

**A Certain Cure for Hypocrisy, Part 1**

Scripture: Luke 12:1-7

Code: 42-168

We return to our study of the Word of God this morning and the bulletin that you looked at might have surprised you a little bit. If you were here last Sunday you know that we finished chapter 11 and you might be a little bit discouraged that we're going back. Don't be, we're not. That's a misprint. In actuality we are now embarking upon chapter 12, another relatively lengthy chapter as many in Luke are, but one filled with wonderful, wonderful truth. I am on a pace to finish the gospel of Luke about the same amount of time that I finished the gospel of Matthew. That was many years ago and not much has changed as we have gone through the Word of God, endeavoring to be as careful as we can and not miss anything the Lord has prepared for us.

Just a little bit of background because we're entering a new discourse by our Lord. We have been learning in chapter 11 that false religion is all hypocrisy. False religion does not truly know God, it cannot bring someone to God, it cannot bring someone into His Kingdom. False religion does not provide forgiveness. False religion does not provide redemption. It does not empower people to do what is right. It does not please God. It does not lead to heaven. False religion is deception, it is all lies and hypocrisy. It is people pretending to know God, pretending to know truth, pretending to do good and to do right, to please God and pretending or imagining that they are headed for heaven. All false religion is hypocrisy. And all the leaders of false religion are hypocrites who claim to know God and to know truth and to be able to lead others in the right way and are utterly unable to do it.

The Judaism of Jesus' day was, of course, hypocrisy. It was a corruption and a perversion of true Old Testament worship. It was apostate, that is it had defected from the truth and it was hypocritical. If that was not clear before Jesus came, it became very clear when He arrived. There's nothing like having the truth in order to see where the lies are. And Jesus, of course, not only spoke truth, He was truth incarnate and He made it crystal clear how hypocritical the false religion of Judaism was.

Up to this point in Luke's history of the life of our Lord, he has pretty much focused on Jesus' ministry. Jesus coming and preaching the Kingdom, preaching the good news of forgiveness, the good news of salvation, giving people the hope of heaven if they trusted in Him, calling people to repentance and faith and acknowledging Him as Lord, Messiah and Savior. And He confirmed the veracity and the truthfulness of that message in a massive, extensive display of supernatural miracles to make it very clear that He was indeed God in human flesh speaking the truth. However, in spite of the clarity of

His message, in spite of the truthfulness of it, in spite of the miracles to attest to it, the people of Israel, both in Galilee, the more rural area in the north, and in Judea in the south, around Jerusalem, the people in both places held tightly to their hypocritical religion. They held tightly to their form of apostate Judaism and they held tightly to their self-righteousness, their works, their ceremonies to the degree that they were increasingly hostile toward Jesus. And that hostility was, of course, led...in fact orchestrated by the leaders of the Judaistic apostate religion, the Pharisees and the scribes. They put a spin on everything Jesus did. Ultimately to make the greatest impact on the people in turning them against Jesus, they told the people that Jesus actually was from Satan, not God, and that what He did He did by the power of Satan, not the power of God. And, of course, remember that from chapter 11 verse 15, after Jesus had done a miracle, they said He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. So the ultimate blasphemy, the opposite to the truth they called Jesus satanic, when in fact He was divine. They said He did what He did by the power of Satan, when what He did He did by the power of the Spirit. And so they have rejected their Messiah. As John put it, He came to His own and His own received Him not. They, of course, are held tightly in the grip of an apostate form of religion which is in the fabric of their lives. So strong is that grip on them that they bought into the spin that the Pharisees and scribes put on the ministry of Jesus and they too echoed that it was in fact satanic. And that's why back in chapter 11 verse 29 Jesus said, "This generation is a wicked generation." They were headed for divine judgment if they did not acknowledge their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in chapter 11 you will remember that the things have reached a sort of high point, a kind of crescendo, a crisis time. The people, for the most part, both in Galilee and in Judea have rejected Christ. They're holding on to their false religion. The architects of that false religion are the Pharisees and the scribes. And so Jesus confronts them at a lunch, chapter 11 from verses 37 to the end of the chapter, we remember how He confronted them. He pronounced upon these religious hypocrites six curses...six curses which we have looked at in detail. And in so doing He pronounced a curse on their whole form of apostate religion and in fact we can extrapolate from there He pronounced the same curses on all forms of false religion...all forms. And I just remind you by way of review that religion is man at his highest, it is man at his lowest. It is not man reaching the noble heights of his evolution, it is man going down to the lowest depths. Religion is not a noble attempt at being good, it is not a noble attempt to reach God and to make ourselves better. Religion is just the opposite. It is a descent into satanic deception. And Jesus said He had more in common with publicans than sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes and the riff-raff and the scum of society than He did with the religious leaders. Next time you access a culture and you look at that culture, and you see the worst of it from the moral standpoint, the most base of it portrayed before you on the television or in a book you read and you see how low people can go in terms of immorality and how far they can descend into the pit of crime and all the rest of the filth that goes with the dregs of immorality, and then on the other hand you look at religion with all of its white robes and all of its attire and all of its

