or evil.

God's judgment puts this life in perspective. The certainty and finality of it gives life the meaning Solomon had been searching for.

To understand this in context, here's what Solomon is saying...

"I was looking for meaning in life from wealth, partying, possessions, pleasure, but I found it in recognizing we will stand before the Lord and give an account. Whatever we have or don't have, whatever we experience or don't experience, knowing we will be judged puts everything in perspective, b/c accountability before God is eternal and irrevocable."

When considering this reality, only a fool doesn't fear God and obey Him.

Ultimately the only way to find meaning in this meaningless life under the sun is by keeping our focus on the One who is beyond life under the sun, and that's God Himself. Everything under the sun will eventually disappoint. Relationship w/ the Lord gives us the meaning, hope, and perspective we need.

Let me close w/ this...

Back in **verse 14** it says...

God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing,

The is exhaustive...

It doesn't say

- Most deeds and most secret things
- It says every deed and every secret thing

It couldn't be clearer that nothing escapes God's judgment.

All of us have done things we're ashamed of that we don't want judged, and that we'd like to remain secret.

If you've repented of your sins and put your faith in Christ, then those things will remain secret, b/c they were judged by Christ on the cross:

- **John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.**
- **Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Those who fear God will be vindicated on the day of judgment, b/c they're already declared right by faith.

God will condemn the unrepentant, but vindicate the repentant.

Oswald Chambers wrote, *“The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else.”*

Let’s pray.

ⁱ Wilkerson, David. “Love, Fear, and Obedience.” World Challenge. August 17, 1992.
<https://worldchallenge.org/newsletter/1992/love-fear-and-obedience>