THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

I. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14—“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

A. One translation says, “This is the end of the matter...”

1. Just that simply we come to the final lesson in these series of lessons on this book.

2. This is not the only conclusion Solomon reached in his search for happiness, but it is the grand conclusion........the conclusion or conclusions.

a. After his long and disappointing search for meaning, purpose and happiness without God, he was driven back to that godly teaching he had received from his father, David.....the man after God’s own heart.

b. After all is said and done, man’s search for meaning and happiness ends with God.

B. Solomon searched in all the wrong places for happiness in this life--and never found it!

1. He repeated his theme often in this book: ‘All is vanity’!

2. He talks about the vanity of. . .

   a. Pleasure..........................2:1
   b. Industry (labor).................2:11, 22-23; 4:4
   c. Human wisdom..................2:15
   d. All life............................2:17
   e. Leaving an inheritance......2:18-21
   f. Earthly existence..............3:18-21
   g. Acquiring riches over family....4:7-8
   h. Political popularity............4:16
   i. Many dreams and many words...5:7
   j. Loving abundance..................5:10
   k. Wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it........6:2
1. Wandering desire .................. 6:9

m. Foolish laughter ................. 7:6

n. Injustice in this life .............. 8:14

o. The days of darkness .......... 11:8

p. Childhood and youth .......... 11:10

3. Solomon finally decided that when life is viewed solely from an earthly perspective...

a. There is no advantage of wisdom over folly ................. 2:15-16

b. Man is no different from the animals ......................... 3:19-21

c. The dead know nothing and they have no more reward .... 9:5-6

C. If life “under the sun” is all there is, then truly, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

1. But we have seen throughout the book that Solomon gave wise counsel for dealing with the vanity of life.

2. Life is vain, useless, of no profit, when it is lived without God!

   a. How hopeless we are without God!

   b. When Paul described the Ephesians before they brought God into their lives, he describes, not only the Ephesians, but all who live without God.

   “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” (Eph. 2:12)

   (1). Without God we have no hope!

   (2). Can you imagine a sadder plight than to be without hope?

   (3). But that’s the future of one without God, he has no hope!

      (a). No hope of eternal salvation.

      (b). No hope of redemption.

      (c). No hope of heaven.
(d). No hope of eternal joy and happiness.

(4). No wonder Solomon said life without God is vanity!

II. Then we come to Solomon’s grand conclusion................12:13-14

A. He says it is the conclusion to “the whole matter.”

1. This is not just a part of the matter, it is the whole matter.

2. Forget all that has been said in the previous eleven chapters and twelve verses---this is the “whole” answer---nothing is left out in what is about to be concluded.

B. “Fear God and keep His commandments”

1. “Fear God”

a. I must admit that I ‘fear’ snakes, but I also ‘fear’ God.

b. However, we must not misunderstand the idea of this word here.

(1). “Fear” carries with it the idea of reverence or respect, but it also denotes a quaking fear.

(2). The word here is not one of trembling in fear or a quaking fear, as I indeed feel with regard to snakes.

(3). This word is a reverent fear that wants to please God.

(a). Psalms 115:11---”Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield.”

(b). One does not trust someone of whom he is terrified, but those we respect and hold in reverence, we do trust.

2. “Keep His Commandments”

a. This is a charge that was given to the nation of Israel.

(1). Deut. 13:4---”Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.”

(2). Deut. 30:16---”In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy
God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.”

b. This is also a command that is given to the followers of Christ.

(1). John 14:15---”If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

(2). Revelation 22:14---”Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”

c. There are a lot of people who claim they know God, but we do not have to wonder about whether we know God or not!

“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” (I John 2:3-4)

d. And, if that is clear enough, listen to what John says in I John 5:3---”For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

3. Solomon’s conclusion to keep God’s commandments is sorely needed by a world in rebellion to God’s will. (Hebrews 5:9)

C. “For this is the whole duty of man.”

1. This is the “why” of his conclusion...this is why we should fear God and keep His commandments.

2. “Duty” in this passage is not in the Hebrew text.

a. Solomon actually says, “For this is the whole of man.”

b. That is, this is the whole purpose of man--to reverence God and obey Him.

D. Then in verse 14, he gives another reason why we need to fear God and obey His commandments.

1. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

2. There is going to be a judgment day............Acts 17:30-31

3. This judgment day is already appointed...........Heb. 9:27

4. All will attend this judgment...................2 Cor. 5:10
5. **Christ** will be the judge.................................John 5:22

6. His Word will be the **standard**......................John 12:48

7. What we **do** in this life will be very important.........Rev. 21:12

8. The **consequences** will be eternal life or eternal punishment........Matt. 24:46
   a. What a sobering thought this is.
   b. The decision will be irreversible.
   c. Surely, no thoughtful person would gamble his eternal destiny for the passing pleasures of this life.

E. “**With every secret thing.**”
   1. This speaks of God’s omniscience (all-knowing).
   2. “**There is no creature that is manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do?”** (Heb. 4:13).
   3. Our Judge in that great day of judgment is able to “discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

**CONCLUSION:**

I. There are two lessons I want you to take with you from the book of Ecclesiastes---
   A. No satisfying and lasting joy can be found in this life apart from God and submission to His will.

   B. There is a world to come and a judgment wherein God will determine if we live in joy or in misery. Our eternal destiny will depend on our choices and conduct in this life.

   1. If we understand these great lessons, surely we will fear God and keep His commandments.

   2. Solomon found the truth just where his father, David, had told him it would be.

   a. Like the man searching for acres of diamonds, who after a long and painful search, found them in his own back yard.

   b. Salvation, happiness and forgiveness are waiting to be yours, but you must come to Christ in obedience to His will.
II. This lesson is the **conclusion** to this study of Ecclesiastes.

A. We have studied the **conclusion** of the whole matter.

B. One day will be the **conclusion** of our life here upon this earth.

C. This service is the **conclusion** of our services for today and we are ready to sing the **concluding** hymn.

D. Would you be ready to **conclude** your life upon this earth and stand before Christ in judgment as you are now?