supposed assent to God, just remember this, they're worse than the most wretched of reprobate sinners. Religion is man at his lowest. The descent in Romans chapter 1, man at the very bottom is inventing God. Having rejected God, he has gone all the way to the pits of hell, if you will, grasped the satanic counterfeit of religion, invented a God of his own design, aided and abetted by demons. John Calvin, looking at Roman Catholicism as he did, being so powerfully instrumental in the Reformation said this...I read it in a letter this week that he wrote to some Christian martyrs. He said he was writing about Roman Catholic priests who, of course, are portrayed and were portrayed in his day as the best of men, the most righteous, the most noble, at the top, if you will, and he says this in the letter to those martyrs who will die at the hands of the Roman Church, "Their vows...the vows of Roman Catholic priests...are impossible," he said, and the priests take all kinds of vows. He said, "They are nothing but an insult to God. For instance, when the monks and priests renounce marriage and that generally the whole of these vows are nothing but false inventions in order to bastardize the service of God. We're not permitted to promise or offer to Him anything except what is in accordance with His Word. False vows made by impotent people who don't know God and have not the power to carry out those vows bastardize the service of God." Pretty strong language. That's false religion. And that's exactly what the Pharisees had done, they had bastardized the service of God with their false vows and their impotence and inability to keep them. But the people had become so entrenched in their religion, they had invested so much in it and it made them feel so good about themselves, self-righteousness does that, that they weren't about to abandon that religion, rather they would kill their true Savior, scream for His blood, not many months after this very occasion.

As we come to chapter 12, the people are becoming fixed in their resentment and resistance and animosity and rejection of Jesus. And, in fact, the character of the crowd has changed. In the early years of His ministry they were really interested, they were peaked, they were curious, they were hungry, they were excited, they were enthusiastic, they were coming off the ministry of John the Baptist, they were eager for the Kingdom, they were eager to find out if He was the Messiah. They were stunned and shocked by the amazing power that He exhibited in all of His thousands of miracles which He did day by day. He was very attracted to them. They were thinking maybe He could be the Messiah. But as the months went on, that began to change. And by the time we come into chapter 12, most of the crowd has sided with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and His enemies. Most of the crowd is rooted and dug in and entrenched in their false religion and they see Jesus now as the enemy. And so from here on out there's a tone in Jesus' ministry of warning and judgment that has escalated. For most, the decision has been made and Jesus now warns them of the coming judgment...not so much the promises of coming blessing, although they will come, but the warnings of judgment that fall on those who reject Him.

It is warning that sets the tone in the text we're coming to. If you notice chapter 12, I want to show you something interesting, verse 1 says, "Many thousands of the multitude gather together." Verse

