

# MY WHOLE DUTY UNDER THE SUN

## Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Charles Itseghosimhe

### INTRODUCTION



**Ecclesiastes 12** is both the completion and critique stages (*cf. art work*) of Solomon's exhortation from *chapter 1 to chapter 11*.

By the time we reach the latter half of **Ecclesiastes 12**, we have come a long way with Solomon. If ever we have carefully listened to the analysis from *chapter 1 to chapter 11*, then **chapter 12** answers any question, doubt, or confusion that may be in our hearts.

We have seen the results of Solomon's experiments with pleasure, wealth, human wisdom, folly, work, sex, alcohol, and everything else he could think of. He declares, "*Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!*"

Solomon has learned some important lessons in the process especially that life "*under the sun*" offers nothing in and of itself. It has been a profound, sobering, and sometimes disturbing experience.

But Solomon is much the wiser for it, and hopefully we are too. He carefully reveals what makes up the whole duty of human beings in this world.

### TO CAREFULLY AND INTENTIONALLY INFLUENCE WITH THE TRUTH - A NECESSITY (VERSES 9, 10)

<sup>9</sup> *And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.* <sup>10</sup> *The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.*

In spite of his struggles, the Preacher, Solomon, was able to share his wisdom with others. He assembled many proverbs to teach his people. He searched for the right way to communicate the words of truth and righteousness.

Here, we see Solomon using his role, as an experienced teacher to influence carefully and intentionally. He was offering himself in service to educate others on finding the ultimate and lasting fulfillment and happiness in life—in a right relationship with God! He did not hold back the truth.

Truth must be told but communicated rightly with wisdom and love. James emphasized in **James 5:19-20** that *if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

Solomon was careful to prepare his message, his proverbs, he was careful with his words but he made sure that he wrote "*words of truth*".

He had no desire to offend or upset those he taught, but he felt compelled to tell the truth, even if offense was the result.

Part of the whole duty of man is, as a necessity - carefully and intentionally influence others with the truth.

**BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT YOU ACCEPT AS TRUTH (Verse 11, 12)**

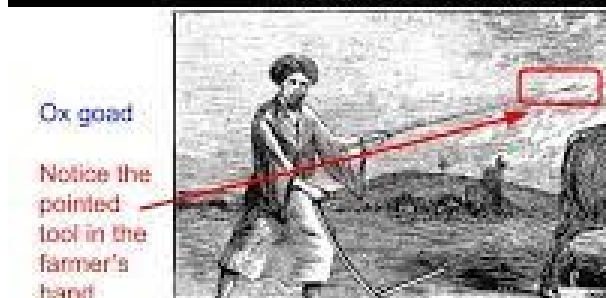
*11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. 12 And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.*

Another part of the whole duty of man is to be develop the skill to analyse everything that is presented as truth, determine which is man's truth or God's truth and be willing and ready receive the truth (pleasant or unpleasant).

In **verse 11**, Solomon's words were described as being "like goads" and "like well-driven nails."



How God Convicts the Heart (Ac



These images do not suggest anything comfortable or pleasing, but rather something which provides a

necessary irritation. A "goad" is a large sharp pointed stake, stick or rod used to prod an animal like yoke of oxen (cows).

Eaton adds that the idea of teaching as "goads" and "nails" ". . . speak of the twofold effect of the Preacher's words, which stimulate to action and establish teaching in the memory."

Such words as these will never be pleasant, but they will always be necessary. Anyone who wishes to learn how to live successfully "under the sun," in this world as we know it, must learn to face truth, regardless of how unpleasant it might be.

The brethren in Galatians saw Paul as an enemy because the truth he told them was not supportive of their actions or lifestyles - *Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? (Galatians 4:16)*. They were not willing to accept God's truth about their lives.

The Bible tries to get us to face realities, and we are not taking advantage of its wisdom until we do so. The Bible speaks concerning the reality of our sin (**Romans 3:23**), the need for genuine repentance (**Acts 17:30**), and the truth that only in Christ can we find the forgiveness and peace with God that we need and desire (**John 14:6; Acts 4:12**).

While it may be unpleasant to acknowledge that without Jesus we are lost in sin, there is no wisdom in refusing to face the truth. Not only must we all face this truth, we must do something about it. The only thing we can do is turn to Christ as His Word instructs.

Solomon then admonished his son to weigh carefully what he would hear and be taught (**verse 12**).

There is no end to the production of human wisdom within this physical world. Endless opinions are expressed by those who claim to be knowledgeable.

