

Ecclesiastes 12:9–14 "Fear God and Keep His Commands"

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[0 : 00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, Your Word often asks us to zig when the world tells us to zag. Your Word often is against the intuitions of our present age and our culture, and we confess before you that you are wise and that when you speak to us in counterintuitive ways, that's what is truly wise. And so, Father, we confess before you you are going to ask us to do something which is quite counterintuitive to our culture. So we ask that you would tune our heart, not just to our culture, but to us. And so we ask that you would tune our hearts to receive all that you want to give us through your Word and all the grace that you desire to give us this morning. Tune our hearts to receive that and to respond in a worthy manner. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. So this morning, I am going to attempt to not just to defend the indefensible, but to commend the indefensible as something that you should actually want to do and pray. And what that is, I think if you were to ask most people, they would say that real spirituality, real religion should take you away from fear. It should deliver you from fear.

It should give you a type of confidence with no fear whatsoever. And that would be something that people will listen to. And I am going to try to get you to say by the end of the service that I would like to pray most days something like this. Heavenly Father, please make the person and work of Jesus more and more real to my heart. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, help me day by day to deepen my fear of you and my obedience to you. In Jesus's name, amen. Fear of you and obedience to you, that's not something that's going to sell easily in Canada. But that's what the Bible teaches. And I believe it's very, very wise, and it's exactly what our soul needs. In fact, in a very funny way, it's as you grow in the fear of God that you will lose your fear of other things, actually. And if you don't have the fear of God, you will always have fears of other things, unless you're a sociopath or something like that.

[3 : 31] So let's look. Why am I even talking about this? I'm talking about this because that's the whole book of Ecclesiastes, which we've been with for nine weeks, now the 10th, is coming up to the end of the matter. And that's what the end of the matter is, a desire for you to wholeheartedly want to embrace the fear of God and obeying his commandments, his commands. So let's look. And it's Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verses 9 to the end. So it's six verses. Ecclesiastes 12, 9 to the end. And it begins in sort of an innocuous type of way. It begins like this. Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many prophets with great care. I just sort of want to pause here. This is, on one hand, it's a very innocuous verse, but it's a very important verse. It shows that Christians, in fact, value the mind. We value study. At least we should. If you meet a Christian who doesn't value the mind and doesn't value thinking and

doesn't value, you know, doing research, they might sound very pious, but they're not being biblical. The Bible will encourage us to be thoughtful people, as thoughtful as we can, to be people who seek after true knowledge and to base their lives on it and be able to be good communicators. That's what the Bible will form you to do if you get to know Jesus. So it begins in innocuous, and then it goes to something. The next verse is, for those of you who write for a living, and for those of you, and by that I include not just like people who want to write poetry, but also if you have to write government briefs.

And I know that as soon as we say what this is telling us how government briefs would be, you'll all say to me afterwards, George, maybe in the future I'll write two government briefs. I'll write one government brief that obeys this, but if I write it the way this text tells me to write it, it'll get filled with red lines and crosses out, because as we all know, government briefs, the goal is to be as short and boring as possible with nothing that could get anybody upset, right?

So, but this is telling us to write in such a way and to make music in such a way and deliver lives in such a way. It should be, it's tattoo on your hand worthy as a verse. And what is it? Look at it in chapter 12, verse 10. The preacher or the teacher or the sage sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The good, the true, and the beautiful. Like, if you're going to write, write it as beautifully as you can so that people delight in reading it, because you delight over beauty, right? And you delight over goodness, and you delight over truth. And so, right, and this single passage has this as sort of a goal of writing and creativity to write, you know, John O. F. used to write a song. He should write in such a way, and the melody should be the one to delight, they're true. And the good is there too. It's just not as obvious to it, but it's all three of these. This great thing, in fact, in all of the things, you know, when I said that what you need to do is to pray, that I'm hoping that by the end of the sermon, you'll want to say, you know what, I think I'm going to try to pray, maybe not every day, but at least once a week, that I'll grow in the fear of God and keeping his commands. And that's because God is the source. He is goodness himself.

