

# The Whole Duty of Man

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient, ungrateful, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not-loving, treacherous, reckless, treacherous, reckless, rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Now clearly the Apostle Paul is not saying that all people in the last days would be like this. But what he is saying is that so many people would be like this that it is fair to broadly describe them as being marked by these character traits.

That's what he's saying. That's quite remarkable when you consider these descriptions. I believe that all of us would say that we have seen and we continue to see on a daily basis people who fit these descriptions.

If you count them, you'll see that there are 19 of them. The Apostle Paul wrote 19 marks about people in the last days. And when you closely consider them, I think what you would be able to say is that they can be easily summarized in a very succinct way.

And here's what I would say is a fair summary of these descriptions that the Apostle Paul sets forth in 2 Timothy 3, verses 2-5.

[ 1 : 50 ] In the last days, people will not fear God. In the last days, people will not fear God. I think that's a fair summary of what Paul describes in these verses because when you look at the activities that he is talking about, the root of them is a lack of fear of the Lord.

They are such that they are almost in God's face pointing their fingers. And so they don't fear God. And so I would say that the great need of the hour, the great need in our country and around the world, is for women and men, boys and girls, to fear God.

And it is for this reason that I believe that it is timely that we have come to the concluding section of Ecclesiastes this morning.

Ecclesiastes chapter 12, verses 9-14. This is our final message in this extended series in Ecclesiastes.

And if you've not yet done so, please turn there in your Bibles. Ecclesiastes chapter 12, beginning at verse 9. I'm reading from the English Standard Version.

[ 3 : 17 ] If you have another translation, yours will read slightly differently. Ecclesiastes chapter 12, starting in verse 9. Besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

The preacher sought to find words of delight. And uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads.

And like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these.

Of making many books there is no end. And much studying, much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter, all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

[ 4 : 37 ] Let's pray together. Father, we come to you this morning and we are so grateful for your care for us. Lord, I am aware this morning of your care for us as you have cared for me.

As we've been preaching through the book of Ecclesiastes. Lord, I am sorely aware this morning that both in preparation and in preaching throughout this series, you have met me in humbling ways in order to care for and to serve this church.

And I ask this morning, Lord, as we conclude this series and this book, that you would do the same. I pray, Father, that you would pour out upon me your spirit and your grace, that I may serve these

who are gathered this morning, who need to live by every word that proceeds out of your mouth. Lord, you know us by name and nature and circumstance. And I pray that you would cause us to hear your word as we ought to in our particular contexts, but also as a church this morning. Father, I pray that you would cause us to see light in your light, the light of your word this morning. Cause us to both heed and obey your word.

[ 6 : 20 ] And Lord, we ask that you would do it all for your own glory. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. There is a division of opinion between commentators regarding these concluding verses that we just read in terms of who they were written by.

Some say that they were written not by the preacher who wrote the rest of Ecclesiastes, but that they were written by an editor who sometime later commended and summarized the preacher's message in Ecclesiastes.

And while there's a lot that can be said about that debate, I want to say two things as we prepare to consider these verses. First, I want to say that I'm on the side of those who believe that the preacher wrote these concluding verses of Ecclesiastes.

Not someone else, but the preacher. One of the reasons that Bible scholars say that the preacher did not write, some of them did not write these concluding verses, is that in these verses you will see that the preacher is referring to, or the person is referring to himself in past tense.

And referring to himself as another person. So, if you look at it where it says in verse 9, beside being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge.

[ 7 : 53 ] They would say, well, if it's the preacher, he wouldn't talk like that. He would say, being wise, I, the preacher, also taught the people knowledge and wisdom and understanding.

Well, while that is true in general, I think, that we do tend to talk about ourselves in the first person, it's not always true that we do that.

And we see this in Scripture, we see it in other writings as well, that sometimes authors refer to themselves in third person as another person. One good example of this is in Matthew 20, verses 17 through 18, where Matthew records Jesus going up to Jerusalem.

This is what it says. And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the 12 disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, see, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day. So here we see Jesus referring to himself as another person. He could have said, I, the Son of Man, will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn me to death, and deliver me over to the Gentiles to be flogged, and I will be raised on the third day.

[ 9 : 26 ] He could have done it that way, but he didn't. He spoke about himself in the third person. So we shouldn't assume that just because the preacher doesn't refer to himself in these concluding verses in the first person, that the preacher did not write these words.