13 says, "Someone in the crowd said..." If you keep going, verse 54, He was also saying to the multitudes. Chapter 13 verse 1, "Now on the same occasion," and then verse 2, "He answered and said to them." You say, "Why you telling me that?" Because that connects all of this to the same event. The crowd gathered. He spoke to the crowd. Someone in the crowd interrupted Him, later Peter interrupted Him. He went back and said more to the crowd in verse 54. Chapter 13 verse 1, it was the same occasion when some folks were there and they came and spoke and He answered them again. This is one discourse that took place at one time and it runs from chapter 12 verse 1 to chapter 13 verse 9. It is a long discourse punctuated by a couple of interruptions. The background here of all that our Lord says is judgment. Verse 5, "Fear the one who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him." Verse 19, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come, take your ease, eat drink and be merry," verse 20, "but God said to him, 'You fool, this very night your soul is required of you and now who will own what you've prepared?'" Verse 35, "Be dressed in readiness, keep your lamps lit." Why? Verse 40, "Be ready, the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." Verse 46, "The master of the slave will come one day when he doesn't expect him, at an hour he doesn't know, cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers." Chapter 13 verse 5, "I tell you, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Verse 9, "If that tree bears fruit, next year fine, if not, cut it down." And there's an escalating backdrop of judgment. Jesus now begins His ministry of warning...of warning.

There will be promises. There will be calls to follow Him. There will be words of blessing to those who do. But primarily the note that He sounds is warning of judgment. And with all the warnings that He gives, all the words of judgment, don't really reach the hard-hearted Pharisees and scribes, they just make them angrier, and angrier, and angrier and angrier until finally they get Him to the cross where they think they have silenced Him and satisfied themselves. But contrary to that, those sons of hell will not escape God's wrath.

Now as we come to this, there is a massive crowd that is collected around Jesus. This is in Judea in the south. They all know the conflict between the Pharisees, the scribes and Jesus. It is the most riveting, and compelling, and fascinating, and interesting, and dramatic event that takes place anywhere when Jesus and the Pharisees get together. And it happened a lot because they were always coming to question Him, try to catch Him in His words. And so the crowds begin to grow and grow and grow and verse 1 says, "Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples, 'First of all...'" Let me stop right there. That's the setting of this section, that's the setting.

Let me just tell you a little bit about that setting. "Under these circumstances," *en houst(??)* in the Greek, meanwhile, or during this period, the same period sort of initiated by that lunch when that hostility between the Pharisees and Jesus had been escalated to its fever pitch. You remember He left the lunch at the end of chapter 11 and it says they were very hostile toward Him and looking for ways they could pounce on Him and attack Him and actually kill Him.

So while that was going on, the crowds began to grow. The phrase "so many thousands of the multitude had gathered" uses the word *muriadon*, it's a plural of *urias*, or *murion*. *Murion* means literally ten thousand. It's the highest number that has a word in the Greek language. And so that's why when you read about multitudes of angels, it's ten thousand times ten thousand because there's not a word for anything more than ten thousand. They don't have a word for one-hundred thousand. And so what you have here is the plural of that. It literally says, "So many ten thousands of the multitude." Multiply tens of thousands. Well it wouldn't probably be twenty-thousand, it could be thirty, forty, fifty. This is a massive crowd that's now collecting because this is the biggest issue going on in Israel right now. Religion dominates their life. The Pharisees and scribes dominate their religion and they are confronting this Jesus, the miracle worker. I mean, there is no drama played out in their life ever like this. Huge crowds drawn by the conflict, and most of them are hostile. Most of them are entrenched in their false religion. They are a part of the hypocritical, apostate, Judaistic system...most of them. And it's so large that they're stepping on each other. What does that simply mean? Well look, they didn't have any electronics, they didn't have any sound system, they didn't have any microphones. And if the crowd is tens of thousands of people, how are you going to hear the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees? How are you going to hear what Jesus says in response to these things unless you get close? And everybody trying to get close and you have a mob scene and they're literally stepping on each other. Whatever dialogue was going on ends at this particular point and Jesus speaks and essentially what you have from verse 1 right to chapter 13 verse 9 is a long sermon by Jesus, interrupted with a few questions.

And it should be helpful to you to note to whom it speaks. Go back to verse 1. He began saying to His disciples, first of all," really important to point this out...really important to point this out. He's not speaking to the crowd. They're going to hear, but He's not speaking to them. He's speaking to some within the crowd who would fall into the category of disciples. Now the word disciple in the Greek is *mathetes*, it means a learner, a student. That's all. It doesn't say anything about their faith and whether they were born again or whether they truly believed unto salvation. It doesn't say where they are, sort of, it's just that they were learning. They...they're still on the fence, they're still open, they're still interested, they're still curious. Maybe it's true, maybe it's not. They still are there because they're attracted to Jesus. This is not the hostile group. Some of them, of course, by now had become true believers and some were in the process. It is to them that He speaks. It is to those who haven't made up their mind, those who are just coming to understand who He really is, the learners, the real students. And it is to them that He gives the warning. It is to them that He calls for a true response. It is to them that He calls to salvation and to faith.