He is beauty himself. He is truth himself. You are being asked to come into the presence of truth, the true, the good, and the beautiful. And have that be the source and the inspiration about how you live your life. Like, who doesn't, who shouldn't, who wouldn't want that? If you're honest.

[7 : 09] If somebody says, no, no, no, no, I'd rather lies, ugliness, and evil. Well, I mean, if they may be joking at a party or a bar, but if you really start to take them serious, you don't want to turn your back on somebody like that, right? Because you want to keep your enemies in, you know, the people who might harm you in sight. But how would it like? So the words of delight, that's referring to beauty.

And then uprightly. We could do a whole sermon on upright. But what upright means here is that it means moral. It means right. It means that you have the right, you have the right relationships with other people. They're right. They fit. They're good. And you have the right relationship with God and the created order. So that would include the right relationship to animals and plants and trees and rivers and streams. There's a whole ecological movement right there and contained in upright.

And you have the right goal, the right desire, so that you're right with people, right with God. It's good with them. And you're living in a way which is good and fits. And it's moral. And it's such a beautiful text because it uses the word upright, because what it says is that goodness ennobles you.

An old-fashioned word ennobles you. Evil and virtue makes you cramped and crooked and tiny and petty and stunted. Goodness, as you become more good, you stand straight.

It ennobles you. And it's a very, very beautiful, old-fashioned, very uncool, square, non-hip word that we should all say, who wants to be cool and hip if you're not upright? I mean, that's what we should be thinking in our minds, right? So here you have it, the words of delight, uprightly, that's the good, the moral, and then words of truth. And the word of truth here, it's not truthiness, it's truth.

[9 : 03] And Christianity at its heart, we are reality respecters. What does true mean? You know, if you're like Planteus Planteus, when I was taking my, you know, I studied my year of theology with ultra, ultra, ultra liberal people. And in one of the lectures, you know, I said, well, you know, you have to pursue the truth. And the professor said, well, what is truth?

Truth. And I said to him, that's exactly what Planteus Pilate said to Jesus. And he looked at me with a frown on his face and said, that's a bit of a low blow. And I didn't apologize, by the way. Anyway, we went on, right? But it's a miracle I passed. Anyway, but truth just means what's real. That's what it means. You want to know what's real.

Christianity will, the Bible will corral you to try to learn to be a reality respecter. What's real? That's what's true. We can't know exhaustive truth, but we can know true truth. And that's what the Bible encourages us to pursue. And now the Bible is going to sound at first as if it's, as if it's contradicting itself. No, sorry, that's, that's a little bit. No, okay. So we have the true, true, the good and beautiful. And, and that's what we, we should be pursuing. And now the Bible is going to say something about itself, which is really important for us to hear. It's going to talk about why it is that Christians historically, not just Protestants, but the early church fathers, from the early beginnings of the church, you want to hear this doctrine, go to Augustine, go to Chrysostom, like the early church fathers, why it is that Christians believe in sola scriptura, not solely scriptura, but sola scriptura. It's in this next verse. And for those of you outside the Christian faith, you don't know what I'm talking about. That, that's fine.

Christians are going to make a big claim about the Bible, and it comes from what the Bible says about itself. Look at verse, um, oh, sorry. Yeah, no, it is right here. Verse 11. The words of the wise are like goads, which I'll explain in a moment, and like nails, firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd. They are given by one shepherd. Now, right, all of Ecclesiastes, it's moving to a point, it's going to get us hopefully to the point where we actually want to pray that we'll grow in the fear of God and, and, and obedience to what he, uh, he tells us to do. And so part of the beauty of the Christian faith is seen actually in this text. If you, last week we looked at the end before the end, uh, and this week we're looking at the end of the end. And last week it described God for the first time in the book of Ecclesiastes as our creator. And that is a really important Christian idea, but it sounds, it could lead to deism, it can lead to God being very distant, as if God set everything in motion with the big bang, and, and now he's sort of off doing other types of things. He's lost any type of interest to it. So it's an important doctrine about, uh, you know, how things work and everything, but it implies God's bigness, his transcendence. He's bigger than the big bang. He's the one who effortlessly can cause the big bang. But now God is described as our shepherd and shepherds are right amongst the sheep in all their mess. Shepherds get sheep poop on their shoes and they get sheep tufts stuck on their clothes. They're part of, they get right involved in our mess. And so we have here the beautiful picture of God, that the God that is introduced and, and revealed in the Bible is the God who is both unbelievably transcendent and the creator of all things and, and maintains all, all things in their, in their proper existence. But he's also the God who is among us. We're going to be going into Christmas.