And the second thing I want to say is really it doesn't matter whether the preacher wrote these words or some editor wrote these words. These words are still the divinely inspired word of God. We don't know the identity of the preacher. We don't know if there was an editor. We would not know that person's identity. And in Scripture, the book of Hebrews, we don't know who wrote it, but it is God's inspired word.

So it would still be God's inspired word, and it really would not matter whether the preacher wrote these words or whether some editor wrote them. But for our purposes this morning, as I said, I stand on the side of those who say that the preacher wrote these words.

Now, while we need to consider all of these verses, the six of them, I want to alert you to what I would call the preacher's burden or the summary of the message of Ecclesiastes.

[ 10 : 45 ] And we see it in verse 13. The preacher closes into this summary with the first sentence when he says, the end of the matter, all has been heard. And in a nutshell, here's what the preacher goes on to say.

This is what the preacher is saying the whole matter is about. Mindful of God's judgment, mindful of future judgment, live your life fearing and obeying God.

I think that's a faithful summary of the burden of the preacher in these two concluding verses, verses 13 and 14. Mindful of future judgment, live your life fearing and obeying God.

Time and time again in the book of Ecclesiastes, the preacher reminds us that we're going to die. And time and time again, he called us to fear God.

And now for the second time, in two consecutive chapters, earlier in chapter 11 and now here in chapter 12, he is reminding us that God is going to judge us.

[ 11 : 56 ] This morning, I want to use three simple points to work our way through these concluding verses. The first is the preacher's work.

The preacher's work is described for us in verses 9 and 10. And what we can say is this, the preacher engaged in diligent work.

Notice this intimate description of his work that we find in verses 9 and 10. And I believe when you look at how intimate the preacher's work is described, it provides further evidence that this was the preacher talking about his own work, having firsthand knowledge of how diligent he was in his labors that he undertook in his writing.

In verse 9, we see that the preacher was not just a wise man who kept knowledge to himself, who kept his wisdom to himself, but it tells us that besides being wise, the preacher taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

So what is in view here is that the preacher is diligently working to serve the people through teaching. In his day and time, there would have been others who would have written proverbs and wise sayings.

[ 13 : 23 ] And so what the preacher did, in addition to what he wrote here in Ecclesiastes, he weighed and he evaluated many proverbs and wise sayings.

And this clearly means that he didn't just accept everything that was written or that was said. He weighed them. He evaluated them. And those that he selected, he studied.

And we are able to see the discernment of the preacher in doing this. And then what he studied, we see that he also took and he arranged them with many proverbs with great care.

So this is the work of this preacher. He expresses his care for the people through his care for his work.

Then in verse 10, we read that the preacher sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth. I think this is very insightful for us, especially for those of us who have the privilege of bringing God's word, as I'm doing this morning, but certainly in other contexts as well.

[ 14 : 37 ] I think what we should see is that it is not enough to preach and teach words of truth, rather spoken or written. But like the preacher, we must labor to find words of delight.

And what he is referring to is choosing words and crafting sentences so that what we have to say will land on people's ears in a way that they are better able to receive and understand what is being spoken.

The preacher labored at this and so should we who have the privilege of speaking God's word to his people. Now if you've heard any of the messages in Ecclesiastes, you would acknowledge that the book of Ecclesiastes deals with some difficult realities in our fallen world.

And this book of Ecclesiastes stands really as a testimony to the preacher's work, how he sought out words of delight to communicate to his audience.

We need look no further than verses 1 through 7 of chapter 12, where the preacher's talking about death, talking about death and dying, and he chooses words of delight.

[ 15 : 52 ] He uses poetry to talk about the aging process and the process of death to cause us to hear it and to ponder it. He could have been more brutal and more plain and talk about it and we don't like to talk about death.

But the preacher labored to serve us by crafting this poem about death and dying that awaits us. And then also in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, that wonderful section where he talks about times and seasons.

In Ecclesiastes 3, one is perhaps one of the most quoted verses in the Bible that says there's a time for everything and a season for everything under heaven.

And so, whatever your context, whether you preach God's word as I do this morning or whether you lead a discussion in a care group or you teach a lesson in children's church or in counterculture or youth ministry, we can learn from the example of the preacher to seek to find words of delight that communicate what we have to say that people will be able to receive it and hear it and we don't deny that we must do it in a truthful way but we must seek to labor in what we say so that it can be received.

In verses 11 and 12, we see the preacher's humility on display in the way that he gives credit for his wisdom and this brings me to my second point.