And so that's why it says at the last part of the introduction, verse 1, He began saying to His disciples, first of all. He's not going to cast His pearls before swine. Those that are locked in an unbelief, you

know, it's a Genesis 6:5, "My Spirit will not always strive with men." There comes a point when you go beyond and you're fixed in your unbelief. But in that crowd scattered there are some still interested, verse 4, He says, "I say to you, My friends." He's talking to those that are friendly toward Him. Over in verse 32, it's not a large group. "Don't be afraid, little flock." In the middle of this massive, multiple of ten thousands there is this little flock who are believing and some who are coming to believe and perhaps some who won't...like John 6, remember, there were many of His disciples who walked no more with Him and they went away. But it is to those that He speaks.

And what He wants to say to them in the opening twelve verses is this. Verse 1, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." I'm warning you, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. Don't get caught up in a damning, hypocritical, false religion. That's exactly what He's saying. Do not get caught up in a damning false religion. That's His message. Beware is actually take heed to yourselves. What He's saying is, watch yourselves, very personal. Protect yourselves. As Jesus says in Matthew chapter 24, there are many out there who want to lead you astray, they're all over the place. You better protect yourselves. And what you need to protect yourselves from is the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy. Talk about leaven, over in chapter 13 and verse 21, you have a little parable Jesus gives there. He compares the Kingdom of God to leaven. He said it's like leaven, and here He describes what leaven does. "Which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal until it was all leaven." Now that's what leaven does, right? You take the leaven and you put it in the dough and it permeates. By the way, the word for leaven is *zume* from which you get enzymes.

The idea is this, leaven...you take this basic fermented old dough sitting in its fermenting juices and you put it into new dough and it expands it, right? And it permeates it. And Jesus is saying beware, take heed, protect yourselves from the permeating, fermenting influence of the Pharisees. Save yourselves from the damning influence of their apostate religion. Avoid all contact with it. It reminds me of Jude 23 where he says, "When we go to reach people in false religions, we have to be careful unless we become corrupted by the garments spotted or stained or corrupted from the flesh." And last Sunday night I told you that is graphic, graphic language. It's so graphic you can hardly speak of it in public. What He is saying is getting close to people in false religion is like taking a hold, the word is underwear, stained from bodily elimination. Getting near people in false religion is like taking hold of that. You wouldn't do that and stain your physical body, and stay away from that as regards your soul. So...it's the same thing He said back in chapter 11, you know. Getting near a Pharisee is like walking across a tomb and being defiled by it. Beware of the permeating fermenting influence of false religion.

I'm telling you, that is tough. I mean, we live in a world today which is just literally engulfed in false religion. By the way, in Matthew 16:6 Jesus said this, also there but He added this, "Beware also of

the leaven of the Sadducees." And in Mark 8:15 He added, "And beware of the leaven of Herod." With the Pharisees it was fundamentalism, it was works, it was legalism, it was materialism. With the Sadducees it was skepticism and rationalism and liberalism. And with Herod it was political ambition and secularism and all of it corrupts...all of it corrupts. So He says this stuff permeates everything.

There's a verse in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that's good to know. It says, "Evil company corrupts good morals." Remember that verse? "Evil company corrupts good morals." Evil company...you think company...ah, yeah, stay away from those kinds of people. Listen to what it means. The word for company is *homilia* and that word in the Greek means, literally in its root, can mean in association or company, but at its root it means a sermon or a lecture or communication or conversation. And isn't that the whole point? I mean, the reason association with evil people corrupts good morals is because of what they say. Don't expose yourself to a sermon, to a teaching, to a lecture, to communication through media, to a conversation that's going to give you evil deceiving lies. It will corrupt you. That's why the Psalmist said, "Blessed is the man who doesn't hang around the ungodly, doesn't sit down in the seat of the scoffer."

