



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 12:1-12

To understand a little more about the authority of God, and the danger of blaspheming Him.

“A Little Leaven”

Years ago I was a part of a college ministry group that met weekly to study the Bible and enjoy community together. One night, we studied Galatians 5, where Paul says: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” At the end of the time of study our college pastor and his wife brought out two pans of brownies. As young college-aged adults with not a lot of money, free food was always exciting. After dishing out the brownies, our college minister began to talk about how they only used the most expensive ingredients for this particular batch of brownies. The finest chocolates, cage-free eggs, local whole milk, fresh butter; we savored every bite as he described the top-shelf food items that were used to make these incredible brownies. As we got closer to finishing them, he shared: “I added one extra special ingredient to these as well. I went out and took just a small pinch of our dog’s poop in the back yard and added it into the mixing bowl.” We froze. He said, “It was a really big batch of brownies, so you would never know. You certainly won’t taste it.” After a few moments of frantic questioning, he began to laugh and then reached for his Bible and said: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” It was all a joke, but a well placed one to demonstrate how just a little bit of something bad makes the entire good thing bad as well.

In Luke 12:1, Jesus warns His disciples: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” To be even a little bit like the Pharisees and the lawyers is to tarnish everything else that is good. The Pharisees did a lot of really good things, but their hypocrisy was a stain on all of it. Their lives could be likened to the finest dessert mixed with a little dog excrement; totally inedible.

All Will Be Revealed

Verses 2 and 3 are quick, and follow Jesus' warning regarding the leaven of the Pharisees, but encapsulated in these verses is an important theological truth: *Everything* we do and say will one day be exposed. Jesus says: "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops" (Lk. 12:2-3). This is similar to what we have already seen in Luke's Gospel. Compare Jesus' words to what He said in Luke 8:17: "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." In both instances, Jesus is committed to the reality that for every single person there is coming a day of judgment (Acts 17:31). Though the Pharisees might think they are getting away with their hypocritical lives, everything that they did in secret will one day be revealed and judged for what it truly is.

Fear the Right One

Verses 4 through 7 begin the next sequence of teaching from Jesus with regard to who Christians should rightly fear. This discourse might seem random, but given that Jesus has just publicly humiliated a group of very powerful religious leaders of His time who had a history of executing people for speaking truth (Lk. 11:47-5), and that this exchange between Him and the Pharisees and lawyers seems to have created quite the public stir (Lk. 12:1), His words actually make a lot of sense in context. Jesus is warning people to consider who they should actually fear. Though the religious leaders have the authority to "kill the body" (Lk. 12:4), they are not to be feared in contrast to God who "after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell" (Lk. 12:5). In other words, Jesus is warning His disciples to fear the more powerful of the two.

There is an added twist to this as well, in that the God Jesus is referring to is specifically God the Son, Himself! Later, Jesus says in Revelation 1:17-18, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hell." One of the most bizarre twists of Scripture in the modern imagining of heaven and hell is that often God is presented as the king of heaven whereas Satan is presented as the king of hell. This could not be more inaccurate. Jesus is the king of both heaven and hell. Satan is, for a time, the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), but he will, like every other wicked and unrepentant person, be sentenced as a *prisoner* of hell, not a king: "and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10).

The point of this exchange is that there are consequences to how we live our lives and whether or not we obey God. The consequences of obedience to Christ might result in drawing out the ire of powerful people who have the ability and the authority to kill you physically. This seems like a frightful prospect, and might lead Christians to live in fear and thus not obey Christ with their lives. However, the consequences of disobedience to Christ will result in both physical and spiritual death for eternity. Christ calls His disciples to consider the two choices in light of one another. While one may seem scary, it is nothing in comparison to the grim future of those who willfully reject Christ in order to save their lives. Jesus has already said in Luke's account: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk. 9:24).

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

In verses 8 through 12, Jesus continues to develop the consequences of denying Jesus as the “Son of Man” (Lk. 12:8). The presence of the phrase “the angels of God” in verse 8 is likely a nod to the title “Son of Man,” in that “the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of the Father” (Matt. 16:27). In this sequence, Jesus differentiates between “everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man” and “the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit.” The former will be forgiven, but the latter will not (Lk. 12:10). What does Jesus mean by “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?” It is very unclear. However, several attempts to explain this have been made. Below is a brief breakdown of each possible explanation.

