

THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER: FEAR AND OBEY

Introduction

As we've traced connecting threads through Ecclesiastes, we've seen that God is big and we are small. We've candidly looked at the frustrations of a sin-cursed world and learned that joy is a proper response. We studied death and discovered that it puts life into proper perspective for us. But where is Solomon going with all these themes? What is he driving at? He concludes his investigation of everything under the sun in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. Finally, after pages of cycling through topics, the book winds to a close. Fear God and keep His commandments - that sounds short and sweet. We're going to take some time to trace those phrases through Scripture and sharpen our understanding of these familiar words.

Fearing God Is Not a Surprise!

To the observant reader of Ecclesiastes, "fear God" does not appear out of nowhere. Eccl. 12:13 is actually the _____ time that Solomon mentioned fearing God.

- 3:14 - God's sovereign _____ of the world motivates us to fear Him.
- 5:8 - True fear of God is better than _____ worship.
- 7:18 - Fearing God enables you to live a _____ life.
- 8:12 - No matter what everyone else does, fearing God is your _____ choice.
- 8:13 - Not fearing God is a mark of an _____ man.
- 12:13 - God's _____ for mankind is fear and obedience.

A careful reading shows that Solomon is not sneaking a new idea into the book, but continuing a theme that has flown under the radar throughout the book. What exactly is Solomon talking about when he tells us to fear God? He doesn't define it here in Ecclesiastes, so we'll study this phrase in the rest of Scripture.

Defining the Fear of God

When we list all references that talk about "fearing God," we see how important it is to Solomon. There are seventy-three verses that mention "fear of God" spread out over

twenty OT books. Nearly one-fourth of those verses are in _____.
Ecclesiastes ranks _____ in number of references to “fearing God.”

1. Gen. 21:12 – Abraham’s willingness to _____ Isaac was proof that he feared God.
2. Ex. 1:21; 9:30 – God _____ the Hebrew midwives for fearing Him, but plagued the Egyptians for not fearing Him.
3. Lev. 19, 25 – Fearing God shows up in your relationships with _____.
4. Deut. 4, 10, 31 – Fearing God is something learned from His law, demonstrated in _____ and passed down through generations.
5. II Ki. 17 – Fearing God exclusively is a covenant-based _____.
6. Job 1 – _____ fear of God was at the heart of Satan’s challenge.
7. Psa. 61-68 – God’s _____ and our testimony motivate others to fear Him.

As all the pieces come together, a clearer picture of “fearing God” begins to form.
Fearing God is...

- _____: It is often linked with worship, love and closeness. Fearing God grows from a heart-felt desire for God.
- _____: Fearing God shows up in action. Acts of sacrifice, obedience and compassion are frequently linked with a fear of God. It affects our actions toward God and toward others.
- _____: The full, mature expression of fearing God doesn’t instantly appear. God desires us to learn His Word so that we can learn to fear Him and then teach that fear to the next generation.
- _____: We don’t fear God for no reason at all. Our fear is based on three primary motivations: His redemptive choice, His fear-inspiring acts and His fear-inspiring character.
- _____: Fearing God puts you in a position of blessing, benefit and balance.

So, “fearing God” comes from an internal desire for Him, based on who He is and what He’s done; it grows as we learn more about Him, displays itself in obedience and brings us benefit. That’s a good *description*, but what’s the *definition*? To put it simply, understanding “the fear of God” is just a matter of understanding “_____.”

There has been a tendency to minimize the negative aspects of fear and to redefine fear as “reverence” or “great admiration and respect.” However, to squeeze the concept of “fearing God” into the definition “reverence” ignores the normal meaning of the word. Throughout the Old Testament, “fear” means “a feeling of fright based on potential harm or pain.” Adam hid after he sinned (Gen. 3:10), Sarah feared God’s reaction to her disbelieving laughter (Gen. 18:15), Jacob was very nervous about re-meeting his estranged brother (Gen. 32:7), the Israelites were terrified by the approach of Pharaoh’s

army (Ex. 14:10) and Saul feared David (I Sam. 18:12). The fear of God is more than just "_____." It also includes the awareness that God's chastening power is real and often painful. This fear is not contradictory to a relationship of love; it is because God loves us so perfectly that His discipline is so sharp. We ought to fear God because we know that He loves us too much to let us get carried away in the sinful shenanigans that we so willingly try.

There is also a sense of sobriety and seriousness about fearing God. It is impossible to fear someone or something that appears to insignificant; fearing God is based on seeing how important He is. When I take God lightly, I am not fearing Him. When I show the appropriate respect and sobriety, I am fearing Him.

"The "fear of God" in the Bible is not just an inward _____ over His greatness, but an outward obedience because of His God-ness – His authority to _____, His ability to _____, and His awareness of _____ we are and do" (Layton Talbert).

Conclusion

We are living in a world that has been marred by sin. God's redemptive work is aimed at restoring His ideal, and that means fearing Him. Not merely reverence, but a sobriety and an obedient respect that take Him seriously. It grows from our sincere desire for God and accurate knowledge of who He is. As we grow to know Him better, we learn how fearing Him is properly displayed. Fearing God always shows up in our actions: how we worship, how we respond to His Word and how we treat one another. It is our response to who God is and what He does, and it is the position of greatest good for us.