So to those who are still open, He says you've got to avoid the hypocrisy that's all around you. Then this, how do you do that? How does one avoid being a hypocrite? And that's really the title of this message. If you wanted to write one down, put down, "How to avoid the eternal disaster of being a hypocrite." How to avoid the eternal disaster of being a hypocrite, how do you do that? How do you avoid it? In verses 2 through 12 the Lord's going to give you three things...three necessary realities...three essential obligations. If you want to avoid being damned, for being a hypocrite, if you want to make sure you're not in a false religious system, here are three essential obligations.

Here they are, you ready? Honor God, honor Christ, honor the Spirit. How about that? God is mentioned in verse 5 as the one who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell and He's also mentioned in verse 6. The Son is mentioned in verse 8 as the Son of Man who must be confessed and mentioned again in verse 10. The Spirit is mentioned in verse 10 and again in verse 12. And here you have a magnificent trinitarian passage and in the broad sense of things you cannot avoid hell if you're not a trinitarian. That is to say you're going to hell if you're a unitarian. You cannot honor God without honoring Christ and you cannot honor Christ without honoring the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit points to Christ and Christ shows us the Father. It's a package. The only way you'll ever avoid eternal disaster is to honor God, honor Christ, and to honor the Holy Spirit. How basic is that?

Let's just take the first one, honor God. Escaping hell starts with honoring God. Go down to verse 5, the middle there, "Fear the one who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell." Fear or honor. This is where it starts, folks. God must be honored. God must be feared. Let me tell you what hypocrites are like. They don't fear God, they fear men. And they live their lives to please men, they live their lives for the outside which is visible and not the inside which is invisible. Stop fearing men

and start fearing God. That's the point. Everything the Pharisees and scribes did, Jesus said they did it before men, right? Remember the Sermon on the Mount? Everything they did, they fasted to be seen of men, they prayed to be seen of men, they gave to be seen of men. They lived their superficial morality to be seen of men. And the truth was, they were painted white on the outside, as Matthew 23 says, and they were rotten like dead men's bones on the inside. It was all about a show for men, a fair show in the flesh, Paul calls it in Galatians. Fear God.

And why should you fear God? Three reasons. Number one, God will uncover what is hidden....God will uncover what is hidden. Look at verse 2, "There is nothing covered up that will not be revealed and hidden that will not be known. According to whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you have whispered in the inner rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." Pretty simple, isn't it? No one escapes exposure...no one escapes exposure. Everybody is revealed.

By the way, this is a favorite saying of our Lord. Luke 8:17 has the same statement, "Nothing covered that won't be uncovered, nothing hidden that won't be brought to light." He also said it in Matthew 10:26 that was up in Galilee, a parallel passage in Matthew 10 occurred earlier in His ministry in Galilee, same truth. It's also in Mark 4:22. And it really is a principle drawn out of the Old Testament because at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes the last verse of the last chapter, chapter 12 verse 14, "God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden whether it is good or evil." Nobody gets away with anything. Hypocrites may be successful here, but this is it. Not all hypocrites are successful. I've often said, time and truth go hand and hand. And in most cases if you're a hypocrite, generally it will come out. Time and truth go hand in hand, given enough time you know the truth about someone. But for sure if you can cover it up, and some men's sins as Paul wrote to Timothy, some men's sins are known here, 1 Timothy 5:24 and 25. But some men's sins won't be known till the future but they will be known. Matthew 16:27, "The Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will recompense every man according to his deeds." And Romans 2 and verse 6 says the same thing, "He's going to render every man according to His deeds." Verse 16, "On the day when according to My gospel God will judge the secrets of men." And 1 Corinthians 4:5, "He's going to reveal not only the secrets of the heart but the motives." Whatever you said in the dark is going to come out in the light, verse 3 adds, which is just a metaphoric way of saying it's all going to be exposed.

