

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

**Chapter 11- Luke 11:53-12:5**

**228- Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees**

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**Luke 11:53-12:5**

**53** When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects,

**54** plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.

**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.

**2** But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

**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!

To the Glory of God

Now in God's Providence- we have been learning all through Chapter 11 that false religion is all hypocrisy. False religion does not truly know God, it cannot bring anyone to God, and it cannot bring anyone into God's Kingdom. False religion does not provide forgiveness; it does not provide redemption because it has no true Mercy.

The Mercy of God is very little understood today. Many think that God's Mercy is in place to allow them to live as they choose, to do what

is right in their own eyes, or to continue on in their rebellion against God or their sin.

But true Mercy is that which allows sinners to repent and approach God for forgiveness. Grace is the Power of God that compels them to repent but mercy is that which keeps God's Wrath back so they may not be destroyed before they repent. Mercy is that which gives unworthy sinners space to change, time to turn away from sin, opportunity to reason with themselves so that they may be saved. And since false religion has no capacity for anyone to be saved- there is no Mercy.

False religion 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 all hypocrisy. It is people pretending to know God, pretending to know truth- having an outward appearance of human morality and doing good and to do right on some human level and to pretend or imagine 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 nothing but hypocrisy. It was a corruption and a perversion of true Old Testament worship. It had nothing to do with love for God- only in the keeping very detailed and meticulous ordinances and carnal commandments. It was apostate- which means that it had defected from the truth and it was hypocritical.

And if that was not clear *before* Jesus came- it became crystal clear *after* He arrived. There's nothing like having the Truth and Jesus spoke only Truth. He was Truth incarnate and He made it crystal clear how hypocritical the false religion of Judaism was.

Now up to this point in Dr. 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 Jesus has confirmed the veracity and the truthfulness and the reliability of that radical Message in a massive and extensive display of supernatural miracles to make it very clear that He was indeed God in human flesh speaking Divine Truth.

However, in spite of the clarity of His message and in spite of the truthfulness of it and in spite of all the miracles that attest to Him- the majority of the people of Israel- both in Galilee and in Judea- held tightly to their man-made 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 and orchestrated by the leaders of the Judaistic apostate religion- the Pharisees and the scribes. They put a spin on everything Jesus said and did. They took pure Truth and twisted it to make it look sinister and evil. They took pure innocence and sinlessness and made it look like the devil. They took effort after effort of preaching and teaching Divine Truth and performing unmistakable miracles to back it up and called God Incarnate, "Beelzebal". And I spent a great deal of time going over this because it is an amazing thing when you see it; it is odd, and it almost seems harsh the way that Jesus dealt with these people until you remember that Jesus was perfect and what Jesus did was right.

Now back in chapter 11- things have reached a sort of high point- a kind of crescendo- a moment of crisis. The people, for the most part, both in Galilee and in Judea have utterly rejected Jesus. They're holding on to their false religion. And the architects of that false religion are the Pharisees and the scribes. And so Jesus confronts them at a lunch from verses 37 to the end of the chapter.

And our precious and kind and merciful Savior pronounced six curses on the Pharisees which we have looked at in detail. And in so doing He pronounced a curse on their whole form of apostate religion throughout all time.

Now as we went through this amazing Chapter- and we saw this unbelievable hostile confrontation- we saw something that we always need to remember. False and man- made religion is not Man operating at his highest degree of morality- it is Man wallowing in his lowest degree of fallenness. False religion is not noble and it does not have anything that should attract any genuine believer to it. It is all bad – all the time.

False religion is not a noble attempt at being good; it is not a noble attempt to reach God and to make ourselves better. False and man-made religion is just the opposite. It is a cruel and merciless descent

into satanic deception. And that is why Jesus said that He had more in common with the publicans and sinners and the hated tax collectors and the prostitutes and the riff-raff and the scum of society than He did with the religious elite who tithed their seeds and had an outward appearance of morality.

