

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 15

Leaven of the Pharisees

Luke 12:1 Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

What are the circumstances? The Pharisees and lawyers have just verbally attacked Jesus and He has defeated them all with His words. At the end of Chapter 11, we find the Pharisees and lawyers seeking to catch Him in some sin against their laws.

Notice that the Scripture indicates that thousands of people are gathering around Jesus, so many that they are stepping on each other. Jesus turns to the many disciples and proclaims a warning about the hypocritical "leaven of the Pharisees".

Leaven is a metaphor for the corruption and perversity of the hearts and lives of people. The Scripture strictly forbids the use of leaven in all offerings made to the Lord on the altar because of the belief that it secretly penetrates and diffuses power. Leaven produces a chemical process which begins fermentation. It starts the state of putrefaction in which the atoms are in a continual motion. Cooks use a small portion of fermented dough to ferment other dough; spiritually, the fermenting process symbolizes a corruptive influence. In the New Testament, leaven symbolizes an evil influence which, if allowed to remain, corrupts the body of believers. Jesus warns His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees, a reference to their teaching and hypocrisy. In his letter, Paul urges the Corinthians to remove wickedness from their midst and become fresh dough, unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Nothing Covered

Luke 12:2 "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

As Jesus watches the huge crowds waiting to hear him, he warns his disciples against the hypocrisy of trying to appear good when one's heart is far from God. The Pharisees cannot keep their attitudes hidden forever. Their selfishness will act like yeast, and soon they will expose themselves as power-hungry impostors, not devoted religious leaders. It is easy to be angry at the blatant hypocrisy of the Pharisees, but each of us must resist the temptation to settle for the appearance of respectability when our hearts are far from God.

No Fear

Luke 12:3 "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops. ⁴"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. ⁵"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Jesus reminds the disciples to fear God Who controls the eternal, not merely the temporal consequences. Do not allow fear of a person or group to keep you from standing righteously for Christ.

God's Care

Luke 12:6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? *Yet* not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

The true value of God's estimate of worth outweighs the estimation of our peers. People evaluate and categorize us according to how we perform, what we achieve and how we look. God cares for us because we belong to him; therefore, we can face life without fear.

Acknowledge Jesus

Luke 12:8 "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; ⁹but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

We disown Jesus when we

1. hope no one will think we are Christians.
2. decide *not* to speak for what is right.
3. are silent about our relationship with God.
4. blend into society.
5. accept our culture's non-Christian values.

We acknowledge Jesus when we

1. live moral, upright, Christ-honoring lives.
2. look for opportunities to share our faith with others.
3. help others in need.
4. take a stand for justice.
5. love others.
6. proclaim our loyalty to Christ.
7. use our lives and resources to carry out His desires rather than our own.

Blasphemes Against the Holy Spirit

Luke 12:10 "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him.

Jesus emphasizes the unforgivable act of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Scripture explains the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as the continued and obstinate rejection of the gospel, hence, an unpardonable sin simply because as long as a sinner remains in unbelief, he voluntarily excludes himself from pardon. These Pharisees are rejecting Jesus!

Teaching of the Holy Spirit

Luke 12:11 "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

The disciples know they can never dominate a religious dispute with the well-educated Jewish leaders; therefore, the Lord promises they will be prepared. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will supply the needed words at the appropriate times. The disciples' testimony might not make them look impressive, but it will still point out God's work in the world through Jesus' life. We need to pray for opportunities to speak for God, and then trust Him to help us with our words. However, this promise of the Spirit's help does not compensate for a lack of preparation. Remember, these disciples had only three years of teaching and practical application. We, too, must study God's Word. Then God will bring His truths to mind when we need them most, helping us present them in an effective way.

Division of Inheritance

Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me."

People regularly brought questions like this to the rabbis to settle. Jesus' response, though not directly to the topic, does not change the subject. Rather, Jesus points to a higher issue and a correct attitude toward the accumulation of wealth. Life consists of more than material goods, the most important being our relationship with God. Jesus puts his finger on this questioner's heart. When we bring problems to God in prayer, He often changes direction to show how we need to grow and adjust our attitudes toward the problem. His answer is often not what we are looking for, but it is effective in helping us trace God's hand in our lives.

Beware of Greed

Luke 12:14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

Jesus says that the good life has nothing to do with being wealthy, so be on guard against greed. It is the exact opposite of what society usually says. We spend millions of dollars thinking that if we buy more and more we will be happier, fulfilled and comfortable. How should we respond to the constant pressure to buy? Learning to tune out expensive

enticements and concentrate instead on the truly good life of living in a relationship with God and doing His work is essential.

Bigger Barns

Luke 12:16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. ¹⁷ "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ ~'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'" ²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'

Why do we save money? To retire? To buy more expensive cars or toys? To be secure? Jesus challenges the disciples to think beyond earthbound goals and to use what He gives for God's kingdom. Faith, service and obedience are the way to become rich in God's estimation.

Treasures for Self

Luke 12:21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The rich man in Jesus' story dies before he can begin to use that which he has stored in his big barns. Planning for retirement and preparing for life *before* death is wise, but neglecting life *after* death is disastrous. If we accumulate wealth only to enrich ourselves with no concern for helping others, we will enter eternity empty-handed.

