

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

TEXT:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

INTRODUCTION

It is no doubt that we all have a duty or responsibility to perform at one time or the other. At work, we all have a job description indicating what task our boss expects us to do in our roles. A Christian husband commits to his wife. He is duty-bound to love, care, lead and support his wife even to the point of laying down one's life (Ephesians 5: 25). Also, the wife has a duty call to submit to the man's leadership, love, and be a homemaker (Ephesians 5: 22-24; Tit. 2:4-5). The children have the mandate to be obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3). Collectively, as parents, we have a responsibility to provide, train and nurture our children in the way of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Moreover, in the Church, the elders have the divine mandate to shepherd the congregation by providing counsel through the Word of God (Acts 20:28-29). Likewise, the holy spirit has saddled the evangelists with the responsibility "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Nevertheless, to accomplish all these responsibilities, the fear of God is critically important. To enumerate, we shall focus our attention on some of these issues by drawing various application through our text.

THE FEAR OF GOD LEADS TO IMMENSE WISDOM

God bestowed wisdom on Solomon enormously from above, but unfortunately, he was a man who did not retain God in his understanding. After King David's death, Solomon ascended the throne as the King of Israel (1 Kg. 2:10-12). The Bible says He loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of his father David (1 Kg. 3:3). In one of the occasions at Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "ask! What shall I give you?" (v.4). Solomon's response was fantastic! 2 Chronicles 1:10-12: "Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead these people, for who can govern these great people of yours?" On the strength of his request, God said to Solomon, " 11 Then God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king— 12 wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like. " (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). In several ways, Solomon, no doubt, is one of the greatest of all the kings of Israel. However, it was saddening to note that even though Solomon received godly wisdom when he asked from the Lord, yet in the later years of his life, he apostatized- he turned away from following the Lord, for his heart was no longer upright before the Lord. He disobeyed the Lord in all ramifications and began to worship idols (1 Kings 11:1-11). The rest of 1 Kings 11 details Solomon's failure as the Lord removed His hand of blessing from a man who started well and ended weak because the fear of the Lord is no longer in his life. He was legendary for his wisdom, and people came from different countries to hear

his wisdom, including the queen of Sheba (1 Kg. 10: 1-13). Solomon was a man who had wisdom, money, power, time, and energy to make his dreams come true. Anything his heart desires, he gets. However, with all that God had blessed him, Solomon was also restless. He wanted to figure out what life was all about, and he was searching for ultimate meaning and satisfaction. Regrettably, receiving wisdom from the Lord did not ensure that Solomon would follow the path of wisdom because of the fear of God lacking in him. Sadly, he exchanged his godly wisdom for worldly wisdom. Truly, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10, Psalm 111:10).

EXPERIMENTATION WITH LIFE

Solomon experimented with various adventurous feats. Learning was one of the things he applied his mind to research. Solomon was philosophical; his erudition is unsurpassed because the Preacher went further to investigate all that is done under heaven through the wisdom God endowed him (Eccl. 1:13). He gave his heart to pleasure through the gratification of alcohol (Eccl. 2:2,3). His massive projects' exploratory quest is unparalleled (Eccl. 2:4-6, 1Kg. 7:1, 9:10, 9:24). In addition, he possesses servants and staff, flocks and herds, vineyards, silver, and gold. Solomon had the best male and female singers, intimate relationships with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (Eccl. 2:7-8; 1Kg. 11: 3). While Solomon denied not himself any of the things his heart desired, it was not enough to satisfy his cravings (Eccl. 2:10,11). Thus, he concluded that everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Hence, Solomon writes, "22 For what has a man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night, his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 NKJV). In other words, Solomon now realized that he needed something more than all he had ever craved because there was nothing that satisfies his soul—all his achievement is but vanity! Whatever height one might have climbed, without the fear of God, one is just as empty as he who chases the wind (Eccl. 2:26).

A SOBER REFLECTION TOWARD LIFE

At the climax of his admonition in Ecclesiastes, Solomon the great wise man penned the following words: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13). The Preacher reiterates the fact that life apart from God is meaningless. He calls to remembrance that all of man's activities and arduous task here on earth are pointless when God is excluded. Solomon articulates that self-gratification and success in the world would at no time bring satisfaction to the human's heart. In other words, man needs to understand that life lived without a knowledge of God and in fellowship with the almighty is empty and meaningless. Thus, in reinforcing his message, the Preacher notes that the purpose for one's existence here on earth is for one to "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." (Eccl. 12:1). Markedly, we can do so many things when we are young, but the question is: are we doing things that please the Lord when we are young? While so many young people believe that they can indulge in whatever they deem fit because there are many years ahead of them in life, Solomon is saying no! there is no time as you may think (Eccl. 12:1-7). Today, the older ones among us can testify because of advancement in their age that the word of the "Preacher is acceptable, upright and even words of truth." (Eccl. 12:10). We thank God for as many godly exemplars in the Church of Christ because they have decided to encourage our young ones to take up the preaching work and give the youths the necessary support to succeed in their ministerial careers.