So false religion is Man operating at his lowest. And that descent is described in **Romans 1**, for example, and we have to remember that **Romans 1** and the Judgment of Abandonment that **Romans 1** talks about does not deal with people who are atheists. It deals with people who know about God and yet go about to invent their own gods.

Over 500 years ago- when John Calvin was examining Roman Catholicism- he wrote a letter to some Christian people just before they were martyred. And he said he was writing about Roman Catholic priests who were portrayed in his day as the very best of men and the most righteous and noble of all men. And Calvin wrote this to those believers who were going to be killed at the hands of the Roman Church,

"The vows of Roman Catholic priests 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 God 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."

That's pretty strong language. But that is what false religion is. 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. And the people had become so entrenched in their own religion, they had invested so much in it, and it made them feel so good about themselves- which is what self-righteousness always does- they weren't about to abandon that man-made religion but they would rather kill their own true Savior and scream for His blood than to repent.

And even though God incarnate issues out these Divine Condemnations towards these religious hypocrites- as we see in the last two verses of Chapter 11- the people were not convicted but became

fixed in their resentment and resistance and animosity and rejection of Jesus Christ. Let's read those last two verses again together:

**53** When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects,  
**54** plotting against Him to catch *Him* in something He might say.

That is the sum total of all their focus on Jesus. This is the place that they now come to after all they have seen and all they have heard. There is no desire to hear what Jesus was saying and be convicted and change- but from now on- the only reason why these people wanted to ask Jesus anything and the only reason they wanted Him to say anything was so they could trap Him and catch Him in something that they could use against Him.

And these two verses mark a dramatic change in the character of the crowd. Back during the early years of His ministry- most of these people were really interested in the Lord. They were peaked and they were curious and they were hungry and excited and enthusiastic. They were just coming off the ministry of John Baptist and they were eager for the Kingdom and they were eager to find out if Jesus really was the Messiah. And they were stunned and shocked by the amazing power that Jesus exhibited in all of His thousands of unmistakable miracles which He did day by day. So Jesus was very attractive to them. They were thinking that just maybe He might actually be the real, sure nuff Messiah.

But as the months went on- that all began to change. And by the time we come into the beginning of Chapter 12- almost all of the crowd has sided with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the enemies of Jesus. Most of the crowd is now committed and they are now rooted and dug in and entrenched in their false religion and they see Jesus now as the enemy.

And so from here on to the end of Luke Gospel Account- there's an ever increasing hostility and there is a tone in Jesus' ministry of warning and judgment that has escalated. And for the most part- the decision has been made and Jesus now warns them of the coming Judgment and the promises of blessings get fewer and farther apart.

These people were so busy tithing their seeds that they forgot all about weighty things like love and mercy and forgiveness. These people

were so busy ceremonially washing their hands and keeping up appearances that they forgot all about patience and kindness.

There will be promises and there will be calls to follow Him. And there will be words of blessing to those who do. But primarily the note that Jesus sounds from now on 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 these people 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 new section- there is a massive crowd that has gathered around Jesus. And this occurs in Judea down in the south. And 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 this happened a lot because these false leaders were always coming to trap Jesus to try to catch Him in His words. And so the crowds begin to grow and grow and grow and verse 1 says,

### **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.**

Now let me just tell you a little bit about this setting. The phrase, "**Under these circumstances,**" means in the original Greek: *"meanwhile"* or *"during this period"* or *"while all this was going on"*. In other words- during the same period when this hostility between the Pharisees and Jesus had been escalating to its fever pitch this new section begins. So while all that was going on- the crowds continued to grow until look what Luke says:

**... so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another...**

Now this phrase "**so many thousands of people had gathered**" uses the plural form of a Greek word that literally means: *ten thousand*. Now this is the highest number that has a word in the Greek language. And so that's why when you read about multitudes of angels- the Bible says that it's "**ten thousand times ten thousand**" because there's not a word for anything more than ten thousand. There is no word in the Greek for a hundred thousand or one million or one billion. And so what you have here is the plural of that. So literally it says,

"So many ten thousands of the multitude."

