

WISDOM ABOUT REVERENCE

Intro: Almost everyone knows the conclusion verses of Ecclesiastes: “Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man”. This summary, “when all has been heard”, is really built on many things the wise man said about God throughout the book. In fact, six times in Ecclesiastes Solomon urges us to do just that—“fear God”.

But what is the conclusion based on? Why should we fear God? In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon gives us many reasons why God should be feared.

This morning in our lesson we considered the words of chapter 5 that guide us in approaching God in worship. Now let’s broaden the theme a bit and notice how the wise man viewed God and the reasons why he urges us to “fear Him”.

God’s worthiness to be feared is shown in His activities as Creator of everything. He is:

The God who gives us the task of exploring the world about us.

And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. (1:13)

First note that it is God who gives man the task. He is the Creator and we are living out His created purposes. He has given man free will, intellect and opportunity to examine the world about him. And maybe we begin this task with the belief that we are going to figure it all out and that there is an optimistic and joyful message in the world, if we can only master it all.

But this task Solomon describes as “grievous” and “an affliction” because what we discover after all our searching is that “all is vanity and striving after wind”.

And so through this process we should be made to see that there must be more than this life! God’s assignment to us is intended to make us see the vanity of this life. It should cause us to see our need for Him to be complete and thus to “fear Him”.

The argument shifts slightly in chapter 3. He is:

The God who gives us the opportunity to explore what He is doing.

I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11)

We are able to conceive of God's existence prior to our own existence and beyond it (on earth). And yet again, we are limited; we cannot know everything about what God is doing. We come to see that God's doing is beyond our ultimate comprehension.

Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. (Ecclesiastes 11:5)

Life is full of unanswered questions; we come to the end of life with many unexplained mysteries. This realization should cause us to seed our need for wisdom from the Creator to answer those questions we can't answer. It calls up us to trust Him with our lives in view of the mysteries of our existence. Thus, we "fear God".

The God who governs us in keeping with unchangeable principles that serve his purposes.

I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him. That which is has been already, and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by. (Ecclesiastes 3:14-15)

When we explore life we learn that it is unchangeable. There is a time for every event under heaven and we cannot stop or reset the clock. God has an unalterable plan for man's existence that the smartest and most powerful men cannot change or evade. We cannot control the world. That means that the times of life are under his control. In this way we come to see that our destiny is in his hands.

For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him. (Ecclesiastes 9:1)

When we confront our helplessness in controlling our destiny, we can see that our lives are truly in His hands; this should cause us to "fear God".

The God who tests us with the reality of death.

I said to myself concerning the sons of men, "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts." (Ecclesiastes 3:18-20)

One of the unchanging aspects of life under the sun is death. No matter how wise or foolish we are, no matter how wealthy or powerful we are, we all end up at the same place. God wants us to see that our lives will end in death. That in a way, we are no different from the beasts of the field; that we cannot prove by our own investigation that our spirit has a destiny different from the animals who live around us. Yet again, it is this realization that we cannot discovered what is beyond this life on our own that causes us to look to God for answers and to "fear Him".

The God who blesses us.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the

task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26)

Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart. (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

In both these texts, Solomon causes us to see that ultimately even our enjoyment of life is based on God's will. We cannot be assured that by ourselves we will find happiness and enjoyment in life. There are too many uncertainties, too many things we cannot control. So instead he urges us to look to God to give us the ability to enjoy life. And He clearly says that this power is God's gift to us, determined by His will. Thus, we should be led to "fear Him".

The God who judges us.

Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? (Ecclesiastes 5:6)

We should remember that He governs the world in which we live and His justice can be exerted at any time. He can take away what he has given.

Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there. (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17)

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14)

For Solomon the ultimate reason to fear God is rooted in our accountability to Him. We are His creation; He has the right to deal with us as He sees fit, in keeping with His purposes for making us. So we need to fear Him because we will ultimately give account to Him.

Conclusion: Let us know how truly great God is and how truly worthy of our service He is and “fear Him”. For Solomon these reasons should motivate us not only to respect or fear God, but to also “keep His commandments” (Eccl. 12:13).