Emmanuel. Jesus is described as Emmanuel. He's amongst, amongst us. He's with us in our mess. He gets our poop and crap on his boots. He is among us. That's how God is. So it's a very, very beautiful image. And this, this, uh, and this shepherd is the one who ultimately causes the words of Ecclesiastes to be written. I mean, they're written by probably Solomon or not that somebody like Solomon, but he's the one who causes the words that we saw in this text to be written. And that's why if I had had been better organized, I could put on the screen right now, uh, I'd have a really thick black line, like about like this all the way across. And on the top of the line, it says God's words and underneath it would say all other words, whether angelic, demonic, or human, all other words. Only God's words in the Bible are described as being from him. And Christians don't say, well, because of that, no other words matter. Not at all. I mean, I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't read Francis Schaeffer, if I hadn't read C.S. Lewis, if I didn't know the creeds, if I didn't know the 39 articles in the

[14:04] Book of Common Prayer with its collects and, and, and, and the ordinal with its preface and, and, and, and godly men and women throughout my lives whose words have helped to shape me. These are all unbelievably important and unbelievably necessary, but they will sometimes err. Only God's words are above that. So it's not solely scriptura, but it's only God's word has that status to inform and to judge and to shape. And so that the, the, the says, the text here is saying is that the same God who has created all things is the same God who is like a shepherd amongst us with in, in amongst our mess, guiding us and directing us, touching us, literally, because that's what shepherds would potentially do with with the sheep. And he's, and he's the one who speaks. And his words, the words of the, the good, the true, and the beautiful, the one who is the source of goodness, source of truth, source of beauty, who is beauty himself, truth himself, goodness himself. His words have, in this summary, two functions that fit together very, very, very beautifully. One function is to be like the pointy stick that the shepherd has to prod the sheep, the sheep to move in a good direction. You know, the shepherd doesn't prod the sheep to go over the cliff. He prods the sheep that prods the sheep to avoid the cliff. He doesn't prod them to go to be eaten by wolves. He

prods them to avoid the wolf and to go where they're going to be safe. And God's words are going to keep poking us, keep, let's be honest, they're going to irritate us. But they irritate us for our good. They irritate us to go in the direction where we will find health and wholeness and freedom. And at the same time, they're words that you can completely and utterly entrust your life to. And the image here is Louise and I occasionally will go through little periods where we like to watch documentaries of things that we would never in a million years do ourselves. So we'll watch, you know, base jumpers. We'll watch some complete and utter lunatic with a suit that when he spreads his legs and his arms, he can jump off of a cliff or a huge mountain and glide. We would never do that in a million years, but it's pretty cool to watch sometimes.

Or somebody who'll climb one of those sheer rock faces. That's, we would never do that, but we go through periods where it's pretty cool to watch that, right? And if you watch somebody who climbs mountains like that, these sheer faces, they hammer things into the crevices of the rock and then they get them really solid and then they can hang from them. And you'll, you know, you'll see these, always in these documentaries, there'll be some time where they sort of do that and then they'll just sort of, you know, hang there, you know, a thousand feet above the ground and certain death and just sort of hang there and sort of look around, maybe take a picture, look around, comment about how cool everything looks, right? And that's what the Bible is, that's what God is saying his word is like. On one hand, his word is going to keep poking you and irritating you, but in a good direction. And the second thing is that once you understand his word, once you come to some understanding of his word, you can completely and utterly hold your life, it'll hold you up. It's life-giving. You need it. And that's how it's describing it. And it's all coming from the one who is the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Now, the next verse, commentators will spend a lot of time as if the next verse contradicts what's just said or if it's problematic, but it's not problematic. It's very wise and it talks about something which we really need for our health. Look at what it says in verse 12. It says, my son or my daughter, beware of anything beyond these. In other words, of, you know, the books of the Bible, etc. Of making many books, there is no end, and much study is wearisome of the flesh. I know we have some people doing their PhD dissertations. We're working on their PhDs and they could probably say, lots of working on my PhD.