So this is multiples of tens of thousands of people. So this is literally a massive crowd of people that is gathering because this is the biggest issue going on in Israel right now. You see, religion *dominated* the average Jews' life back then. Today work or school or I-pads or football or barbeque dominates *our* lives. And that is because we are affluent. Only wealthy nations can afford to be dominated by things that don't matter. Only safe and prosperous nations have the luxury of spending time with foolishness and recreation and idleness and toys. Poor nations have to try to find something to eat or something to wear or somewhere to lay down before dark. But the people of wealthy nations waste their days in fantasies and laziness and getting fat and in pleasures.

But here in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century- the life of the average Jew was dominated by his religion. It was on his mind constantly and it guided everything he did and it fashioned everything he believed.

So the life of the Jew was dominated by religion and the religion was dominated by the Pharisees and scribes and so when the Jew sees these men confronting Jesus- they will normally join in with their leaders. And this makes for quite a circus and a spectacle.

So you have these huge crowds drawn in by the conflict, and most of these people are hostile toward Jesus. Most of them are entrenched in their false religion. They are a part of the hypocritical, apostate, Judaistic system.

And this crowd is so large that Luke says that they're literally stepping on each other. Now keep in mind that this is 2,000 years ago and so they didn't have any sound system or microphones. And if the crowd is tens of thousands of people- how are they all going to hear the

dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees? How are they going to hear what Jesus says in response to these people trying to trap Him unless you get close? So this is like the crowd that gathers at a car wreck times ten thousand.

And so everybody's trying to get close and so you actually have a mob scene on your hands here and they're literally stepping on top of each other. And so what you have from verse 1 right to Chapter 13:9 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*...**

So here is a very important Principle when dealing with Jesus. Jesus speaks to His Own first. And that is why we must guard our hearts, dear friends, to make sure that we belong to Jesus, that we are His, that we are truly saved and not deceived, that we have made our calling, and our election sure and certain because we have been redeemed and born again and we do love Him and we are striving to obey Him- not perfectly- but honestly.

So the Lord is not speaking to the general crowd here. They're going to hear from Him later on- but Jesus speaks first to those within this huge crowd who would fall into the category of being disciples, mathetes, learners, or students.

Now this doesn't say anything about their faith or whether they were born again or whether they truly believed unto salvation. It doesn't say where they are spiritually- it's just that at this point- they are classified as those who were at least learning to some extent. They may fall away next week- but on that day- they were learners or students.

So at this point- they're still open, they're still interested, they're still curious. And maybe they're saved and maybe they're on their way to being saved or maybe they're lost and curious or maybe they're lost and on their way out.

But whatever their condition- at this point, on this day- these mathetes are still there because they're attracted to Jesus to some degree. So in other words- this is not the hostile group. And some of



them had already become true believers and some were in the process of being converted.

So it is to these people that Jesus speaks first. It is to those who haven't made up their mind or those who are just coming to understand Who He really is- the learners and the real students. And it is to them that He gives this 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*...**

Jesus is not going to cast His pearls before swine. Those in this huge crowd that are locked in their unbelief- it is what **3**, says:

**“My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh;**

We must remember, dear friends- that the Grace of God is entirely free and unencumbered. The distribution of God's Grace and Mercy is solely up to God, based on His Free Will, based entirely on His Prerogative. And we rejoice at that. But because God's Grace is free- we must then finish the equation and know that God does not owe you Grace. God is not obligated to give you Mercy. And we cannot do anything that would earn or deserve God's Grace and Mercy. And therefore- Grace and Mercy- the two ingredients or qualities that allow us to be saved- are not distributed to everyone and even among those to whom they are distributed- they are not distributed in equal measure.