ACCUSING JESUS OF BEING POSSESSED

One explanation would be assigning demonic influence to a clearly divine act. In Mark 3, the religious leaders were accusing Jesus of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebul (Mk. 3:22), and after a brief discourse, Jesus concludes: “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit’” (Mk. 3:28-30). Contextually, this explanation makes a lot of sense. To witness a divine act and assign it to demonic power is to blaspheme the Spirit of power behind the divine work.

APOSTASY BY A CHRISTIAN

Another explanation would be a clear rejection of Christ by a believer (as opposed to a non-believer). In Acts 3, as Peter is addressing the Jews responsible in part for crucifying Jesus, Peter says in verse 17: “And now, brothers, I know that you acted *in ignorance*, as did also your rulers.” To speak against the Son in an ignorant manner, Jesus says they “will be forgiven” (Lk. 12:10). However, if once a person is full of the Holy Spirit, it would be unforgivable according to this view. This view is not as strong primarily because it insinuates a person could be saved and then by their own power lose their salvation. Yet, Paul says, “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). John says, “No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning” (1 Jn. 3:6). This explanation should be rejected.

REJECTION OF THE APOSTLES’ TESTIMONY

Another explanation might be the rejection of the apostles’ testimony in Acts, given that after Acts 2 their testimony was concerning the resurrection of Jesus and also empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is a plausible explanation, although very generalized. It would simply mean that anyone who rejects the Gospel after the coming of the Holy Spirit will not be saved. This is true, regardless.

RESISTANCE TO THE SPIRIT’S APPEAL TO REPENT

The most likely explanation is a rejection of the Spirit’s continual appeal to repent. In Acts 7, during Stephen’s appeal to the Jews, he says in verse 51: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” Whenever the Holy Spirit appeals to an individual to see their sin for what it truly is and repent of it, when that person rejects His counsel, they become unforgivable in that there is nothing else that can draw them to repentance. To shut out the only means by which one can be saved is to reject being saved altogether.

What About Now?

The takeaways of this passage are many. For one, we should be aware that even if we do a lot of good things for God, our hypocrisy will overshadow, stain, and leaven those good works. Secondly, we ought to remember that our actions will be judged. While the world may threaten our lives, we should truly fear God who has

authority over both our physical well-being as well as our spiritual eternity. Last, we ought to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s work and listen, lest we fall into the same trap that Psalm 95 speaks against: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7-8).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 12:1. Who all began to gather around Jesus? What were they doing? What did Jesus mean by the leaven of the Pharisees?

2. Read Luke 12:2-3. In your own words, summarize Jesus’ words in these two verses.

Day Two

1. Read Luke 12:4-5. Who should Jesus’ disciples not fear? Who should we fear? What is the difference between the two?

2. Read Luke 12:6-7. In your own words, summarize Jesus’ words in these two verses.

Day Three

1. Read Luke 12:8-9. What will happen to those who acknowledge Jesus before men? What will happen to those who deny Jesus before men?

2. Read Luke 12:10. What will happen to those who speak a word against the Son of Man? What will happen to those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit? What is the likely meaning of “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?” (Hint: See above notes)

Day Four

1. Read Luke 12:11. When the disciples are brought before religious leaders on account of speaking in the name of Jesus, why should they not fear? What can they count on?

2. Read Luke 12:12. What will the Holy Spirit do for people who are interrogated for being Christians?
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Week 47 Discussion: Hypocrisy

Jesus warns His disciples in verse 1 of Luke 12: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” The reality is hypocrisy stains even the good things Christians do. Talk as a group about ways in which you may be hypocritical, and what it will take for you to repent of that.

1. Icebreaker: What is hypocrisy?
2. Can you think of a time when you’ve been caught in hypocrisy? If so, share that experience with your group.
3. Is it easy for you to be corrected, or do you resist? Be honest.
4. Do you believe you do good things for Jesus on a consistent basis?
5. Is it possible that the good things you do are being overshadowed by your hypocrisy?
6. How can admission of hypocrisy be turned into a good thing?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus warns His disciples to not be hypocritical like the Pharisees.
2. Jesus warns His disciples to fear God over man, because God has authority to both kill the body and cast the body into hell.
3. Jesus warns against the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is unforgivable.