[ 17 : 32 ] Wisdom source. In verses 11 and 12, the preacher tells us this, wisdom has a single source. In open humility, the preacher's acknowledging that the wisdom he possesses did not originate with him.

Again, look at how he says it in verse 11. The words of the wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd.

Notice what he says. He says they are given these wise words, these collected sayings, they are given by one shepherd. And notice that shepherd has a capital S.

Cluing us in to the fact that he is referring to the divine shepherd, the ultimate shepherd of the sheep of God's people. In the Old Testament, God the Father is referred to and revealed himself as the shepherd of his people.

We know that familiar psalm, Psalm 23. Many of us know it, some of us by heart, where David says, the Lord is my shepherd. And then in Psalm 80, verse 1, the psalmist Asaph prays, give air, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who are enthroned on the cherubim, shine forth.

[ 19 : 03 ] And then that familiar saying by Jesus in John 10, 14, where he reveals his divine nature and he says, I am the good shepherd. So what is true about these wise sayings about the collected writings is true of all of Scripture.

They're given by the one shepherd. They have one source, our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice that in the first part of verse 11, the preacher uses two similes to describe the words of the wise and the divinely collected sayings.

He says, the words of the wise are like goads and the collected sayings are like nails. Now what does he mean by this? Here's what he means.

A goad was a long staff with a nail embedded in it and the shepherd would use it to prod the sheep to get them moving in the right direction.

The preacher is saying that the words of the wise are like that. They instruct us for our good and sometimes the instruction is painful. Sometimes the instruction stings.

[ 20 : 30 ] And the picture of the collected sayings being like nails speaks about the security and the stability that comes to our lives when we embrace the wisdom of the word of God.

When we want to secure or stabilize something we use nails to firmly fix them and to keep them in place. Brothers and sisters in our fallen world where the winds of secular humanism and worldliness blow we need this ability of the wisdom of God's word to keep us securely grounded and stable. people and the book of Ecclesiastes provides us with some strong secure nails to help us to live spiritually stable lives in this fallen world that is in rebellion against God.

I think it's also fair to say that we can extend the words of the preacher in verse 11 to all of scripture and to the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture.

The apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3 16 and 17 he writes all scriptures breathed out by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent equipped for every good work.

[ 21 : 58 ] All scripture is divinely inspired. All scripture has that one single source of being breathed out by God. Now notice the warning that he gives us in verse 12.

He says my son beware of anything beyond these of making many books there is no end and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

In verse 11 we can see the divine inspiration of scripture being pointed to and now we can see in verse 12 the sufficiency of scripture being pointed to.

The preacher warns beware of anything beyond the words given by the one shepherd. word. He's making a case for the primacy and the sufficiency of the word of God.

He's saying books will continue to be written. They will be written endlessly. Beware of them. Don't wear yourself with much studying of them. Don't run after them.

[ 23 : 05 ] They will wear you out. Now the preacher is not prohibiting reading other books. He's simply saying beware. Just be aware. they're going to continue to be written. But don't wear yourself out after them.

This is the primary source given from the one shepherd. It is that which you need to allow to be primary in your life. And brothers and sisters we find stability and security and sufficiency in the words of the one shepherd which is his inspired word which we have the gift of in the form of Bibles.

And so as it relates to many topical issues of life we find them addressed right here in the book of Ecclesiastes. I want to ask you this morning how convinced are you of the words of the preacher in verses 11 and 12?

Do you value the protective correction the security the stability that comes from God's word? Do you see and accept Ecclesiastes and indeed all of scripture as having been given by the one shepherd? word? And is the word of God the primary and most important book in your life as evidence by the time that you spend in it reading it and studying it and allowing it to guide your life beyond any other book or words of instruction?

[ 24 : 51 ] and sadly for many people Christians included considerably more time nowadays is spent on Facebook than in God's book and that's not obviously confined to Facebook it can be extended to other activities whereby we fritter away much of our time giving ourselves to ideas and ways of thinking that dull our spirit and dull our understanding of the things of God and the word of God does not have primary place in our lives and therefore we lack the stability and the protection that God has designed to come to our lives well third and finally we come to the preacher's final words in verses 13 and 14 which can be summarized as man's duty the preacher tells us that man's duty is to fear God and keep his commandments but it's important to remember that really the preacher is not giving us new instructions instead he is underlining what he has said previously fearing God features prominently throughout