Worry About Life

Luke 12:22 And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about *your* life, *as to* what you will eat; nor for your body, *as to* what you will put on. ²³ "For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and *yet* God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! ²⁵ "And which of you by worrying can add a *single* hour to his life's span? ²⁶ "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? ²⁷ "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ²⁸ "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will He clothe* you? You men of little faith! ²⁹ "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹ "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Seeking the kingdom of God means making Jesus the Lord and King of your life. He must control every area including your work, play, plans and relationships. Is the kingdom only a minor concern or is it central to all you do? Are you holding back in any area of your life from God's control? As Lord and Creator, He wants to help provide what you need as well as guide how you use what He provides.

Unfailing Treasure

Luke 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. ³³ "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys.

Seeing money as an end in itself quickly traps and cuts us off from both God and the needy. The key to using money wisely focuses on how much we use it for God's purposes, not how much we accumulate for ourselves. Does God's love touch your wallet? Does your money free you to help others? If so, you are storing up lasting treasures in heaven. If your financial goals and possessions hinder you from giving generously, loving others, or serving God, sell what you must to bring your life into perspective.

Place of the Heart

Luke 12:34 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

If you concentrate your money in your business, your thoughts will center on making the business profitable. If you direct it toward other people, you will become concerned with their welfare. Where do you put your time, money, and energy? What do you think about most? How should you change the way you use your resources in order to reflect kingdom values more accurately?

Jesus commands that we not worry. How can we avoid it? Only faith can free us from the anxiety caused by greed and covetousness. It is good to work and plan responsibly; it is bad to dwell on all the ways our plans can go wrong. Worry is pointless; it cannot fill any of our needs; it is foolish because the Creator of the universe loves us and knows what we need. He promises to meet all our real needs, but not necessarily all our desires.

Teaching of the Holy Spirit

Luke 12:35 "Be dressed in readiness, and *keep* your lamps lit. ³⁶ "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks. ³⁷ "Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself *to serve*, and have them recline *at the table*, and will come up and wait on them. ³⁸ "Whether he comes in the second watch, or even in the third, and finds *them* so, blessed are those *slaves*. ³⁹ "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ "You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."

Christ largely insists that we not give way to disquieting, perplexing cares as recorded in Matthew 6:25-34. Luke's presentation calls for disciples to cast their cares upon God, and it is the right way to receive ease from those cares. Fears must not prevail. We must not frighten ourselves with thoughts of evil to come. If we value the beauty of holiness, we shall not crave the luxuries of life. We must examine whether or not we belong to His flock. We are Christ's servants, not only working servants, but also waiting servants. We must be as men who wait for their lord, who sit up while he stays out late, to be ready to receive him.

In this passage, Christ alludes to His own ascension to heaven, His coming to call His people to Him through death, and His return to judge the world. Although we are uncertain as to the time of His coming to snatch the Church away, our souls should always be ready, as ready as the man of the house can be if he can know the hour the thief will come.

Sensible Steward

Luke 12:41 Peter said, "Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone *else* as well?" ⁴² And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? ⁴³ "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Jesus promises a reward for those who have been faithful to the Master. Although we sometimes experience immediate and material rewards for our obedience to God, this is not always the case. If it were so, we would be tempted to boast about our achievements. Jesus says that if we look for rewards now, we will lose them later (see Mark 8:36). Our heavenly rewards will be the most accurate reflection of what we have done on earth and they will be far greater than we can imagine.

Watchful and Faithful Leaders

Luke 12:45 "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, *both* men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; ⁴⁶ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷ "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, ⁴⁸ but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

We must watch for Jesus, work diligently and obey His commands until He comes. Leaders especially need such an attitude. Watchful and faithful leaders will be given increased opportunities and responsibilities. The more resources, talents and understanding we have, the more we are responsible to use them effectively. God will not hold us responsible for gifts that He has not given us, but we all have enough gifts and duties to keep us busy until Jesus arrives.

The Lord's Baptism

Luke 12:49 "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!

The baptism to which Jesus refers is His coming crucifixion. Of course, Jesus dreads the physical pain, but even worse will be the spiritual pain that accompanies His death.

Family Against Family

Luke 12:51 "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; ⁵² for from now on five *members* in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ "They will be divided, father against son and son against

father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

In these strange and unsettling words, Jesus reveals that His coming will often result in conflict. He demands an individual response and intimate groups such as families may be torn apart when some choose to follow him and others refuse to do so. No middle ground exists with Jesus. Loyalties declared and commitments made will sometimes result in the severing of relationships. Are you willing to risk your family's approval in order to gain eternal life?

Signs

Luke 12:54 And He was also saying to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming,' and so it turns out. ⁵⁵ "And when *you see* a south wind blowing, you say, 'It will be a hot day,' and it turns out *that way*. ⁵⁶ "You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? ⁵⁷ "And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?

For most of recorded history, farming has been the world's principal occupation. The farmer depends directly on the weather for his livelihood. He needs just the right amounts of sun and rain, not too much and not too little, to make his living. Through experience, the farmer obtains the skills needed to interpret the signs in nature. Jesus announces an earthshaking event that will be much more important than the year's crops, the coming of God's kingdom. Like a rainstorm or a sunny day, there were signs that the kingdom will soon arrive. Jesus' hearers, skilled at interpreting weather signs, are intentionally ignoring the signs of the times.

Settle With God

Luke 12: 58 "For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on *your way there* make an effort to settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

Christ wants the people to be as wise in the concerns of their souls as they live life in outward affairs. Let them hasten to obtain peace with God before it is too late. If any man finds himself against God, he must settle with God quickly!