I mean, part of the succeeding in your PhD is getting over the wearisomeness of all the writing and the rewriting. I know we also have a professor here who probably sends things back to be rewritten, and they might find reading their stuff. Anyway, you get the point. Well, doesn't this contradict things? Is this saying, by the way, that C.S. Lewis was doing something wrong because he wrote like 60 or 70 books? Or, no, it's not saying that at all. It's a very ancient insight which I first had clarity to.

I don't know how many of you remember the little devotional book by Oswald Chambers, my utmost for his highest. I mean, I don't know how many people remember that book. It's a beautiful little book to read, a series of little things to think about every day. And one of the things he says, and he doesn't deny the use of the mind, he doesn't deny that you need to think and look intelligently and study. But he says that often Christians make the mistake of thinking that they can think their way to clarity on points in the Christian life. But you actually need to obey your way to clarity. Obey your way to clarity. I'll be a little bit controversial, and if you want to challenge me on this, you can speak to me afterwards. But after we had made our decision to leave the Anglican Church of Canada over issues of biblical faithfulness because, you know, because we believe that Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 11 is true. And so therefore, if the Anglican Church of Canada wants to say that God's mistaken and wrong and Jesus is wrong about a whole pile of things, that we can no longer be part of the Anglican Church of Canada. So after we had made that decision, but before we'd walked away from our building, there was a woman who came to visit one day, and she was an elder in a Presbyterian Church, and her sister was a minister in an Anglican Church.

[20 : 10] And she said something about how you guys have made the decision to leave, and then I asked her about her sister, and she said, you know, my sister's, well, she said, my sister and I both find this issue very, very, very, very complicated. Now, here's where you'll wonder how on earth I ever got a counseling degree because sometimes I'm not very nice. I said to her, I didn't, I didn't like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I confronted her. I said, no, actually, the issue, that isn't the problem.

This particular issue over blessing of same-sex marriages is very, very, very simple in the Bible. But it is a difficult decision to obey it. And I understand that. I can be sympathetic to that.

But it's not complicated. It's very, very clear in the Bible. I said, that's the problem. It's very simple and clear. Complicated to do. Complicated in terms of your job. Or maybe difficult. Difficult to worry about your future. Difficult in terms of relations. Like, I understand it's difficult in lots of areas, but it's actually very simple. And you can write endless books on it. But your endless books aren't going to solve it unless you're willing to obey. And that's what's at the heart of it.

At some point in time, you study, you study, you read. And then, are you willing to obey? I'll say just one other thing about that. If you don't want to think I'm really...

There was a... In some ways, I'm quite charismatic. I don't mean in a sociological, psychological sense. I have no idea about that. But I was really, really, really, really having problems to preach a text one Sunday. I think it was in Colossians. And I just, all week, I couldn't get the sermon together. And I was living out in Eganville. I was early on in my ministry there.

[22 : 05] And I decided I'd go for a run. And as I was going for a run, and I'm saying that, you know, I'm just thinking, I don't know how on earth I'm going to preach this. And then it was as if, literally, it was as if God spoke to me. And he said, George, your problem is, you don't want to tell that congregation that they're dead in their sins unless they give their lives to Christ.

You don't... You... My problem was, I was trying to wordsmith it. I was trying to think, well, you're not quite okay. You know, you're not as whole as you should be. Like, I was trying to think of some way to wordsmith it because I was confronted that I was afraid to say something.

