

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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The Final Word: Timeless Truth

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 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)

Perhaps the greatest challenge in life appears in the maze of complexities that confront us almost every day. Choices multiply in every facet of our lives. How do you know which way is right? In the early chapters of Ecclesiastes Solomon confessed his exploration of this endless array of options, choices, and indulgences of the human appetite. However, once he rejected any choice that does not involve a genuine consideration of God, meaning submission to His way in all our life choices and conduct, he took us down a road that is increasingly straightforward. Beginning with the eleventh chapter, he draws three basic practical conclusions; 1) be bold in your faith (Like James in the New Testament, Solomon's view of bold faith requires conduct, not mere words or thoughts.), 2) be wisely joyful, enjoying life as God's gift to be embraced and valued, and 3) build your life around moral values that do not change with age or circumstances.

Finally in the last two verses of the book, Solomon takes us to a broad worldview conclusion that is life-transforming. If you fully embrace this conclusion, any other issue in life is secondary. If you do not fully embrace it, life becomes increasingly confusing and void of meaning or value.

In our study of fear, faith, and love we discovered that fearing God does not mean that we live with a morbid dread of divine retribution, but rather a thorough-going obedience to God in all areas of life. The person who claims to fear God, but who constantly seeks to avoid obedience to God's Word in the hard issues of life, in fact demonstrates that he/she does not in fact fear God at all. We prove our fear of God by our faithful obedience to His Word. In typical Hebrew grammatical style Solomon uses repetition to emphasize the point. The

next clause affirms the first, "...keep his commandments."

The more we reject God's Word as the comprehensive guide in all things that we do the more we complicate our life. The Jews in Jesus' day rejected God's true way of life, despite their intense self-image of rigid obedience to it. God gave them Ten Commandments. Not satisfied with ten simple, but comprehensive, rules, they transformed these ten principles into over six hundred. Further rejection of God's simple way motivated them to expand the list to well over a thousand. Imagine the difficulty of trying to remember over a thousand rigid rules every time you must make a decision.

In powerful contrast, when the Jews asked Jesus to affirm the Ten Commandments (actually to tell them which of the ten was more important than the others, itself a rejection of the binding obligation of all ten), Jesus condensed the ten to two! The first four commandments deal with our attitude toward and our obedience to God. The final six commandments govern our conduct toward our fellowman. Simplifying, not complicating, the question, Jesus affirmed this simple truth and condensed the Ten Commandments to two; 1) Love (obey) God, and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. Ah, we often seem more inclined to follow the corrupted first century pattern of the Jews than our Lord's example.

"But isn't there more to Christianity than that?" someone will say in objection to this view of the Christian way. Benjamin Franklin wrote an essay on the ethics of the Ten Commandments that is delightfully wise and honest. In his logical way of thinking he decided that by focusing all of his energy and attention on one Commandment at a time he could perfect that one. Once he

mastered one of the commandments he could then move to the second and put all of his emphasis on it. He started out pretty well, but soon discovered that, as he shifted emphasis from those earlier principles of conduct to perfect the latest one, his “perfect” mastery of the earlier ones eroded. Franklin learned by experiment what Scripture clearly teaches. Although perfect obedience frames our moral obligation to God, we can never master it; we can never arrive at perfect obedience.

Every act or attitude relies for its success on some foundational energy or power. If we join Franklin, not to mention the legalistic penchant that thrives within each of us, we will fail as fully as Franklin, whether we are as honest with ourselves as he was or not.

What is the power that enables us to live with the simple focus and directional clarity that Solomon requires of us? He does not appeal to another rule. Nor does he put our failures under a microscope and load a deadly burden of guilt on our shoulders for our failure. Thank you, Solomon!

Observe that the fourteenth verse of our passage begins with a connective preposition. “For” reminds us that what will follow in this verse relates in some logical way to what Solomon wrote in the preceding verse. How does God’s ultimate and comprehensive judgment of all mankind and of all human acts and thoughts relate to our duty to fear God and keep His commandments? This assurance of divine judgment actually serves as the empowering principle that will enable us to strive toward the wonderfully simple goal of the life of faith. How much of our life is consumed with frustrations and complaints at the unfairness of one man’s inhumanity to his fellowman, often personalized in our complaint that others treated us unfairly? Would you like to gather up every event in your entire life that nags at you, that reminds you of life’s unfairness, and send them away for ever? Would this action simplify your life? Would it be easier in that setting to focus your emotional, moral, and spiritual energy on fearing God and keeping his commandments? Ah, you are getting the point! That is Solomon’s intent in the passage. The fact is that each of us may live—indeed, should live—with the constant assurance that God will deal with every sin, every inconsiderate act of every human

being who ever lived. In some cases He will deal with them by chastening in the present life. In other cases He will deal with them at the final Day of Judgment at the end. Between these events, both consistently affirmed throughout Scripture, we may face every day, including its inequities, with the simple assurance that God knows everything about our life, as well as every other human being’s. He even knows our secret most thoughts!

“The Teacher summarizes the message, drawing attention to the awesomeness of God, the cruciality of his word (13) and the inevitability of his judgment (14). It is a judgment which will include every person, every deed, public or hidden, good or bad.”¹

While, I believe incorrectly, Tom Constable thinks that Solomon had almost no understanding of life after death, he does take us to the correct conclusion.

“We should be content to leave the enigmas of life in God’s hands. We should also follow Solomon’s wise counsel to enjoy life as God enables us to do so and to serve God acceptably while we can. “What is the ‘profit’ of living? What does a man get for all his work? He gets the living God! And his whole profit consists of fearing Him and obeying His Word.”²

The certainty of God’s final judgment becomes the empowering principle that enables us to live life joyfully, understanding that it is God’s beautiful gift to us. The conviction of divine justice, however long delayed, eliminates the nagging complaints that destroy our consideration of the simple walk of faith. *How complicated is your life? Want to make it simpler? Listen to Solomon!*

¹D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*, Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed., Ec 12:9 (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

²Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, Ec 12:13 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

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