And He talks about an inner room which just as a note. Houses in those days were made out of dirt, basically. And you remember when Jesus talked about thieves digging through and stealing? Because you basically dug through the wall made out of mud. And so there was normally built inside the house in the middle of the house, away from the outer wall an inner room. And that's where all the valuables were kept. That's what He's talking about. It was a great place to keep your valuables

and it was also the place where you went to whisper when you didn't want anybody to hear you. So He says, "Whatever you have said in the dark is going to be heard in the light, whatever you were saying when everybody was asleep is going to be heard in the light, and whatever you were whispering in the inner room is going to be proclaimed upon the housetops." The housetops were flat, they had a little short wall around them and they were patios. But it was the place where announcements were made. Back in Matthew chapter 10 the disciples were to go on the housetops and preach the gospel. That's where you made public announcements. And Jesus is saying you may have thought you could keep it hidden in the inner room, and I'm telling you it's going to be broadcast from the housetop. And if not in this life, in the life to come when you stand before the judgment seat and the Lord recompenses you for what you've done, everything is going to be made known. Revelation 20:11 to 15, "The books are going to be opened and every man is going to be judged out of those books and the record will be complete and the truth will be known."

So, you want to fear God because He's going to reveal the truth. You're not going to get away with it. The truth of what you are is going to come out and hypocrites will be seen for what they really are and especially if they name the name of God and the name of Jesus Christ. How horrible will be their judgment. Fear God cause you can't hide anything from Him.

Secondly, fear God because God will punish hypocrites in hell. Look at verse 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." Who's that? Who's that? Who can kill the body? People...people can kill each other, they do it all the time, right? I mean, people go through life trying to prevent being killed. And that's the extreme illustration. All that means is "do not be afraid of those who kill the body" simply means don't be afraid of those people when the worst they can do is kill your body. It's not to say that you should only be afraid of murderers. It's simply to say don't be afraid of people because, illustration from the extreme, the worst they can do is kill your body. And that's not the worst that can happen to you, right? You can kill my body, frankly that's a promotion. Right? "Far better to depart and be with Christ," right? I'm better off. The worst you can do to me is usher me into the best that could ever happen to me. But, you see, the character of hypocrisy is this, it fears men. Its preoccupation is what people think, what men think. How I can gain their trust and gain their favor and gain their confidence and how I can have them elevate me and think highly of me so I can take their money. The Pharisees did what they did for money. They did it for money. Jesus said that, Luke 16:14, the Pharisees who were lovers of money. Sure, all false teachers are lovers of money. They want the chief seats, they want the high places, they want the accolades. They want all the elaborate greetings in the marketplace. They want to wear all the fancy stuff because they want to appear to be nobler, more spiritual, more erudite, more elite, more elevated, more transcendent than everybody else so that you'll bow at their feet and give them all that you have so that they can connect you to God. Which is a lie.

But hypocrites, the whole design of a hypocritical religious system is to train people to fear the leaders, to fear men, to put on a show for people. And that's the heart of hypocrisy. But verse 5 says, "I will warn you whom to fear. Fear the one who after he's killed has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him." Who's that? Somebody might say, "Well, that's Satan." It's not Satan. Satan doesn't cast anybody into hell, Satan himself is cast into hell. He's not the king of hell, God is the king of hell. The one is God, He has the power to kill and the authority to cast into hell. Do you know there's nothing in the Scripture that tells us ever to fear Satan? Nothing. You can run around in a panic, afraid of Satan, worried that Satan's coming in their house, coming in their room, going to make them sick, going to kill their kids. There's nothing in the Bible about that. I mean, the bottom line is if you're not a Christian, Satan's your master, he's your lord, he's your father. You're living totally in his world. But if you're a believer, you've been delivered from Satan completely. He's, as it were, under your feet. "Greater is He that is in you than He's in the world."

You say, "Well what should be our attitude toward Satan?" Simple, resist the devil and he'll what? He'll flee. He has no power over us. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to fear Satan. It just says in 1 Peter 5:9, "Resist him, be firm in your faith." But who are we told to fear over and over and over in Scripture? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of...what?...of wisdom." Everything starts with fearing God. This is *phobasete*(??) from which we get phobia, a clinging, gnawing, nagging, overpowering fear. Let it be of the one who can cast you into hell. Don't fear men, fear God.