The text was just really clear. That was the problem. I was sort of caught by the text. The text said, like, apart from Christ, you're a corpse. That's what it's saying. And I'm trying to figure out a way to nuance it. And it was as if God spoke to me on the run. Your problem, George, is that you're trying... You don't want to say what the text says. You're afraid to say it.

And as soon as that came, I went back and the sermon was finished. Like, it was really easy to do the sermon. Because my problem was, I didn't want to obey. And just in case you're wondering, the next day I said that to the... You know, I'm going through the text like this with the congregation.

And they might not have quite understood it, but they go, oh, okay, well, that's what the Bible says. Like, nobody got mad or left the church over it, because they want to just hear what the Bible says, right? And so that's what this is saying here.

So just to go back in terms of where we are in all of this, we get this beautiful picture of the good, the true, and the beautiful. And that when we communicate as much as possible, we should try to speak out of goodness and truth and beauty and the delight that comes in that, that ultimately God is the source of good and truth and beauty. And that he is not just that, but he is also the creator and the shepherd. And he speaks these true words. And the challenge before us is, are we willing to obey? And that leads us to, are you willing to pray that you will fear God and grow in it and obey what he tells you to do? Look, verse 13 and 14 goes like this.

[24 : 22] This is the end of the matter. When I said this is the end of the matter, that's because it says the end of the matter. Sometimes Christians just have to be the masters of the obvious or the mistresses of the obvious. You don't have to be creative. You just have to say, that's what it says.

The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of the human being, for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. I read it again. The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, or keep his commands, for this is the whole duty of the person, the human being, for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Now, there's a bit of a geek. In the original language, there's four alls, which aren't captured in the translation. So if you look at verse 13, it says, all has been heard. And when it says the whole duty of man, it literally says, this is all of man. It is literally in the Hebrew, this is all of man. And by here, man, you mean humanity. And this is one of those cases where it's best to probably translate it as man in the old-fashioned English way, because it's trying to communicate both each individual person. This is all of each human being, and it's all of all human beings. And then in verse 14, it says, every there means, for God will bring all deeds into judgment with all secret things, whether good or evil. So there's four alls here in the text. And it's telling us to fear God, and obey his commands. So first of all, I'm going to make it less attractive, but hopefully more attractive. There's two different ways to come at this doctrine of the fear of God, and even the use of the word fear.

Some of your Bible translations avoid the word fear of God. They'll use reverence of God or honoring God. And the original word has those elements in it. But you don't want to lose the fear of God word there. And because, you see, there's one way of understanding fear of God when you're

outside of it, looking at it. And there's another way of understanding it when you're inside of it. And in a sense, indwelling it. And from the outside, it's connected to this. If you go through the whole book of Ecclesiastes, one of the things about the whole book of Ecclesiastes is that it keeps reminding you of death. And part of how it's analyzing the human condition is that human beings are certain about what is in fact uncertain, and uncertain about what is truly certain. I got this from a Scottish pastor by the name of Gibson. He said, the human condition, the book of Ecclesiastes, is trying to get us to realize that we're uncertain about what is in fact, in fact, in the real world, uncertain. And we are uncertain in our minds about what is in fact, in the real world, absolutely certain. And so here would be, you know, an example. And this is where a lot of human unhappiness and disappointment comes from, because we're certain we know that, you know, if God's blessed you with children, we're certain that our children are going to live long and happy lives, they're going to have really good, they're going to have, you know, good careers, you know, they're going to grow up as Christians, et cetera, et cetera. Or, you know, we're certain about some things that's going to happen in terms of a promotion, or we're certain about, well, at the wedding reception yesterday. Afterwards, I was talking to a guy, and he introduced himself as a systems engineer who just got a job in engineering. And I said to him, are you uncertain about your future? I mean, with AI.

