Man's Responsibilities

In view of Solomon's warning in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 to "fear God and keep His commandments," it seems prudent for us to consider what responsibilities he has given man throughout the book. First, Solomon instructed man to enjoy life. While many today have an "it's all about me" and a "go for the gusto" philosophy, Solomon offered a legitimate reason to find joy in one's life. There is much to enjoy—food, companionship, work—but all based upon a positive relationship with God. This theme occurs seven times in the book (2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:8-9). This joy cannot be hedonism (i.e., pleasure and joy are the chief goals of life) because God gives it.

Second, Solomon instructed man to be wise. There are some definite negatives to wisdom (1:18; 2:12; 4:13-16; 9:13-16; 10:1). However, there are numerous advantages. Wisdom itself is good (2:26) since it improves the quality of life (7:11-12) and gives strength (7:19). It even can help a person in a difficult situation (8:1). It is important to wise men that they help others to become wise (12:9-12).

Third, Solomon instructed men to worship God acceptably. Men throughout the centuries have foolishly approached God in ways that were unacceptable (Leviticus 10:1, 2; Isaiah 1:10-17; Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 15:8-9; John 4:23-24). Proper worship involves a recognition of God's presence (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). It also includes careful consideration of one's words and promises (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

Fourth, Solomon instructed men to remember God. He specifically noted that God should be remembered as Judge (11:9; 12:13-14) and Creator (12:1). These terms establish God's power and authority, and they demand more than a simple mental acknowledgment but demand action and genuine devotion (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Fifth, Solomon instructed men to have a good work ethic. In a world filled with laziness and gluttony, this message still applies today (Ecclesiastes 9:10; 10:17-18; 11:4-6). It is God's plan that man work—and work hard. Those who are looking for a "free ride" will not be able to fully appreciate God's plan for life and will ultimately destroy themselves (Ecclesiastes 4:5). However, it is possible for one to be a "workaholic" and fail to have the kind of balance God desires (Ecclesiastes 4:6).

Sixth, Solomon instructed men to fear God. This concept is central in all of the wisdom literature (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10), and it is a recurring theme in Ecclesiastes (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). This admonition calls upon men to have a healthy view of God's awesome power and authority, in contrast with man's weakness and helplessness. It includes more than respect, but a terror of facing an angry God in the Day of Judgment (Hebrews 10:31).

Seventh, Solomon instructed men to recognize their limitations. Far too often men become arrogant and self-sufficient. Such entails the thinking of fools. Rather, Solomon demonstrated that there are many things men do not know (Ecclesiastes 11:2, 5-6) or understand (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Equally, there are many events that are beyond man's ability to control (Ecclesiastes 8:8).

Denny Petrillo, Vol. 22 No. 5, May 2020, https://www.gospelgazette.com/gazette/2020/may/page4.html