**Verse 12** gives an implied statement - that we have to study and know these things, how they works, how they impact us, how they pose risks to our faith; we have to analyse them. We must not play ignorance about them otherwise we will be swept with their appealing and deceptive strength.

There is no indication that says “*don’t read*,” however, the focus here is “*beware as you read*.”

Yes, studying them and deciding which ones are true can be tiresome, but we must examine what we are taught. Anything that does not hold true by God’s standard, is not wisdom.

**II Timothy 2:15** demands Christians to be diligent, giving God their best effort even in Bible study.

**I John 4:1** says it is both right and necessary for all Christians to try the spirits. We must test the various spirits to see whether they are from God. We must try these spirits consistently and continually.

**Hebrews 5:14** added that Christians must work through practice (careful analysis) towards “*having their senses trained to discern good from evil*”. There must be this habit of careful study and reflection. Without this training, we have no way to evaluate new ideas. We may easily become prey for any new popular idea.

Another insight given in **verse 12** is that as we study good books including the bible literatures, we must translate study into action otherwise it becomes tiresome.

As we study the word, we have to practice the word. We have to commit to what we have learnt from God’s word.

Paul mentions in **2 Timothy 3:7**, that some are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*.”

**Why?** Because they will not commit themselves to the truth.

*Great danger lies in seeking, finding, and knowing truth but never acting on that truth.*

Davidson rightly says, *there is more to life than study, study which at times can be frustrating or “wearisome”. There is more to life than seeking; there must be finding. There is more to discipleship than sitting in an armchair reading a sound book on theology or a challenging book on discipleship. There must be commitment which flows out into action.*

To our friends who have not given their lives to Jesus, if you continue your study of the Word of God, you will learn

about His Son, Jesus. Then it will be necessary to commit yourself to Him, to confess Him, to be baptized into union with Him, to live with and for Him. If not, all your study— even of Scripture—will be nothing more than “*a weariness of the flesh*.”

## **FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS (Verses 13, 14)**

For many years Solomon, in all his wisdom, sought to discover the meaning of life. At the end of Ecclesiastes he wrote, *13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing whether good or evil.*

The most important truth: “*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all*.” This applies to every person – young and old.

This is where we find meaning and purpose in life. Yes, and this is where we find ultimate and lasting happiness—in a right relationship with God!

We shall someday face the One who made us. “*For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil*”. Let all that we do be done in light of that solemn truth.

Given the importance of this command, we need to look carefully at both parts of it.

### **FEAR GOD**

To “*fear God*” is “*to realize God’s unchanging power and justice*.” It is to acknowledge that we cannot escape our responsibility to Him, and to fear ignoring or denying Him His rightful claim on our lives.

This is the beginning and guiding point of our relationship with God. **In 2 Corinthians 7:1**, we are commanded to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

We must always have the fear of not being what God would have us to be, regardless of how much He loves us or how much we love Him.

Davidson says, *to fear God means to put God at the center of life and thus to see all our own desires, hopes and ambitions in a larger context. It is to realize that all our life, everything we do or say, good or evil, is to God an open book, and he will pass his verdict. This is not a thought intended to strike terror into us. Quite the opposite. It assures us that we are dealing with a God who cares what we do; therefore life has meaning.*

If we (*young and old*) have not remembered our Creator (**verse 1**), we should stand in fear. If we have remembered Him and still disregard Him through our lifestyles and actions, we should also stand in fear.

**Hebrews 12:28-29** and **2 Corinthians 5:11** added emphasis to this - *therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*

*Knowing, therefore, the terror (fear) of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.*

### KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

The second half of this principle is the natural consequence of genuinely fearing God. As the Scriptures present it, a relationship with God that does not include obedience to His will does not exist!

If we believe that God has spoken, that He commands and instructs us, then obedience must logically and naturally follow.

God holds us responsible for how we live. He knows everything we have ever done or thought, good or bad. There is no escaping His judgment. Solomon says that *God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing whether good or evil.*

### CONCLUSION

True and lasting happiness comes from having a right relationship with God—and with His Son, Jesus.

God would have us learn from Solomon's advice and even from Solomon's mistakes.

The wisest course of all is to live our lives for Him and be ready for the Judgment (**Matthew 25:31-46**).

We will give an account to God for the things we do, even the secret things, whether they are good or bad. Paul spoke of that day when *"God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus"* (**Romans 2:16**).

Those who fear God and keep His commandments will have cause to rejoice when that day comes (**1 Peter 4:13**).

### REFERENCES

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