WHAT IS THE FEAR OF GOD?

The fear of God is to demonstrate a feeling of awe, reverence, and acknowledgement of the supreme being (Cf. Acts 17:26-28). The author of Hebrews pens a strong note, "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God *is* a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29). To the Children of God, the fear of God does not connote a negative sense. Instead, a proper understanding of God should direct our paths in fear of the Creator to lead to greater faith, trust, and obedience (Cf. Heb. 5: 8-9). In Exodus, when the Israelites saw the wonderful work of salvation that God did at the Red Sea, the Bible says, "they feared the Lord and put their trust in Him" (Exo. 14:31). Thus, the fear of God is the disposition that extends from utter terror to veneration and glory of the almighty. To fear God is to obey his commands. Jesus says, "if you love me, keep my commandments...You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 14:15; 15:14).

Consequently, a scriptural understanding of the fear of God should lead us in the path of reverential fear toward sins as God's Children. We must hate sin for what it is-it can and will destroy the souls of men! (Psalm 97:10; Prov. 16: 6). Likewise, for those who are not Christian, the fear of God is the dread of his judgment and eternal separation from the presence of God (2 Thess. 1:9). While teaching in Luke chapter 12 on the fear of God, Jesus says, "4 And I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:4-5). In addition, the author of Hebrews corroborates this fact, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

THE IMPACTS OF GOD'S FEAR

The Impact of God's fear should ordinarily bring about obedience in our lives. When God told Noah to build an ark, the Bible says, "Thus Noah did according to all that God commanded him (Gen. 6:22; 7:5). Hence, by inspiration, the author of Hebrews notes: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." (Heb. 11:7). In other words, obedience should cause us, among many further instructions in the Bible, to do the following:

A. The Preacher and His ministry

"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

It takes the fear of God for an evangelist to see the imperatives in the above injunction from Paul the Apostle. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "knowing the terror of God we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5: 11). To what extent are preachers persuading men today? Are we preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)? Or do we seek to please men (Gal. 1:10)? Paul would later tell the Galatians, "Am I, therefore, become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). Therefore, it takes the fear

of God for Preachers to "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 2:1). A preacher, in fear of God, must "study to show himself approve unto God..." (2 Tim. 2: 15), he must "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." (1 Tim. 4:16). Said differently, the message that springs forth from the mouth of a preacher should be healthy and not adulterated teachings that damn the soul!

B. The Elders and the Shepherding of souls

Men saddled with the responsibility of caring and watching over men's souls must be those who have a fear of God in their lives. The following qualifications about elders reveal the seriousness of this matter:

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the Church of God? 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover, he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he falls into reproach and the snare of the devil." (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Said differently, it takes men with the fear of God to guide and guard the Church by godly wisdom, not through worldly or manipulative wisdom. God expects elders to be men who are vast in the scripture (1 Tim. 3:2). The shepherds must be competent in teaching to feed the flock properly. By doing that, they will keep the congregation from evil by watching for wolves from without and protecting it against tragedy from within (Acts 20: 30-31). The ability to handle God's word correctly is vital because scriptural eldership must respect biblical authority. These godly men must be willing to take on the responsibility of caring for the souls of the congregation (1 Pet. 5:2-3; Heb. 13:7,17) and be ready to give an account to God for their stewardship (Tit. 1:7).

C. The fear of God in the lives of the members

"12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves." (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Apostle Paul enjoins on the brethren at Thessalonica the willingness to submit to their leaders as a duty. Hence, the need for fear of God, otherwise, one might think the above instruction is a light command. To reiterate the importance of this message, the author of Hebrews writes, "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17). In other words, Christians must show respect to their leaders, obey and submit to their authority in fear of the Lord. Let us gladly follow the guidance of the leadership as they lead us in the right part of the Lord because a Christian's life both within the Church and outside should be a life of submission.

CONCLUSION

The Bible says, "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." (Eccl. 12:10). As we draw the curtain for this lesson, let us remember that fear serves to keep us obedient to the things of God. To the Corinthians, Paul would say, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1). It is the fear of God that keep

God's children in check to abhor sinning. Thus, since "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14), would you rather not fear God and do his will? Remember, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the almighty God (Hebrews 10:31). Let us continue to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), even as we remember the word of the Lord: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Final thought, if you are reading this message, and you have not submitted yourself to God, you need to fear Him and keep his commandment by surrendering your life to God through the following processes:

- A. Hear the gospel, for faith comes by hearing (Rom. 10:17; John 20:30-31).
- B. Believe in the deity of Jesus Christ (John 8:24; John 3:18).
- C. Repent of sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23; Luke 13:5; Acts 17:30)
- D. Confess faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:36-38).
- E. Be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21).
- F. Continue in the faith by living for the Lord; otherwise, your salvation can be lost (Matt. 24:13; Heb. 10:36-39; Rev. 2:10; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

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