

Topic	Fear God and keep His commandments
Reference	Ecclesiastes
Date	20 August 2017
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Successful and rich people in this world like Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Jack Ma followed their ambitions. The brand proposition composition of their companies is the same as the person. They are the brand; the brand is them. Some social workers find meaning in their work, they believe and they found meaning in what they do.

What is your purpose of life?

Most people in church meaning in life is having a family, you have kids, you can live a simple life, comfortable life, follow some hobbies that's purpose. But most people don't have that. A rubbish collector purpose is not the same as yours.

Worldly meaning: Life is meaningless unless you give it meaning.

Christian meaning: Life has no meaning unless God gives it meaning.

This is where you really know whether your meaning in life is God given or self-driven.

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV)

That opens a whole can of worms. The New Testament says, perfect love cast out all fear, because fear has got to do with punishment. Are Christians supposed to be scared of God and better to keep a checklist of all the commandments.

Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people.

He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.

The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails – given by one shepherd.

Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

Fear God and keep his commandments,

for this is the duty of all mankind.

For God will bring every deed including every hidden thing,
whether good or evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

This is an editorial text. Nowadays an editorial is written at the beginning of a book. In the olden days they put it at the end, which probably makes sense. They wrap up the whole book in a summary.

Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.
For God will bring every deed including every hidden thing,
whether good or evil.

So two reasons are given.

1. Duty of all mankind.
2. God is going to reveal every deed.

The context of that however is the first few verses of wisdom.

What is fear?

A very famous atheist said, *the fear of hell is the basis of the Christian faith*. Ted Turner, founder of CNN says, *Christians need a crutch. They are scared, they are wimps, they are cowards. They don't know what is out there, they don't know where they are going to go when they die and they see all these pictures of fire and hell and brimstone.*

If we look again at the verse and we look at Ecclesiastes as a whole, there is no mention of hell. There is no mention of this fear. There is no mention of this wrath. There is a lot about practical wisdom. The first thing is that, the idea of fear of God and practical wisdom. So he is talking about life.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, therefore you are feared. Psalms 130:3-4.

So he is tying forgiveness which is the character of God with fear.

Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool- why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. Ecclesiastes 7:16

Again, he is saying don't be too righteous, you are not going to live longer, don't try too hard. I am not going to add another day to your life. Don't sin intentionally. He is asking you to live a balance Christian life. That has got nothing to do with the fear of hell. It has got to do with God, with grace, it is that you can't earn your salvation, is got to do with the fact that fear God but you can still die tomorrow. So it gives you a little bit of the sense of fear.

In scripture fear of God is in reverence and awe, is the shekinah glory of God, is when Abraham decides to surrender his son to God and the angels says, now I know you fear God, because he knows that the Hebrew writer says that he believe God could raise Isaac back again. So it is not about external fears, because if it is we will all be cowards and there is no place for a disciple of Jesus to be coward. It is a response to His majesty, holiness, is where you pause and some people call this a wow moment. It is when you are silent and say, God this is what you are and he brings us to a deeper realization of his love and grace and there is none better expression of this than the gospel. That God in his infinite greatness, the power of the universe would come as a baby in a manger that's a wow moment.

The Fear of God as the Foundation of Wisdom

Here we are not looking at intellectual wisdom. We are not looking at how good we are at social media. We are not looking at how street smart we are. We are not looking about how good is your biblical knowledge is, how theologically correct you are. We are going to look at, how does this book apply to you in our relationships, at home and at work.

**The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails
Ecclesiastes 12:12**

The teacher uses two imageries. So this is an agricultural metaphor. A goad was a prod, you wanted an ox to move, you take a goad and you poke the ox and the ox will move. So God wants to poke you. The second one is God does not poke you because he wants you to feel pain for the sake of pain, he does it because again the next imagery is to take a nail and firmly tie down a tent, so that the tent is secure. So here is where we are getting with wisdom from the Bible.

1. If you read the bible and it does not hurt and it does not make you feel uncomfortable, it does not make you feel uneasy, you are not reading the Bible, you are only reading parts of it.
2. If that uncomfortable reading does not make you change and that change does not lead you to a place which is better in your life, more secure, able to withstand the storms of life you are not reading the Bible.