Now there are some people who don't believe in hell. This passage makes havoc of their idea by virtue of the contrast. Some people say that it just means the grave, that hell here means the grave, that He has the authority to cast you into the grave. Don't fear men who can just kill you, fear God who can kill you and cast you into the grave. That's nonsense because if there is no hell, and there is no eternal torment, then God can't do anything to you that man can't do. If a person kills you and you go out of existence, or God kills you and you go out of existence, it's the same deal. So the fact that you should not fear that men can kill you but fear God who can kill you...and here's the key word...and after that cast you into hell, makes it very clear that there is something after death, otherwise there's no contrast between what God can do to you and men can do to you if there is no punishment. What God can do is far worse, far greater than death. All men can do is kill you. What God can do is far worse than that because God not only can kill you physically but send you to eternal punishment. And by the way, the word here for hell in the Greek is

*Gehenna* from *ge*, valley and *hinnom*, the valley of hinnom. If you go to Israel today, you can see the Valley of Hinnom, it's right there. It's south and west of Jerusalem, down off the plateau where Jerusalem sits. Originally when the Jews got into idolatry, that's where they set up their high places to worship Baal and Molech. It was a place of perversity and blasphemy and idolatry. It was called

Toffit and Toffit, according to many of the lexicons means a place of spitting out, or a place of vomiting, a place of abhorrence. And some indicate it could be connected to words that mean a place of burning. Well in each of those cases it's representative of what happened there. Because what the Jews did there, going against God, of course, was they built a place to sacrifice to idols and the sacrifices were just staggering. What they did was create a massive pit at this high place of idol worship down in the valley. It had a very deep hole and they just poured wood into that deep hole and wicked kings, Ahaz and Manasseh actually sacrificed their children there, threw them into the fire pit as offerings to the gruesome idol Molech, 2 Chronicles 28 and 33. And others followed, Jeremiah 32:35 talks about others copied it and they had these babies being sacrificed to Molech.

Well Jeremiah came along and predicted that God was going to bring divine judgment on this horrible place and this horrible practice, that God was going to come against this terrible wickedness that occurred in the Valley of Hinnom in Gehenna and He was going to come with mass destruction and the Valley would become known as the Valley of Slaughter. And, of course, that did happen when Israel's enemies, Judah's enemies came and destroyed them. God-fearing Josiah came along and for a moment there was a respite, God-fearing Josiah obliterated all the idolatry out of the place. You remember the reforms under Josiah, he stopped all the abominations, he stopped all the idol worship, 2 Kings chapter 23. And he turned it into the Jerusalem rubbish center...city dump. And the fire kept burning but it was burning the refuse of the city. And so the Valley of Hinnom known as Gehenna was a place of constant burning, constant smoke, constant inhaling of brimstone. And it was also associated with blasphemy and cursing. And so the Jews picked up the word Gehenna and made it the word for hell. Hell is an ever-burning fire, smoke, darkness, indicating wickedness, abomination, divine judgment and slaughter. And our Lord had so much to say about it, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, darkness, blackness, aloneness, torment, burning. And our Lord says you want to fear somebody? Fear the one who can send you there. Yes, end of verse 5, I tell you, fear Him.

How can you avoid being a hypocrite? Stop fearing men and start fearing God, the true and living God who will uncover everything that is hidden and who has the authority to send you to hell. Third, one further reason to fear God, nothing escapes His knowledge...nothing escapes His knowledge. Verse 6... "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

You say, "What is that?" Well back in Matthew 10 it has a little more positive feel to it. But here it doesn't feel too positive because fear Him, fear going into hell, and then what's the transition into "are not five sparrows sold for two cents, and yet not one of them is forgotten before God, and indeed the very hairs of your head are numbered." Very simple, He knows everything. It's omniscience. He knows everything. Sparrows were little tiny birds that the poor picked up, caught in nets and ate, plucked them, skinned them, roasted them and ate them like tiny little hors d'oeuvres and they fed

the poor. They were so cheap you could buy five for two cents. In Matthew it says they were two for a penny. So what happened is for two pennies you got an extra one thrown in...two for a penny, or five for two pennies. A penny was one-sixteenth of a day's wage, a denarii is called an assarion, it was a copper Roman coin. They were cheap food for the poor. Nobody cared about sparrows, the only reason the poor cared about sparrows was they could eat them. If there was anything, you'd think God wouldn't bother Himself about it would be sparrows. Couldn't there be one sparrow somewhere on the planet that God didn't know about? No...no. And if He knows about sparrows, He knows about you. In fact, in Matthew 10:29 it says that He knows when the sparrow falls and that word can mean hops. He not only knows every sparrow but He knows when every sparrow hops.

