

Help For Holy Living

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Luke 12:1-12

In Luke 12:1-12, it says, “In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people...” or more than can be numbered, probably in the thousands “...had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed...” “the body” it’s implied “...has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”

Verse 6, “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Notice who Jesus began to speak to, in verse 1: “to His disciples.” The context is that there is no break between Luke, chapter 11 and chapter 12. Sometimes when you’re studying the Bible, it’s important to see that there is no break between chapters. The Bible wasn’t originally written in chapters and verses. And sometimes the chapter breaks in our Bibles aren’t the best places to create breaks. We have chapters and verses for easy reference.

Jesus has just been to the home of the Pharisee, in chapter 11, and the Pharisee freaked out because Jesus ate without first doing the ceremonial washing. Then Jesus pronounced the six “woes” on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And at the end of chapter 11, introducing us to chapter 12, the Pharisees became hostile toward Jesus and were trying to trap Him in His words and trying to “get Him” in something He would say. So the opposition and confrontation was getting stronger against Jesus Christ. The religious leaders now determined that they wanted to put Jesus to death. This had become a very dangerous period.

So Jesus wanted to fortify and strengthen and encourage His followers to live holy lives in a hostile world. In light of His confrontation with and the opposition of the Pharisees, Jesus knew His followers were going to be in danger—in danger of compromise, of not confessing Him, of maybe turning to hypocrisy or even of denying Him in the face of this opposition. So Jesus is speaking these words of admonition to them to strengthen them.

These admonitions apply to our lives as well, because we are facing a hostile world. This world is not our home, and we are going “against the grain” of this world. Jesus said, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). So if we are going to live for Jesus, we need to follow these admonitions on how to live a holy life in a hostile world.

There are four admonitions in our text. First, to live a holy life in a hostile world, we need to guard ourselves or beware of hypocrisy, verses 1-3. “He began to say to His disciples first of all, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.’”

The word “beware” means “be on guard, look out, be cautious, be alert.” There is always a danger that we could slip into hypocrisy. The fear of man leads to hypocrisy. We cover up who we really are, because we’re afraid people will not like us or they’ll persecute us. We become hypocrites because we don’t fear God, we fear man. So He is warning them first of the leaven of hypocrisy, to be on the alert.

I’ve run into several people over the years who say, when they find out I’m a pastor, “Well, I don’t go to church, because it has too many hypocrites.”

My response sometimes is, “Come join us; we could always use another one. There’s always room for more hypocrites.” Where can you go where there are no hypocrites? “I’m not going to work; they’re all a bunch of hypocrites!”

The word “hypocrite” is the Greek word “hupokrite,” which means “to speak under.” It comes from the Greek theater. When they acted on a stage, they held up a mask on a stick over their face of the part they played. With each part they played, they held up a different mask. So a hypocrite was one who put on a mask, or was role-playing.

You’re not really who you want people to think you are. Actors are great on the stage but not in the pews or the pulpit. We want people to be genuine.

The opposite of hypocrisy is integrity. “Integrity” means “oneness, wholeness, not divided.” There is also the word “duplicity” tied in with the word “hypocrisy.” It means “two-faced.” They say one thing to one person and another thing to a different person, so you don’t really know who they are. As His followers, Jesus warns us to not be hypocrites. We need integrity as believers if we are going to stand against the hostile world around us.

Why does He liken hypocrisy to leaven? In the Bible, leaven is symbolic of evil. They would take leaven out of their food offerings, because it represented evil. Then they would put leaven in an offering to remind them of their sin. Leaven is yeast or a piece of fermented dough put in their bread to make it rise when they baked it. That’s interesting because pride puffs us up in hypocrisy. So it was a way of Jesus saying they were to beware of evil or the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, which was like leaven.

The Bible says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). So a little bit of hypocrisy or duplicity will puff you up. Knowledge puffs you up, but humility brings us down. We don't want to be hypocrites; we want to be humble and honest before God and others. Hypocrisy starts very small but grows, penetrates and puffs up.

What Jesus does in verses 2-3 is He points out that hypocrisy is foolish and futile, because that which is done in secret will be known in the open. And that is looking to the future, so with all these admonitions, He is turning our thoughts toward God and toward an eternal perspective. If you're going to stand in a hostile world, you must have a God-focus and an eternal perspective.

Verse 2, "For there is nothing covered..." that's hypocrisy "...that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known." When will this happen? When the Lord returns and there is an eschatological judgment. Jesus is reminding them to keep an eternal perspective. We're going to be stumbling and falling against the hostile world if we lose our eternal perspective. So in the future the Lord is coming back, and hypocrisy will be revealed. Verse 2 describes how foolish it is.