And that is the rub with the Truth about Grace because sooner or later you come to the conclusion that Grace is not “fair” in the human sense of that word. And that doesn't mean that God is “unfair” but that God is not interested in having to measure up to some arbitrary standard of human fairness- God is interested in being God and in being known and loved and enjoyed forever.

So there comes a point when God will cease the imposition of His Grace in a person's life and He will cease to sovereignly stop them from sinning against Him and He will cease to deal with them to break them and convict them- when a person's rebellion is so fixed and when their heart is so hard. It's not that God will not make anyone disbelieve and

it's not that God will force anyone to sin- He doesn't and He won't- but He will allow a person to stay in your unbelief and will not intervene on their behalf to rescue them.

Now anytime you get into a deep subject like this- it is very important to also say that there is not anyone who sincerely desires to be saved who will be rejected by God. Nobody who wants to come to God or forgiveness and salvation will be turned away. The very fact that they are convicted of their sins in the first place and the very fact that their eyes are open to the fact that they are lost shows that God is dealing with them and everybody that God is dealing with will be saved.

So we should walk softly before God, begging Him for Mercy, begging Him to not be weary of us, begging Him to deal with us a little longer, begging Him to keep our hearts soft and tender and make it to where we can be easily convicted of our sin and make it easy for us to repent and turn away from sin and to never cease His gracious imposition in our lives.

And it is to those people that Jesus speaks first. So in that huge massive crowd that is filled with such hostility and unbelief toward Him there is scattered among them still those who are interested. And in verse 4- Jesus calls them:

### **My friends**

... which has got to be one of the most endearing and sweetest terms that God could ever call us. And so Jesus is talking to those who are friendly towards Him. And down in verse 32- we see that it's not a very large group because Jesus describes them like this:

### **Luke 12:32**

**Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.**

So in the middle of this massive, multiple of tens of thousands of hostile and unbelieving people- there is this little flock who are believing and some who are coming to believe and perhaps some who won't. But it is to these that Jesus speaks first.

And this is the first thing that Jesus wants to tell these students- this is the most important thing that Jesus wants these people to hear:

## **Luke 12:1b**

**... Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy...**

Beware, stay on your guard, keep your guard up, don't be fooled, be watchful, stay alert, pay attention, don't sleep, stay on the wall, be careful, take heed, don't minimize this, don't slouch this off, don't think this doesn't apply to you, don't be naive. 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.

Now the word "Beware" is literally "take heed to yourselves". So what Jesus is saying is, "*Watch yourselves*". So this is very personal. Each person has to take this to heart. Protect yourselves because as Jesus says in **Matthew 24**,

There are many out there who want to lead you astray, they're all over the place. So you better protect yourselves.

... and what you need to protect yourselves from is **"the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy"**.

Now in order to get an idea about leaven and what Jesus is talking about- we need to skip ahead a little and look at **Luke 13:20&21**- so please turn there with me:

## **Luke 13:20-21**

**20** And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?

**21** It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

Here Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to leaven. And He describes what leaven does.

**"Which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."**

... and that's what leaven does. You take the leaven and you put it in the dough and it permeates. And the word for leaven is *zume* from which we get our word, "enzymes."

And the idea is you take this basic fermented old dough sitting in its fermenting juices and you put it into new dough and it expands it; 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."* And this reminds me of what Jude taught about this. Please turn with me to the Book of Jude.

### **Jude 21-23**

**21** keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

**22** And have mercy on some, who are doubting;

**23** save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Now look again at the last phrase of verse 23:

**... hating even the garment polluted by the flesh**

... and this is very graphic, harsh language. It's so graphic that you can hardly speak of it in public. What Jude is saying here is that getting close to people in false religion is like taking a hold of underwear that has been stained from bodily elimination. So getting near people in false religion is like taking hold of that.

And Jude says that we are to hate that. Hate it. Despise it, be repulsed by it, to turn away from it in disgust. So you stay away from that kind of spiritual corruption for the sake of your soul. And this is the same kind of thing that Jesus said back **Luke 11** where He said that getting near a Pharisee is like walking across a tomb and being defiled by it. Beware of the permeating fermenting influence of false religion.