St Augustine was the bishop of Africa and he made a really fascinating remark in the 1st century. He says, *“People hate the truth for the sake for whatever it is that they love more than the truth. They love truth when it shines warmly on them, and hate it when it rebukes them.”*

Meaning, we like the parts of the bible that says, God loves me, God is patient, love is kind but the part that tells us to walk in the spirit, to give up some bad habits, the need for forgiveness, we tend to neglect them with the assumption of not being applicable to us.

A Christian has a sin of duplicity in him. They might be going to church regularly, but they are completely blind to the way of treating people. So coming to church sometimes not only it does not change your behavior, my proposition to you is that if you don't take the whole counsel of God, it makes you worse. There is a data to support this. Last month Australian News carried a report and this is what the report says.

‘Submit to your husbands’; women told to endure domestic violence in the name of God. Research shows that the men most likely to abuse their wives are evangelical Christians who attend church sporadically. Church leaders in Australia say they abhor abuse of any kind. But advocates say the church is not just failing to sufficiently address domestic violence, it is both enabling and concealing it.

Unless biblical wisdom goes every day in your life, unless it is like a goad and it pokes you, it is not biblical wisdom. When a man mistreats his wife or people who do not how to bring up their children well, the common thing is that there is no fear of God. It means we all live double lives and that's why at the end of it, he says

For God will bring every deed including every hidden thing, whether good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:14

That's why the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Some of us might say that, doesn't the Bible says that there is no condemnation for those in Christ. John says, fear has got to do with punishment, perfect love cast out all this condemnation. He says,

Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Ecclesiastes 12:10-12

We are living in an age of information overload and what Ecclesiastes is telling you again and again and again, knowing everything isn't going to solve your problem, in fact you are in an age of too many choices and I suggest to you wisdom says, having too many choices is actually something that is going to stumble you in life. So he picks up something else and for all of us where we are bombarded with so many things, you enter the world and you want to find meaning

and people tell you, you should do this and you listen to them because social pleasure tells you, you want to do that and your parents tell you, you should be like this. So can you imagine a poor guy who wants to find himself, he wants to be this but his parents want him to something else and society wants him to something else. He gets very torn and he procrastinates. So what is the meaning of life, he says 'I don't know I am confused' and so the author gives you a clue to anchor this and it is found in this word, given by one shepherd and this is only found in this occasion in Ecclesiastes.

Anchor your life on the gospel and all the noise will shut off. Screen everything through the gospel, either that when you wake up in this generation, this world will tear you to the left and to the right and in every direction and you wouldn't know what you want in life and you are going to sit there and say, I hate my job, I wish I could have been that but I don't have the money to that, I come to church, I don't really feel a life, my kids hate me, I have no meaning, I am lost.

So here is the other thing, '*Anchor yourself in the shepherd and when the shepherd speaks listen to the shepherd and when the shepherd speaks, he is going to prod you with his goad because he wants to anchor you down then when we come before God all fear will go away.*'

The Fear of God and the Love of God

Now again when you look at the interpretation of the text

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. Ecclesiastes 12:13

The most obvious book that basically almost runs against this is 1-John. Because 1-John has nothing to do with fear. It is got to do with love, love and love. But there is one word which is repeated very often in the epistle of John which ties to this. It is called command.

What is the greatest commandment?

Love God with all your heart and all your mind and how you sow and love your neighbor as yourself. So you fear God by keeping his commandments and all the commandments have the practical wisdom we spoke about. So fearing God and loving God and keeping his commandments are all part of the same basic glue. They are all tied together. If you are walking with God, you have nothing to fear. There is no condemnation because God is love.

What you want your kid to do, follow you because he is afraid you are going to whack him or would you rather your kid follows you because he respects you. He knows that whatever you do, you mean it well.

A healthy fear of God drives out all other fears. That is very powerful because the fear of God is rooted in the love of God and the mystery of this is that, they are both the same thing. Scripture is about paradoxes.

