

Ecclesiastes 12:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

After eleven chapters exploring life's enigmas 'under the sun,' the Preacher arrives at the 'conclusion of the whole matter' (Hebrew 'soph davar ha-kol,' end/summary of the entire discourse). The dual imperatives—'Fear God, and keep his commandments'—constitute humanity's 'whole duty' (Hebrew 'kol ha-adam,' literally 'the whole of man,' meaning humanity's essential purpose/duty). 'Fear God' (Hebrew 'yare et-ha-Elohim') denotes reverential awe, not terror—recognizing God's majesty, holiness, and authority. 'Keep his commandments' (Hebrew 'shemor et-mitzvotav') means carefully observing covenant obligations. Despite life's mysteries, inequities, and frustrations documented throughout Ecclesiastes, this conclusion provides clarity: ultimate meaning isn't found in accomplishments, pleasures, or even wisdom itself, but in right relationship with God expressed through obedient reverence.

Historical Context

This conclusion echoes Deuteronomy's covenant theology: 'What does the LORD require of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways' (Deuteronomy 10:12). Written during or after the exile, when Israel's covenant faithfulness determined blessing or curse, Ecclesiastes redirects readers from anxious striving toward simple obedience. Jesus summarized the Law similarly: love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). The early church understood that fearing God and keeping commandments find fulfillment in Christ, who perfectly obeyed (Hebrews 5:8) and enables our obedience through the Spirit (Romans

8:3-4). The Westminster Shorter Catechism similarly concludes: 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'—echoing Ecclesiastes' God-centered conclusion.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does this simple conclusion—fear God, keep His commandments—cut through the complexity and anxiety of your current circumstances?
2. In what areas of life are you seeking meaning and purpose apart from reverent obedience to God, and how is that working out?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת	בְּאָלֹהִים	אֶת	נִשְׁמָע	לְפָנֶיךָ	רָבָרְבָּה	וְאֵת	יְמִינָה	בְּאָלֹהִים	יְמִינָה	יְמִינָה	יְמִינָה
the conclusion	of the whole matter			H3605		Let us hear	H853	God		Fear	
H5490	H1697					H8085	H430	H430		H3372	
אֶת	בְּאָלֹהִים	יְמִינָה	נִשְׁמָע	לְפָנֶיךָ	רָבָרְבָּה	וְאֵת	יְמִינָה	בְּאָלֹהִים	יְמִינָה	יְמִינָה	יְמִינָה
H853	his commandments	and keep	H3588	H2088	H3605						
	H4687		H8104								
בְּאָדָם:											
for this is the whole duty of man											
H120											

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 10:12 (References God): And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

Deuteronomy 6:2 (Word): That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged.

Micah 6:8 (References God): He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Psalms 145:19 (Parallel theme): He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

Job 28:28 (Parallel theme): And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

Ecclesiastes 8:12 (References God): Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

Luke 1:50 (Parallel theme): And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Proverbs 19:23 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil.

Proverbs 1:7 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Revelation 19:5 (References God): And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.