And he said, well, you know, when I came, when I started into this, I would never believe it would come to this. But my future is going to have to be getting into management stuff, because I don't know if AI is going to take over large parts of my job, and there'll be far fewer systems engineers. Like, what career counsellors five years ago were telling people that? I mean, I don't know for certain, but I bet if you went back and looked at the National Post, the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, if you went and looked at all sorts of things, they were recommending really good careers were to getting into programming. They have great job opportunities, really secure future, really lots of work. And now there's an article just in the National Post, or the Citizen, or something like that just the other day about how it's really hard for people to get introductory jobs in that particular field, because AI is taking it over. But you see, we go through life really certain about what is in fact uncertain, because we don't know the future.

[29 : 26] We don't know if we're even going to be alive in a year's time. We don't know if we're going to get cancer. We don't know if the economy is going to... We don't know if the economy is going to get skyrocket hot, and it's all of a sudden things are really, really well. And how many people wish they could go back in time and buy a Bitcoin when they were virtually free, or get an Apple stock when it first opened up?

Like, you know, if you went back in time and did that, you'd be a billionaire if you got an early Bitcoin thing, right? But the future is in fact completely uncertain, but we're certain about it. But death is absolutely certain, but the average Canadian is uncertain about whether they will die.

And then we wonder why we have problems figuring out and managing life and are disappointed time and time and time again. And so the book of Ecclesiastes is a reality respecter, and part of that is the whole image of death. And last week, if you go back and look, the text says that in death, what happens is we return to stand before our Maker. And so what the Bible is really saying here, why is it from the outside fear of God? The fear of God is really good from the outside, even though it's not accepted, is it need to realize that if you live your entire life in rejection of God, ignoring of God, rebelling against God, doing whatever you want, having no time for God, at some point in time, you're going to meet Him face to face, and that will break you and crush you.

You should be afraid of that. You should be. That's the outside. What about the inside of the fear of God?

Let's say you say, okay, God, George, yes, you know what, I've lived my entire life as if that's not going to happen, as if I'll never die, as if I'll never have to appear before God. And by the way, if you appear before God, what will it be like when He reveals every single secret thing that is secret about you and every deed you've ever done, and you're judged by absolute truth, absolute truth, not truthiness, not bell curves, but absolute truth, absolute goodness, and absolute beauty.

[31 : 36] And so you take this warning, and you say, George, what do I do? And hear the message is, well, you need to get in the inside of that.

You need to fear God and say, God, and this is for these people 900 years beforehand, Jesus, for our Jewish ancestors who were part of that great tree of the faith that we just get grafted into, you call out to God and say, God, I want to be in a relationship with you, I want to be under your cover, I

want to be protected by your mercy, I don't know how you're going to work it out, but I don't know how you're going to work it out, so it's still true, and it's still good, and it's still beautiful, and it's still just, that I am under your care and protection, and I have no, I don't know how on earth I will ever stand before your judgment, but all I can do is call out for you with mercy.

And for people in Solomon's time, all they could do is trust themselves upon the mercy of God, and that he had a history of delivering his people, because the exodus was unbelievably important to them, and that's all they can trust.

They don't know how it's going to work in the future, but they can just trust on that, and in light of that, I will obey your commands. I'm going to talk more about the fear, but we as Christians, our understanding of all of this isn't, I don't say to people outside the Christian faith, I'm just way better at fearing God than you are, that's why I can stand before him in the judgment.

No, it's not that at all. I think, is it the offertory we're going to sing? What is a savior? There's a very beautiful hymn from the 1880s or 30s or something like that, called Man of Sorrows, right?

[33 : 18] Is that the hymn? What a savior? It has a very beautiful line in it. In my place, condemned he stood. In my place, condemned he stood.

See, the message of the gospel is that Jesus, in a sense, comes and looks at each person through the scriptures, and through our mind and our imagination, but ultimately through the scriptures.

Jesus comes and stands, and at some point in time, he taps me on the shoulder and asks me to turn around, and he looks me in the eye and he says, George, will you trust me and believe me?

Will you ask me into your life, and will you allow me to come into your life? Will you trust me? And I might say to him, you know, Jesus, I do trust you, but I don't know if you want to know, come actually be connected to me, because there's a lot of real mess inside of me, and there's a lot of stuff which is not pretty as being too proud.