And we all need to hear this because we live in a world today that is just literally overwhelmed by false religion. The *easiest* thing to find is a false teacher; the *easiest* thing to hear is false doctrine. The *hardest* thing to find is a real godly under-shepherd and the *hardest* thing to find today is Biblical Truth. And if you doubt what I say- just try it and see the re-action of people against you. People will tolerate rapists and mass murders and they will tolerate evil, evil people- but

they have no toleration at all for people who are genuinely preaching and teaching and endeavoring to live according to God's Word.

So as you struggle and struggle year end and year out to have a Biblical Church and to change things to be submissive to Scripture- it is truly an uphill climb. It is very hard and very slow and many times- it seems as if you just can't make it and then suddenly God moves and you look around and you're higher up the mountain than you ever dreamed.

But all along the way there is an abundance of frustrations and hindrances and disappointments and the easiest thing you can do is to either slow down or stop or quit. And keep in mind that all along the way- you are struggling to even figure things out because you don't have all knowledge and you don't have all experience and you're not Omniscient and you're not Omnipotent and so you make mistakes and you say the wrong thing and you don't see something and you don't quite understand everything.

And yet after a trial- you look around and you see that Scripture tells you exactly what the situation is and Scripture tells you exactly how to handle it and Scripture tells you what to do and what to say and what to think and how to act.

And then you know that God is with you and as you continue to press on and you continue to seek and continue to knock and continue to ask and continue to struggle- you are zealous and you repent daily.

Now in **Matthew 16:6** Jesus said it again but there He added this,

**"Beware also of the leaven of the Sadducees."**

... so the Sadducees weren't any better than the Pharisees. And then in **Mark 8:15** He added,

**"And beware of the leaven of Herod."**

So with the Pharisees it was legalistic fundamentalism- it was works and exactness and preciseness without mercy and love and 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 corruption.

So Jesus says this stuff permeates everything and there's a verse in **1Corinthians 15:33** that's good to know. It says,

**"Evil company corrupts good morals."**

... and people immediately think of *physical* company and that God wants us to stay away from those bad kind of people. But listen to what it actually means. The word for "company" here is *homilia* and it is where we get the English word, "Homily" from. So in the Greek root it means: *a sermon or a lecture or a communication or a conversation or a teaching*.

So what Paul was actually saying in **1Corinthians** was the very same thing that Jesus was saying here- watch what you are being taught and what is formulating your life and be careful who your teachers are.

So the reason that bad associations with evil people corrupt good morals is because of what those people say and what they teach and what they believe and in how they live their lives. So don't expose yourself to a sermon or a teaching or a lecture or a communication or a doctrine through media or a conversation that's going to give you evil deceiving lies because the Bible says that it will corrupt you. And that's what the Psalmist was talking about in **Psalm 1** when he said,

### **Psalm 1**

**1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!**

**2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.**

**3 He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.**

**4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.**

**5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.**

**6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.**

So Jesus says to those who are still open to Him that they must avoid the hypocrisy that's all around them. But how do you do that? How do we avoid being a hypocrite? And in verses 2-12- the Lord Himself is going to give you three things, three necessary realities,

three essential obligations to avoid being a hypocrite. So 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:

1. Honor God the Father
2. Honor Jesus Christ- God the Son
3. Honor God the Spirit

God the Father 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. God the Son is mentioned in verse 8 as the Son of Man who must be confessed and mentioned again in verse 10. And God the Holy Spirit is mentioned in verse 10 and again in verse 12.

And so here you have a magnificent Trinitarian passage here and so in the broadest 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. So it's a complete package. The only way you'll ever avoid eternal disaster is to honor God, honor Christ, and to honor the Holy Spirit.

And Lord willing, we will go into that deeply next week.

Amen. Let's pray.