Now notice verse 3, which is the conclusion of this thought: "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light..." in a future, judgment day "...and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."

So why would you be a hypocrite, when in this life now you'll be exposed, and for sure you'll be exposed when the Lord returns?! What you "covered" will be "revealed." What you spoke in secret "will be proclaimed on the housetops"!

You may be a hypocrite. People think you're spiritual, they think you're a Christian, they think you're walking with God, but it's all a show. You can fool me, you can fool others, you can maybe fool your wife or husband, but you can't fool God. God knows the truth. One day it will be revealed, it will be exposed, so it's foolish to think that you can just not repent. If God convicts you of some secret sin because you've been hiding something, you need to repent. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And it may be that you don't have to confess it to anyone else but God.

And when you confess your sin and you repent, that means that you change your mind about your sin, and you turn around and go the opposite direction, away from it. So you need to rid the hypocrisy out of your life. That doesn't mean we're perfect; it means we have to be men and women of integrity and not practice duplicity before the watching world. It's foolish and futile.

God's truth is light and not leaven. Leaven is hidden in bread, while light shines and fills the whole room. So we need to live lives that are like light in a dark world. So don't wait for the final judgment; confess your concealed sin to God, and He will forgive you.

Someone said, "The sin of hypocrisy and the snare of popularity have brought down many a servant of God. Don't let it happen to you. Be men and women of integrity."

The second admonition in order to stand and live holy in front of a hostile world is don't fear man but fear God. Why? Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe." In verses 4-7, there are five references to fear or being afraid. "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do."

You say, "I got that; right. All they can do is kill us! No problem!" Jesus is saying, "Yes, that's right." That's because we have an eternal perspective that goes beyond this world. The Bible says, "Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing" (Luke 12:23). And life is more than being accepted or being part of the crowd. We need to live for God and for eternity. So verse 4 is a fancy way of saying, "Don't be afraid of man."

Verse 5, "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed..." the physical body is implied "...has power to cast into hell..." or Gehenna, which is a reference to the Valley of Hinnom, where all the trash was thrown. "Yes, I say to you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Jesus tells them not to be afraid of man. "I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6). Man can't take your salvation. They can't touch your soul.

This is what gave the early, Christian martyrs such boldness when they were tied to a stake and lit on fire rather than recant or deny their Lord. This is what led Christians to be fed to the lions. You talk about a hostile world!

Can you imagine right now in America if they passed a law that if you're a Christian, you read your Bible, you believe in Jesus, you go to church, that you would be executed or put to death for your faith?! How many people would quickly become hypocritical, cover it up or run away?!

That's why Jesus is trying to fortify us to enable us to stand against the opposition and hostility of this world. So don't be afraid of man. Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe." This is what I call "a sinful fear." Then we have the fear of God, in verse 5, which I call "a sanctified fear." So we either have a sinful fear of man or a sanctified fear of God. He said, "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed has power..." or "authority" "...to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

the need for the fear the Lord. The greatest need in the church today is for a revival of the fear of the Lord. We have such a shallow, superficial reverence and respect for God. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." It is the foundation for all wise living.

What is "the fear of the Lord"? It is a respect, an awe, a profound, humble, fearful reverence, an emotion in which dread, veneration and wonder are variously mingled in a profound, humble reverence inspired by God. It is not being afraid of what God will do to me, but what I may do to

Him.

Have you ever loved somebody so much that you don't want to disappoint them? You don't want to break their heart, because you care for them. That's what it means to fear the Lord. It means that I love God so much that I don't want to dishonor Him, disappoint Him or let Him down. I don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit, I don't want to wound the heart of God; I want to respect Him, be in awe of Him and be obedient to Him. That takes away all the fear of man when I am trusting in and fearing the Lord.

Psalm 33:8 says, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him." In Exodus 3:5-6, when Moses saw the burning bush, he feared the Lord. God told him to take off his sandals, and he fell prostrate before God. He had the fear of the Lord. In Isaiah 6:1, 5, when Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple," he saw himself as a sinner and said, "Woe is me....Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." He was broken before a holy God.

Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, was able to boldly stand on his conscience bound by Scripture, because of the fear of the Lord, and not recant or deny the doctrine of justification by faith in what he taught in his books. How important! When John Knox, a Protestant reformer from Scotland, was being lowered into his grave, someone said, "Here lies a man who so feared the face of God that he never feared the face of any man."

When you fear God, you don't fear man. When you don't fear man, you don't practice hypocrisy. We need the fear of the Lord in the church today.

The third thing about the fear of God is that it is a secure fear. It secures us to know that God loves me, God cares for me and God will take care of me, verses 6-7. "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins..." or "farthings?" A farthing is the smallest coin they possessed. Its value was less than a penny. And He said that two farthings could buy you five sparrows in the market. Who would want to buy a sparrow?

The Covid issue was thought to have come from the meat markets of Wuhan. Have you ever visited an open meat market in China? It is bizarre. Every kind of creepy crawler and animal—what we would consider nonedible—is sold in that market and eaten. It's unbelievable! I saw one cardboard box full of turtles. And one of the turtles got out, was running away and we said, "Go little turtle! Run for your life!" but it was caught and put back in the box. And I saw people with little sparrows, taking them home to eat them! How much meat could be on a sparrow?! It's unbelievable!

But in that day, people were so poor that for two farthings they could buy five sparrows. And in Matthew 10:29, He said that one farthing bought two sparrows. Now for two farthings they could buy five sparrows; they threw in an extra one, because they were so worthless. So sparrows were very insignificant by their standards.

So if God is concerned with sparrows, He'll be concerned for you. Verse 6 says, "And not one

of them..." that is, "sparrows" "...is forgotten before God." This is a lesson from the lesser to the greater; if God feeds the birds, which He does, God will feed you.

I used to say that God created fast-food restaurants so that people could feed the birds French fries. I have to pay for them; they scoop them up on the patio and get them for free. God feeds the birds, and He'll take care of us and feed us.

Why is this in here? Because the danger would be that they would be afraid God wouldn't take care of them. They would compromise, they wouldn't confess Christ and they wouldn't live for the Lord so He said that their Father would take care of them.

Verse 7, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Psalm 139 tells us that God knows all about you intimately. But some of you old timers don't give God much difficulty in counting the numbers of the hairs on your head. Even the young folks—some of them shave their heads! God keeps track of how many hairs fall out of your head. That's how intimately God is concerned for and cares for you.

Notice the end of verse 7: "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." He knows the number of the hairs on your head, and He takes notice of any sparrow that falls to the ground.

Do you know that you are valuable to God? Do you know that you are made in the image of God? Do you know that as a Christian you are the object of His redemption? Do you know that God the Father, because He loves you, sent God the Son to die on the Cross for you? He didn't do that for the birds. He did that for you. Romans 8:31-32 says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

1 Peter 5:7 says, "...casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you." The word "cares" here means "anxiety, worry, fears, phobias, depression." You're weighed down with all these burdens. When you come to church on Sundays, bring your burdens, give them to the Lord and leave them here. Don't bring them to church, tell the Lord all about them, but then carry them out with you. Leave them here. I like the Scripture that says, "Cast..." or "roll" "...your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Roll your cares on God; He has strong shoulders and can take care of them. So we need to cast them upon the Lord.

I liked to hear Ethel Waters, in the old Billy Graham crusades, sing the song His Eye is on the Sparrow. She sang,

"I sing because I'm happy.

I sing because I'm free.

For His eye is on the sparrow,

And I know He watches me.”

If you get discouraged, go bird watching. And remind yourself that God cares more about you than many sparrows.

The first admonition was to be aware of hypocrisy. Second was to not fear man but God. The third thing we need to do is to confess Christ openly, verses 8-9. Confess Christ boldly, publicly and openly. “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men...” which means to publicly, outwardly confess with your words that you believe in Jesus Christ “...him the Son of Man...” a Messianic, favorite title Jesus used for Himself in verses 8 and 10 that speaks of His humanity and Messiahship “...also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.” So Jesus gave us a promise in verse 8.

If you are a true Christian, what is involved is confessing Christ publicly. Some of you are proud of the fact that at work, no one knows you're a Christian; you've kept it secret. You're in a Christ-of-the-secret order. You're in the service, but you're in the secret service. You don't want anyone to know so you won't be persecuted or demoted or so you will get promoted. You become hypocritical, in order to be accepted by men. It's “the fear of man brings a snare.”

True faith always moves from the heart to the lips. And once we confess Christ openly, we find it easier to live the truth and avoid hypocrisy.

I have advice for young people. If you are a Christian, don't be silly, rude or obnoxious, but as soon as you meet someone new, as fast as you can get to a point where you tell them that you're a Christian. In an unbelieving crowd, fly your flag and let them know you're a Christian, a child of God. It could save you from being brought into sin with them.

I got saved a couple of weeks before my high school, senior graduation. And after graduation, they go crazy partying all night. All my sin buddies wanted to party, but I went home and read my Bible. A couple of days later, they came over and asked, “What's the deal?! What's wrong with you?!”

“Oh, I just didn't want to go. I wanted to stay home.” And I remember I just chickened out. “The fear of man brings a snare.” After my buddies left, I thought, Lord, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me! I just denied You! I didn't confess You. Lord, please give me another opportunity. And just a couple of hours later, they came back. Wow! I opened the door and started preaching repentance right off the bat. I thought, Lord, I'm not going to mess up this time. Thank You for another opportunity.

But I remember that they laughed at me, mocked me, ridiculed me and put me down. “Oh, that's ridiculous! You can't do that!” I had to find a whole new group of friends in order to follow Jesus Christ. So be careful that you refuse to openly confess Him before men. If we are true Christians, we will openly confess Him.

The fourth thing we need to do is rely on the Holy Spirit's power continually. Verses 10-11, “And

anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven." In Matthew 12:32, it says, "...either in this age or in the age to come." "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities..." which they did in the book of Acts in the early church "...do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you..." notice that "...in that very hour what you ought to say."

So verse 10 warns us not to resist or blaspheme the Holy Spirit. This verse, and others parallel to it in other Gospels, confuses people. What is the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit? Why can you speak against Jesus and be forgiven, but you can't speak against the Holy Spirit and be forgiven?

I don't believe that the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit is a single act. I believe it is an ongoing hardening of the heart, a continual rejection of the Holy Spirit's conviction when He comes to us as sinners and tells us we need Jesus to save us and we say, "No, no, no." We keep hardening our heart and rejecting the Holy Spirit's witness. You cannot be saved apart from the Holy Spirit. If you continue to reject Him, your heart can harden to the point that it spiritually atrophies, and you cannot believe. So it is a very dangerous thing to do. I don't think it's a single act but a continual rejection.

This blaspheming can only be committed by an unbeliever. If you are a Christian, you can't blaspheme the Holy Spirit, because He has already regenerated you, indwells you and "You were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

And if you are worried about having blasphemed the Holy Spirit, it's an indication that you haven't done that. The very fact that you're concerned shows that you are still sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit.

You might blaspheme God, you might blaspheme Christ, even as Paul and others have done in the New Testament. Then you come under conviction by the Holy Spirit, you repent, you turn to Christ and you're forgiven because you're already saved. You haven't blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

But as an unbeliever, if you continue to reject the Holy Spirit, you're in a dangerous position.

Getting back to verse 11, if you're brought before the magistrates, you're brought into the synagogue before the powers, you don't need to think about what you're going to say, because the Holy Spirit will give you what you are to say.

Don't misinterpret that; if you're a preacher, pastor or Bible teacher, don't say that you don't need to study anymore. Some silly, young men training for ministry have gotten the idea that they don't have to study! "The Holy Spirit's just going to fill my mouth." One young man told Harry Ironside that "I don't need to study anymore. I just open my mouth, and God will fill it."

Harry Ironside said, "Yeah, He'll fill it; with the east wind."

So it's not saying you don't have to study. It's saying that if you're being persecuted and you're brought before someone to testify, the Holy Spirit will be your Helper (John 14:26); He'll quicken you and help you. Read Peter's words when he was brought before the counsel, the Sanhedrin, to testify about the healing of the man who was lame (Acts 4:9-12). He preached a powerful sermon. And he was just a fisherman! Then the authorities "realized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). And when you read about Paul, who had been brought before the magistrates and the Roman authorities, he preached powerful sermons that had been given to him by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 4:17).

And when you go to your job, you're around other people who aren't believers. And when you go to a sporting event and God opens a door for you to speak, ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and use you to speak through you and to convict others of sin, righteousness, judgment (John 16:8) and their need for Christ. So you need to rely on the Holy Spirit continually.

In John 16:7, Jesus said, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper..." or "Comforter" in the King James Bible "...will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." "Comforter" is the word "Parakletos," which means "one who comes alongside" to comfort and strengthen us.

When you are walking in a hostile world and you need to take a stand against opposition, rely upon, lean upon and surrender to the Holy Spirit, the Parakletos, the Comforter, who said "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5).

In closing, there are three bullet points. Number one, if we are going to live holy lives in a hostile world, we need to fear God the Father; number two, we need to confess God the Son; and number three, we need to rely on God the Holy Spirit.