It's like really ugly. And he says, I know every one of your secrets, and I know everything you've ever done, and I know everything about what makes you you, because I know all of what it means to be a person, and still I stand by my offer.

[34 : 47] Will you put your hands in mine and allow me to be your savior? I will enter you and you will enter me. And you say yes. And then you discover this profound mystery, that in a sense Jesus stands before God the Father with his arm around me, and he says, Father, George and I are one, and he has trusted me.

So Father, I know everything about, I know what it's going to cost, I know everything about George. I would like to stand in his place. I would like you, I would like that the destiny that I deserve will rest on him, and the doom that he deserves will rest on me.

I will bear his judgment. And that's the message of the gospel. And it's not just that he does it once and then he ignores you, but that you are in union with Christ for the rest of your existence in eternity.

He is not only a forgiveness of sin, but you have his presence to cheer and to guide. So how does that fit with the fear of God? Well, it does in several ways, just very briefly, because my time is coming to an end.

At the heart of the fear of God, a couple of weeks ago I used the analogy of us being, part of the human problem is that we think, I think I'm like a planet, and all of the people are people like, are the moons around me, but if I'm really honest, I think I'm like the sun.

[36 : 22] And all of you folks here, you're the planets and you're the moons encircling me. You know, and in my marriage, I can think I'm the sun, you're the planets and the moons circling me.

And part of the problem is that the fact of the matter is, you think you're the sun, and I'm one of the planets circling you. And we all think that.

And that's just a recipe for chaos and destruction and banging into each other. And part of what happens with this whole thing, like it's all part of salvation, of getting in and trusting God to trust this, is that day by day I start to learn to say, I am a moon.

And that is good. And there is a sun at the center of our little thing. And there's other planets and moons encircling all around that.

And it is a good thing to be a moon. It is fine. The fact of the matter is, is that lots of us not only aren't content just to say with sun, I had to look this up, but the center of the Milky Way is Sagittarius A star.

[37 : 42] And a lot of us think we're actually Sagittarius A star. Entire solar systems involving it, and planets, and moons, and suns, and all of that type of thing.

And it is the goodness of just saying, I am a planet. God is Sagittarius A plus. He is the sun. And so the fear of God comes in not wanting to transgress that.

You see, part of the mystery of the Tanakh, what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh, what we call the Old Testament, is that often if you look at the Psalms and the poetry, even the book of Ecclesiastes, the fear of God is often in the same two verses or three verses connected with a longing for God and a yearning for God.

And you see, the fear of the God is, it's like if I was to discover one day that one of my sons said, Dad, I have some things against you. You know, I've come to realize that you always were trying to live your life through me, and you're violating my boundaries of who I am and not respecting me as a person.

And you're not treating me as a separate individual with my own integrity and my own plans and my own dreams and my own talents. You're always trying to overwhelm me. And if my son came to me and said that, or my daughter, I would be horrified.

[39 : 04] And I would say, please forgive me. And I would wish I could go back in time and fix that. And so you see, here's the fear of God and the love of God and the mercy of God.

How does that work on? It's for me to say, oh God, I am, I don't want to start acting as if I'm God, as if I'm the sun, as if I'm Sagittarius A star.

Help me not to transgress those boundaries and act as if I'm you. Make me content to be a moon. Moons are still important for gravity, for us maintaining our place.

Like, ask a science guy. There's all sorts of things about being a moon which are still really important. I just want to be a moon. And obeying his commands, don't think in terms of obeying his commands and his words in terms of a legalistic threat.

That's not from the inside. The fear of God, that's why the fear of God is all about not only as you enter into the fear of God, you're also entering into a deeper knowledge. You see, what my son would say if I was, if you said I had done that with him, he would say to me, that means, Dad, because you always transgressed my boundaries, you never loved me.

[40 : 13] Because you can only love one who is different. And so the clearer the boundaries, the more the love can be. The clearer the boundaries, the more I can love God and I can honor him and I can respect him.