- Exaltation... ...through humility (James 4:10)
- Strength... ...through weakness (2 Cor 12:10)
- We receive... ...when we give (Acts 20:35)
- Freedom... ...by serving God (Rom 6:18)
- Gaining... ...through losing (Phil 3:7-8)
- Living to the fullest... ...through dying to self (John 12:24)
- Finding... ...through losing (Matt 10:39)
- Fear God... ...by loving God (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

The power of God displayed on the crucified savior and in this context the fear of God is the love of God. Godly fear is Godly love that's the paradoxical mystery of it. God's love brings us to a reverence and awe and that reverence awe is so powerful.

1. We do not want to offend him.
2. We fearfully endure discipline because we want to walk like him.

Paul Gascoigne was a very famous footballer, he played for England. His purpose was football. He became a very well-known coach. Ever since he had to give up his football he lost his purpose. For us is this, when your purpose is not an anchor that can take you through storms. When you are meaning. So when the world teaches you this, life is meaningless unless you find it meaning, it is a complete stupid thing to say.

Wisdom tells you it makes much more sense to shift it to God in the driver's seat. For Paul his purpose was in football, you took that away he had to fill it with something else and he filled it with the bottles and he is a recurring alcoholic. So these are the tragedies of life and when he was a footballer none of the alcoholic issues came out. The moment he was dropped, he had nothing to turn to, he became purpose less.

All of us have a purpose, it is just unconscious. To say, I don't know what I want in life, I am going to go through life is your purpose. To say, I am not sure what God wants me to do, I don't even care is a purpose. Conflictedly, on the other side to say I am very clear what God wants me to do. The Christian church is split because everybody wants to setup his own church, his own NGOs, his own thing and they say God ask me to do it. God is not a God of division, something is not quite right.

Viktor Frankl wrote a book, 'Man's Search For Meaning'. It influenced lot of thinkers like Steven Cowie, a lot of future thinkers came from him. Viktor was the survivor of the holocaust.

He tells this story that one day he was walking in the snow, being pushed around by the Nazi soldiers and they were all very depressed and one of his friends walking around says, you know what if only our wives saw us now. And the three of those started to think about their wives and as they thought about their wives that helped them on that journey and here is what he wrote. He said, *Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading... But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look....*

Meaning, as he was walking through the snow, it was a very difficult journey. He needed to cling onto something, he needed to focus on something to make that unbearable journey better and he focused on his wife because he deeply loved his wife and the three of them did the same thing and it helped them go on. He clicked on something which became the basis of his life. He said this,

Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of Man is through love and in love. Pg 56-57

For us who know Christ who so loved us, died on the cross, if that anchors you through your life that is your meaning in life.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

Rick Warren book "Purpose Driven Life" became very famous. He said this, *'without God, life has no purpose and without purpose, life has no meaning, without meaning life has no significance or hope.*

That is a Christian rhetoric. The non-Christian simply tells you, *Life has no meaning unless you create the meaning*

A lot of non-Christians out there will look at Ecclesiastes and say, it does not apply to me, I found meaning in my life with work, making money, helping others.

You can come to church and you can wrap everything you say in Christian lingo but the reality is your meaning life isn't anchored in God, it is still anchored on you.

The mind is like a camera, what you focus on is your meaning in life. It doesn't have to be conscious, it is unconscious most of the time. 80% of our behaviour is unconscious, in simple English your purpose is where your mind is.

For many of us the center of my universe is myself because it is me in the driver's seat. I am just ambitious. Whatever consumes you becomes you and so Ecclesiastes at the end of so many chapters when he has tried out pleasure, he tried out great projects, he tried to look at knowledge and he went through everything and he discovered that life is unfair. He finally came to only one conclusion, fear God and keep his commandments. You want to have purpose in life, you anchor this.

So here are few questions that we need to ask ourselves honestly from the bottom of our heart.

- What would make you really **happy**.
- What would make you really **excited**.
- What would make you feel really **grateful**.
- What would make you **want to really love someone**.
- What would make you **feel really loved**.
- *Where does Jesus Christ fit in all of the above?*

Ecclesiastes just ends with this with simple truth that just kicks in, the paradoxical fear and love of God brings meaning to life. This is so profoundly simple and so profoundly true. If I audit my life, I will tell you many things are wanting and I have to sit quietly and say, God I wish I love you more, I don't.

So in simple application for me as I come to my own conclusion of the meaning of life, I throw that back to you and may that help you guide you in your goals every day.