Ecclesiastes and a few verses earlier in chapter 11 we're told that God is going to bring us in to judgment for how we live our lives on this earth so what the preacher is doing here is he is repeating these instructions to us underscoring their importance the preacher is not absent-minded but he's just repeating himself no he is remember he labored at this he arranged things in such a way for them to be effective the preacher is artistically bringing this message to us in a way that's delightful in a way that is helpful in a way that is useful and so he concludes in these verses and one of the things we should remember is sometimes God's word only speaks to Christians there are parts of God's word that are only directed at believers but there are other parts directed to all people and we've come to one of those parts this morning as he is saying this is the duty of man now confined to Christians this is the duty of man it is all of mankind's whole duty to fear

God and to keep his commandments and this duty is a is a twofold but inseparable duty it's two parts to it but they're really inseparable fearing God and keeping his commandments go hand in hand because you cannot have one without the other it's kind of like what William was talking with us about about the necessity of love that you cannot love without giving fearing God and keeping his commandments are a dual duty people who fear God keep his commandments and the people that Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3 and 5 they clearly don't fear God clearly not keeping his commandments because those who are disobeying God do not fear

God doesn't matter how much you say I'm God fearing I'm God fearing if you're disobeying God you do not fear God now I believe this morning that most of us if not all of us present have a sufficient understanding of what it means to keep God's commandments but just to be sure let me say that it's more than keeping the ten commandments it's much more than that really it is doing what God says it is doing what he says in his words is simply obeying him but on the other hand I would imagine that there would be some of us this morning who may not be so sure what it means to fear God what does it mean to fear God I want to give you two descriptions of what it means to fear God from two men whose commentaries have been very helpful to me as we work through this message series in Ecclesiastes and the first one is Sidney Grudanus here's how he describes what it means to fear God to fear God is to take God seriously to acknowledge him in our lives as the highest good to revere him to honor him and worship him to center our lives on him that's what it means to fear God why don't you consider those words do you take God seriously is your life centered on him and really do you fear God here's how

[ 30 : 55 ] Douglas Sean O'Donnell describes what it means to fear God he writes the fear God embodies faith and hope in God as well as genuine love for him when by the gift of God someone possesses the fear of God sin loses its sweetness and strength obedience to the word of God follows naturally because it becomes the delight of the soul let's think about that let's ask ourselves this morning as we consider whether we fear the Lord is sin losing its sweetness and strength in your life and here we're not talking about perfection but what we're talking about is that even when we fall short is there the grief that we have failed the

Lord even when we are tempted is there a lack of or some diminishing degree of that temptation over time that we're not being pulled and seduced by particular sins which we have given ourselves to in the past is sin losing its sweetness and strength in your life is a life marked by obedience to God's word again not perfectly but sufficiently that there is this general pattern of obedience to God's word we all fall short or is it the norm that you're going in ways that are contrary to the word of God and then is God's word a delight to your soul and see here we are this morning we're gathered we've sang together we are hearing

God's word together brothers and sisters if we pretend to walk in the light publicly and we live in darkness privately we do not fear God if we are content doing what does not please God under his gaze in private and we will not do that in public with others really we fear people more than we fear God because God is the constant in both of those situations he sees us in private he sees us in public we live all of life before his face and under his gaze and therefore if we have this duplicity in our lives where we are living one way pretending to be in the light when we are in public together and then we're living in darkness in private we do not fear God and we haven't read our Bibles we haven't read that

God in the church in the book of Acts killed the husband and wife for lying and scripture says great fear came upon the church and so brothers and sisters we must consider do I fear God we must not overlook those evidences where it would be revealed that we really don't fear God we're not taking him seriously we take his long suffering for slackness we should also be encouraged this morning that if we are fearing God that's an evidence of the grace of God at work in our lives we don't fear God this morning because we are special or good we fear God because he has been merciful to us John Newton's song Amazing Grace says there's grace that taught my heart to fear there's grace that taught my heart to fear and that same grace my fears relieved God so why should we fear God why should we keep his commandments but the preacher gives us two reasons as he concludes the first is simple and we can easily overlook it the reason is it's our duty he says that's why you do it it's your duty God the creator has laid this duty upon all mankind and again we must remember this is all mankind failure to do so is to live in rebellion to our creator and because he created us he can do this because he created us he can say this is your duty fear me and keep my commandments fear me and do what