And that's all part of the fear of God. And his commands, don't think of some type of legalistic thing coming to crush me. It's all the language of intimacy. It's the intimacy.

I'm going to go a little bit after my minutes. I hope you give me some grace on that. I've told you this story before, not in a while. I was in love with Louise and I became, I got to know her. She was with another fellow and I just really wished that she wasn't with that other fellow but with me.

And one day, we were at the same event and she was at her seat and me and this other fellow, we'll call him Bob, we go up to the canteen and I order the things I order and he says, I think I'm going to get this for myself, and then he says these words that were like a dagger in my heart. I know what Louise would like to order. I'm going to order it for her. Why was that like a dagger in my heart? I had no idea what Louise would like. I had no idea.

[41 : 27] But he did. See, to hear the commands of God is to hear what God loves. He loves justice. He loves mercy. He loves goodness. He loves beauty.

He loves truth. It's to get to know God, to hear his commands. You know, and as part of maintaining an intimate relationship, if Louise says to me, George, could you, you know, we have a mousetrap underneath the fridge and I set the mousetrap but it's your job to take the dead mouse out of the house and that's a division of labor and she said, you know, George, there's a dead mouse and I don't say, well, I don't have to do what you say.

As you all know, that would be a successful marriage response, actually, that would deepen intimacy. What you say, sure, I'll get the mouse. Right? Think of his commands like that.

It's connected to intimacy. It's connected to love. It's connected to how you get to know the other and that's why the fear of God here in this case isn't connected to a longing and loving of God but of his commands because how do you know the one that you love is you learn what the person you love by hearing what they delight in and what they want and so you hear about God's desire for beauty and goodness and justice and mercy and truth and you are getting to know the real God and if the real God is the one who is the good, the true, and the beautiful, why would you want any other being to be God other than that?

And why would you resist the true, the good, and the beautiful? Why wouldn't you want to come under such a God's care? And so my hope is that we would want to pray.

[43 : 12] Heavenly Father, please make the person and work of Jesus more and more real to my heart and by the power of the Holy Spirit help me day by day to deepen my fear of you and my obedience of you to you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. That is the path towards sanity and wholeness. And we live our lives in fear all the time. We do.

Fearing of the future, fearing of bad news in the paper, fearing of maybe losing our jobs, fearing when somebody says something, fearing about getting the Twitter mobs and all the social media mobs after you.

And let me tell you, the part of the last thing about the fear of God is you get to know that you're just a moon and God is more like Sagittarius, A star. In fact, he's way bigger than that. You realize God is big and everything else is small.

And that part of what the fear of God and the intimacy that comes with this whole idea and doing his commands will start to form within you is to order your fears. And as your fears are ordered, many of the smaller ones, you realize there are things you can bring to God and he takes away.

[44 : 29] And you stand upright and free in the good, the true, and the beautiful. Invite you to stand. By the way, you know what?

I'm going to say this. You don't have to say it out loud. I'm going to say that prayer one more time and I'll say it slowly. And for some of you, it can just be a prayer that you say today that you might. If you're curious, I should have had it written down. I didn't come up with how to word this until late last night. I'd had the idea all week, but I didn't write it down. But for some of you, this can also be a conversion prayer.

it can be how you become a Christian. And so I'm just going to say it slowly. You don't have to say it out loud.

Just say it maybe in your heart if you want. And then I'll close, I'll wrap it up. So, Heavenly Father, please make the person and work of Jesus more and more real to my heart.

[45 : 43] And by the power of the Holy Spirit, help me day by day to deepen my fear of you and my obedience to you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you sent Jesus to be our Son, our Savior. We thank you that you speak words of truth to us.

We thank you that you are our Creator, that you are the Shepherd that we need, that you are the true, the good, and the beautiful. And we give you thanks and praise that you desire us to be your children by adoption and grace.

And we ask that your Holy Spirit would move mightily in our lives and draw us ever closer to Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in our fear of you and our desire to obey what you tell us to do.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen.