

**Text:** Luke 12:1-12

**Title:** The Dangers of Hypocrisy

**Truth:** Jesus warns us about hypocrisy and teaches how to handle persecution without ourselves falling into hypocrisy.

**Date/Location:** Sunday July 28, 2024 at FBC

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## **Introduction**

There are six paragraphs in this section. Understanding if and how they fit together is not easy. It starts with the warning about hypocrisy, particularly of the religious leaders. Their hypocrisy will lead them to persecute Christ's followers. In this context of persecution, Jesus wants us to trust the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and not ourselves become hypocrites in the process.

He had just laid into the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers by pronouncing “woes” upon them. Their future judgment is just because of their abandonment of true love for God and justice toward their neighbors. They make their outward appearance to be religious, but inwardly they are full of moral rot of the worst kind. In effect, they took the word of God away from people by loading them up with such difficult and burdensome regulations that they lost sight of the real word of God. They were just like their fathers who killed the prophets. Should you doubt this, just read on some more chapters, and watch how they kill Jesus on the cross.

This led to the scribes and Pharisees laying plans to accuse and eventually kill Him. This danger was certainly evident to the disciples, and they believed it would impact them as well, which it eventually did. So, the Lord applies what he addressed to the Pharisees to His own disciples, warning them against hypocrisy and then telling them to care more about their relationship with God than about what their future persecutors will do to them.

### **I. Beware of Hypocrisy, v. 1-3**

A. In simple terms, religious hypocrisy is pretending to be pious but at heart being full of sin. It is pretending to teach the ways of God, but not following them (or really believing them) yourself. Despite

the inner corruption of hypocrisy, such people see themselves as better than others and cannot stand being exposed.

In general hypocrisy is a mismatch between the moral quality of the inner man and the moral appearance of the outward man, particularly where the inward is worse than the outward. This is the case when a non-Christian pretends to be religious.

Sometimes, as in persecution contexts, a believer can pretend to be an unbeliever, which is a type of hypocrisy as well.

Hypocrisy is an inner corruption that is difficult to observe in yourself because the faculties that you use to observe it are themselves corrupt. It is a corruption that tries to hide the truth, but God can expose the truth.

- B. You can only hide your true self for so long. At some point, it will come out. If not before, then at the final judgment your true colors will be revealed. Being a hypocrite only works for a short duration of time. As with all lies, the lies must be protected with other lies, and eventually you will run out of lies and become exposed.
- C. The figure of leaven is appropriate because it may seem a small thing to be making yourself look good to others when you are not genuinely good. It may even seem to be a virtue! But like yeast, hypocrisy permeates silently, affecting all corners.
- D. In this case, the “leaven” is hypocrisy, which is a corrupting, evil influence. But this hypocrisy is not a mere show or as one commentator says, it is not “play-acting.” It is so intertwined in the hearts and minds of these religionists that they do not see themselves as “putting on a show.” They have come to believe the lie themselves that they can get away with an external display of religiosity while filth that they love resides on the inside. At heart, their “hypocrisy” is godlessness. There is no love of God in their hearts. Rather, there is pride and a desire to elevate oneself among others.
- E. Do be certain that God will evaluate what you are and what you do in this life. Covered, hidden, and private hypocrisy will be rooted out. The Bible is clear that all people will face judgment. It is a detail as to how precisely that happens (2 Corinthians 5:10 for

Christians, Revelation 20:12-15 for non-Christians). But the big picture is that it *will* happen.

F. I take this eschatological warning of judgment to be the main import of Jesus's warning in these first three verses. Such hypocrisy will drive the Pharisees and scribes to persecute Jesus and His disciples, as we will read in the remainder of the gospel and the book of Acts. In this setting Jesus teaches his followers how to handle such persecution without themselves failing like their hypocritical persecutors.

## **II. Fear God, not Man, because God Cares for You, v. 4-7**

The corruption of hypocrisy is integrally connected to the fear of man.

Fear of people leads us to do many foolish things. You want to look better than you are. Instead, with God's salvation, you can *actually be better*.

A. The fear of death is powerful, and some say it is the most powerful motivation in human existence. But that is only because of a lack of clarity about what happens *after* one's physical death. If people had the true facts of the afterlife well in mind, they would fear more what God will do than what any man would do.

B. Jesus tells his friends (followers) that He forbids them to fear those who kill the body. Do not fear these godless hypocrite Pharisees and scribes and lawyers. Do not fear these hypocrites so much that you yourself play the hypocrite. After all, the very *worst* that they can do is torture and kill you. But that is temporary. After that, there is "no more that they can do."

C. Instead, Jesus says, you must fear God who knows your heart (Matt. 6:18) and is the final judge with the ultimate power. The Supreme Court has its power, and the government has the power of physical death over criminals in its realm, but only God has the power to cast a person into Hell.

Jesus believed what He said here about Hell, and therefore so should we.

D. Indeed we ought to fear God, but we do not fear to the extent that we are like the pagans, some of whom exist in terror of their

imagined deities. Jesus tells His followers *not* to fear because our true God maintains a compassionate connection to His creation. He even cares for the smallest of the animal creation, as He himself teaches: the righteous regard the life of their animals (Prov. 12:10).

- E. People in general and His people in particular are worth more to Him than many sparrows, and God sovereignly watches over and cares for them. Matthew 10:29 says that not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of the Father. You may debate whether God's permissive or active will sees to the fall of the sparrow, but regardless of this debate, it is God's will that sees to it. Not one single thing resides outside of the purview of God's decision as to how things will be.
- F. When you fear God in this way, recognizing his deep care for you, why would you pursue a lifestyle of hypocrisy?
- G. Notice the bracketing command to not be afraid, in verse 4 and in verse 7. In sum, we are not to fear man. We fear our Judge, while recognizing that He knows us and cares deeply for us.

### **III. Publicly Confess Christ Despite Difficulty, v. 8-12**

- A. To confess Christ before men is to make a public professing of your allegiance and loyalty to Him. It is as simple as saying that you are a follower of Jesus in front of anyone, especially people who do not like Jesus. Confessing Him means acknowledging with genuineness in your heart that you believe Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead, thus enabling Him to be the one and only Savior of mankind. Confessing the Son of Man before men shows the reality of one's profession of faith.
- B. Those who confess Christ this way will be rewarded. Jesus will be loyal to them and confess their names with favor before the angels of God. The implied timing of this is in the day of judgment before not only the angels but God the Father. Christ will "own" you before the Father and thus you will be secure.
- C. Peter "denied" the Lord, but this was a transient situation, a temporary failure. It was not a settled attitude of heart. In fact, it did not last for more than a few hours. He immediately wept bitterly about it.

- D. The kind of denial Jesus talks about next is out-and-out rejection, refusal to repent, a public declaration settled in the mind that the person is not going to follow Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes and lawyers were rejecting Jesus. He would not confess their names favorably before the angels of God at the judgment.
- E. If the person turns from rejecting Jesus and believes in Him, that is good. Jesus will forgive him even if he speaks a word against the Son of Man (v. 10). Despite all the human and divine implications of that phrase “Son of Man,” Jesus is gracious to allow words to be spoken against Him. Because He had lowered Himself to be in the form of a servant, He even permits people to trash Him in accordance with His lowly status. His glory is veiled, and He forgives people for not seeing it at first. He did not come to elevate Himself and would forgive all who mistook Him in His lowly estate.
- F. Then why was the Lord so zealous for the Spirit? Jesus protected the person and work of the Holy Spirit not because the Spirit cannot take care of Himself but because the Spirit’s work was clear, yet they were calling it the Devil’s work. As a member also of the Triune God, Jesus would not stand for another member of the Trinity being defaced.
- G. What exactly does it mean to blaspheme the Spirit? This refers to angry, hate-filled malice toward God and the work of the Spirit. It is not a mere lack of information.
- H. Here is a tip: If you are concerned that you might have said something against the Spirit of God, then it is most certainly the case that you are *not* guilty of this blasphemy. You have a mindset that would ask forgiveness if you had said something amiss, or were ignorant, or whatever.

On the other side of a great divide are those who have no concern whatsoever for the persons of the Godhead. They could not care less whether they have offended God or attributed the works of Christ to the Devil instead of to the Spirit of God where they belong.

- I. When you confess Christ before men, you may suffer the most severe kinds of persecution, like being taken to court and facing

stiff penalties and even death. Jesus counsels us to resist anxiety when faced with such a persecution situation. God will help by His grace.

J. He does not forbid *thinking* about what you will say in the proceedings. It forbids stressing and obsessing about it. There is here no mystical idea that the Spirit of God will take over and control your mouth, or even your mind. No—in fact, Jesus says that the Spirit will *teach* you. Your mind must be active to *learn*, making effort to understand the help that God’s Spirit gives from the Word of God.

Our Lord’s words here do *not* give an excuse for laziness in pulpit preparation. I have heard of pastors who claim that they do not prepare for their messages, and simply say what “the Spirit gives them” at the time. This is pure laziness and is shameful conduct for a so-called minister of the gospel. Certainly, such sermons would not be thoughtful, organized, weighty, full of meaty truth.

K. If you face a situation like this, remember: God cares for you more than the sparrows, and He *thoroughly* cares for them. Also, should you die, Jesus will see to it that your name is brought before God with a sterling recommendation. Meanwhile, you will receive divine help to answer the charges against you.

## Conclusion

The bottom line is that God sovereignly arranges all things and will, because of His care for you, take care of you when men put you to the most difficult of persecutions: the threat of death and court proceedings. You are safe to confess His name publicly. But if you deny Jesus, or speak against His Spirit, then you can fully expect God’s frown of judgment upon you.

Being a hypocrite does not benefit because it hides nothing from the Person who knows all. God cares for us. Jesus will go to bat for us. The Spirit will help us. What else could you need?

James 3:17 tells us that godly wisdom is without hypocrisy, and Peter adds that we must put away all hypocrisy (1 Peter 2:1).