[ 36 : 13 ] I say and the second reason is that there's a future judgment when God will bring every deed into judgment whether secret good or evil and the judgment provides us with a dual motivation one positive and one negative the positive motivation is that good deeds will be rewarded by God and the negative motivation is that evil deeds will be punished by God and when you think about it it is only by God's grace that he takes note of our less than perfect good deeds and rewards us accordingly you know I was thinking about this and how sometimes you would see children when they're very young they'll draw something maybe it's a stick man or something and they'll color and the coloring is all out the lines and everything and they give it to a parent and parents receive it and sometimes will frame it and will just thank the child for it and praise the child for it that's kind of like our works that's kind of the works that we do for the

Lord the Bible says that our best works are like filthy rags in God's sight but yet he has chosen that he would receive them and he would reward us for them and we should be encouraged to know that God is going to reward even our secret deeds he's going to reward the things that no one sees the good things that we do no one is looking nobody knows the labors behind the scenes and I think of what you're doing in red bays pastor Brian in the back there nobody sees people don't know but God sees and God knows and he says that he will reward even those things done in secret but the preacher also reminds us that God will not overlook evil he will judge all deeds the evil deeds as well whether they are in secret or whether they are in public those are the concluding words of the preacher and they apply to every person whether he is as high as the prime minister or he is as low as a condemned prisoner they apply to the rich and to the poor to the young and the old they apply to all people and when we think about life and we think about the mass of humanity it really is simplified in two groups of people all of humanity can be divided into two groups of people the first group is comprised of those who fear

God those who fear God those who keep his commandments and they do so because they've experienced what the Bible refers to as the new birth they have been born again God in mercy has raised them from spiritual death to spiritual life he has given them the gifts of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and he's transformed their lives from people of disobedience to people now of

obedience and it's all possible because Jesus Christ took their place on the cross died their death the death that they deserved to die and their motivation for fearing God and keeping his commandments is not the fear of future judgment their motivation is love of God that's what it says in 1 John 5 3 says this for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome and John 14 15 Jesus says if you love me you will keep my commandments our love for God is the motivation for our obedience not future judgment it is our love for God we sing about it this one my Jesus I love you because you first loved me and a further reason that believers in Christ don't have to fear the judgment and don't have to obey God because of the judgment really it's because the one who is their savior is also their judge here so Jesus says it in John 5 22 through 24

Jesus says the father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son that all may honor the son just as they honor the father whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him truly I say to you whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and listen he will not come in to judgment he will not come into judgment but has passed from death to life brothers and sisters this morning this is good news because we have trusted Christ we have passed from death to life we will not come into judgment and so fear of future judgment is not why we obey God the reason we obey him is because we love him Jesus has already been judged on the cross in the place of all repentant sinners he's already done that and therefore no no judgment no condemnation awaits those who are in

[ 42 : 44 ] Jesus Christ but there's a second group and this morning if you would be honest with yourself and acknowledge that you're not in that first group you're not in that first group where you can really say I have been brought from spiritual death to spiritual life I enjoy a relationship with God my father if you aren't able to say that this morning then you're in the second group the second group would be the people that the apostle Paul describes in 2nd Timothy 3 2 through 5 those who do not fear God and you may be a nice person but being nice does not exempt you from being in that group of those who do not fear God certainly that's done to degrees there's some people who fear

God who don't fear God more than others but nonetheless to be in that group is to be marked among those who do not fear God and this should sober you this morning this is a warning this morning the preacher ends with these sobering words for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil friends if this is not true we can throw our whole Bibles away we can't trust them but this is true this morning God will do this we don't know all the details we don't know how he's going to conduct this mass judgment of all of humanity but we can rest assured that he will do this if you're not found in Jesus Christ this is your lot and here some people are trusting that it says well he's also going to judge some good deeds!

and they've done some good things but see the good deeds don't go to your credit for your salvation because there's only one way to be saved and that is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ for the believers their good works have nothing to do with their salvation their good works don't save them God will reward them for their good works but they will not be saved by their good works and even if God were to reward you for your good works If you're not one who fears God, then you will still be eternally separated from God.

But the good news this morning is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Jesus said, I will receive everyone who comes to me.

I will never turn them away. And so this morning, God has brought you here. To hear the last words of the preacher that this is the end of the matter.

[ 45 : 57 ] This is what matters. This is what it's all about. This is our duty, the whole of our duty on this earth. If our lives are not centered around loving God, serving God, fearing God, keeping his commandments, we are missing the purpose that God has put us on this earth for.

And so I urge you today, if you stand outside of Jesus Christ, turn to Christ. Trust him as Savior and Lord.

And hold on to his promise. If you come to me, I will never turn you away. And in addition to receiving eternal life, you will be able to find meaning in this fallen world as you live for the only one who is worth living for.

Let's pray.