You say, "Wait a minute. Why would God bother Himself with that?" It's not that He learned it, it's not that He acquired it. Listen to this. God has never acquired any knowledge. God has never learned anything. If it is, He knows it. If it is, He knows it. Nobody has to tell him. He doesn't have to study it. He doesn't acquire it. If it is, He knows it. And the point is this, He even knows the very hairs of your head and they are all numbered...one, two, three, four and with some of you He runs out pretty quickly. Right? The average is 150 thousand hairs. That's average. And I'm a little shy of that and so are some of you, but...six billion people on the world, you can do a little math and find out how many numbers God has to keep everybody's hair. And what about when one falls out, does He catch that? If it is, He knows it, He doesn't acquire information.

What's the point of saying that? The point of saying that is..look, you better fear God because He knows everything...EVERYTHING, absolutely everything. Back in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 14:45, 2 Samuel 14:11, 1 Kings 1:52 is a familiar Old Testament phrase, "Not one hair of your head shall fall." By the way, that same phrase is in Luke 21:18, same thing about the hairs of your head. "Yet not a hair of your head will perish." That was God's way of saying when judgment comes, I'll protect you...I'll protect you. You'll also find it in Acts 27:34. God knows every hair on every person on the planet. He knows the minutest, most inconsequential details because if it is, He knows it. So don't think somehow you don't need to fear God because in the end something will slip by...ah, it won't slip by. The truth will be uncovered, hell awaits the hypocrite, and God knows everything.

And then I love this, verse 7, "Do not fear...do not fear," cause some were starting to get nervous. "You're of more value than many sparrows." This is another way of saying the Lord knows those that are His. That's where the transition comes in the text. Not before verse 6 but there, you can see their eyes...if God knows everything...ahhhh...how will I survive? Oh, now that you already fear God, don't fear, right? He says in verse 5, "Fear," and in verse 7, "Don't fear." If you've already feared God, don't fear God. You are of more value than many sparrows.

I'll close with this. At the end of the Old Testament is Malachi. And in chapter 3 verse 16 we read this, I love this...Malachi is all about judgment, judgment, judgment, coming judgment, day of the

Lord, devastating, final eschatological judgment. He's coming. Chapter 3 verse 2, "Who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? He will sit as a smelter and a purifier of silver," and all this about judgment. Verse 5, "I'll draw near to you for judgment." Verse 6, "I don't change, therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed," and goes on and on about all this coming of judgment. And then verse 16, I love this. "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another." And what do you think they said? Yikes...judgment is coming, the day of the Lord is coming..it's coming. And they were expressing their concern back and forth and it says, "And the Lord gave attention and heard it." He heard their fears that maybe somehow they would get overlooked. And a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name.

Listen, if you already fear the Lord, don't fear. He has your name in His book. And I love verse 17. And this is the hymn we sang to start our service. "And they will be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, on the day that I prepare My own possession and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who doesn't serve Him. Yes, verse 1 of 4, a day is coming, burning like a furnace. All the arrogant, every evil doer will be chaff. The day is coming to set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, that it will not leave them root or branches. But for you who fear My name, the Son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. You will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall and you will tread down the wicked for they shall be ashes under the soul of your feet on the day which I am preparing, says the Lord of hosts.

Don't be afraid. If you are fearing God, don't fear. He knows everything and He knows you are His. If you are not His, time to fear God who will uncover the truth, who will sentence you to hell and who knows everything.

But how do you come to know God? What is the only way to come to know God? You cannot honor God unless you honor the Son. That's for next time.

Father, we thank You again for Your truth and for the glory of this Word to us. We feel like we've been there with Jesus. How rich. Thank You, Lord, for bringing this truth to our hearts and now it is our responsibility to act upon it. We pray, Lord, that there will be some who will finally fear You in the right and true sense and embrace Christ and that all of us would rest and rejoice in the fact that if we fear You we don't have to fear You because You've written our name down and in the day that You make up Your jewels, we'll be there. I pray, Lord, for those who do not yet know this salvation and this confidence that You'd be gracious to them even now, we pray.

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).