

# BEWARE OF HYPOCRITES

LUKE 12:1-12

**Being fooled by hypocrites can be deadly to your Christian walk.**

## I. BEWARE OF HYPOCRITES (VS 1-3)

**Knowing the bible and how to apply it to your life is the best guard against being fooled by hypocrites.**

- A. RELIGION ATTRACTS ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE (1a)
- B. RELIGION ATTRACTS HYPOCRITES (1b)
- C. GOD EXPOSES HYPOCRITES FOR WHO THEY ARE (2-3)

## II. DON'T BE AFRAID OF HYPOCRITES (VS 4-7)

**Proper fear and knowing god can prevent us from being fooled by hypocrites.**

- A. HYPOCRITES ONLY HAVE POWER YOU GIVE THEM (4)
- B. GOD HAS ALL POWER (5)
- C. IF GOD IS FOR US WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? (6-7)

## III. DON'T HESITATE TO REJECT HYPOCRITES (VS 8-12)

**Having knowledge of scripture and having an intimate relationship with god will enable the holy spirit to work in you to reject hypocrites.**

- A. SUBMITTING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (8)
- B. REJECTING THE HOLY SPIRIT (9-10)
- C. DEPENDING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT (11-12)

# Beware of Hypocrites

Luke 12:1-12

At the end of chapter 11, Jesus mercilessly rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees for their approach to religion. Jesus characterized them as unmarked graves. In other words, just by being with and teaching others, they were polluting them. Jesus said they looked good on the outside but were rotten on the inside. They appeared to know and apply Scriptures to their lives and to others' lives, but in reality, their religion was worthless. Jesus gave them a good beat down. In today's passage, He will explain His confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisees to His disciples.

There are always people in life and in church who are ready to tell you what to do. They make sure everybody knows how spiritual they are. But when you press them a little, they will back down.

At a church meeting, a very wealthy man rose to give a testimony about his Christian faith. "I'm a millionaire," he said, "and I attribute it all to the blessings of God in my life. I remember that turning point in my faith. I had just earned my first dollar and I went to a church meeting that night. The speaker was a missionary who told about his work. I knew that I only had a dollar bill and had to either give it all to God's work or nothing at all. So at that moment, I decided to give my whole dollar to God. I believe that God blessed me and continues to bless me because I gave Him everything."

When he finished, there was an awed silence at his testimony as he moved toward his seat. As he sat down, a little old lady leaned over and said to him: "I dare you to do it again."

At that point, the man went a little deaf. Jesus doesn't have much patience with hypocrites. As we study through this morning's text, let me give us two attitudes to approach it with. First, if you find yourself to be a hypocrite, stop it. If your Christian walk is being disrupted by hypocrites, tell them to get lost.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES CAN BE DEADLY TO YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK.** Living the Christian life is a difficult task. It takes a great deal of energy to pursue holiness in our personal lives. When hypocrites come along with the appearance of wisdom and holiness, and then try to tell us what we should believe and do, pursuing holiness becomes almost impossible. Legalists will heap on so many false expectations on you, if you let them, they will crush you in the end. Jesus warned His disciples to beware of them. The section we are studying through this morning fits into the larger section of chapter 12, verses 1-48. In this section, Jesus instructs His followers how to function "in the world." The two driving principles will be to seek God's will and agenda knowing that God is concerned and He cares.

## BEWARE OF HYPOCRITES (VS 1-3)

In verses 1-3 Jesus warns His disciples to beware of Hypocrites. KNOWING THE BIBLE AND HOW TO APPLY IT TO YOUR LIFE IS THE BEST GUARD AGAINST BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES. We need to keep in mind that the people Jesus confronted knew the Bible and were able to quote it. Further, they did a lot of religious stuff that made them look good. Jesus said they made sure to tithe perfectly. They made sure to wash themselves carefully and ceremonially before every meal. They taught the Bible and quoted it regularly. They also prayed regularly in public. Jesus said they looked perfect on the outside but inside they were dirty, corroded, and dead. They looked very holy on the outside but were rotten on the inside.

In the first half of verse 1 we shouldn't be surprised to learn that religion attracts all kinds of people. The United States is probably the most religious country in the world. Now I am not equating religion with authentic Christianity. Authentic Christianity is merely one religion among many in the United States. It has become fashionable in the United States to talk about spirituality. People will say things like, "I am a very spiritual person." However, by saying that, they in no way mean they are Christian. Even within Christianity there is a difference between religious people and authentic Christians.

Luke informs us that right after this public confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisees a crowd started to gather around Jesus. It is a large crowd. In fact Luke says it is many thousands. It is getting so crowded, that they are stepping on one another and tripping over each other. Everyone wants to hear Jesus. That should be a good sign, shouldn't it? People are hungry to see, hear, and touch Jesus.

It amazes me to see how mesmerized people are with religious people who are able to quote the Bible, especially when these people speak as if they have wisdom and authority. People are drawn to television evangelists who perform miracles and demonstrate great emotion. All sorts of people are drawn to religion. All sorts of people were drawn to Jesus. But Jesus knew who each one was. Today He still knows who each one of us is. But don't be confused by church people. Religion attracts all sorts of people. It attracts authentic believers and phony bologna people as well.

In the second half of verse one Jesus informs us that religion attracts hypocrites. It's interesting that Jesus makes hypocrisy His first topic of discussion. There is an interpretation problem we must deal with here in this second part of verse 1. The NIV says that "Jesus began to speak first to His disciples." The NASB says, "He began saying to His disciples first of all." The question is to how to determine what the word "first" is to be connected to. Is it connected to the disciples? In other words is Jesus addressing the disciples first, before He addresses anyone else? Or does the word "first" refer to the topic? Is Jesus saying, "First and most important of all, be on guard against hypocrisy."? My Greek is nowhere close to being good enough to determine which of these interpretations is most correct. However, most

of the English translations I looked at seem to lean towards the first option. Jesus seems to be addressing His disciples first. So even though Jesus is addressing the disciples first, the first topic He brings up is hypocrisy.

Now let's see what He says, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Now that's interesting, isn't it? The rules guys, the ones who dot their i's and cross their t's are the ones Jesus says to be careful of. The word hypocrisy describes actors in the Greek culture. They are stage people. More to the point, a hypocrite is one who lives a double life. And who do actors act for? They act for other people. They act for you and me. They are concerned about looking right. They are concerned to project the correct image. People who go around quoting Scripture, telling others what to do, pointing out the sins of others are good candidates to be religious actors. Hypocrites are people who are continually on the lookout for the sins in other people's lives. Almost always, their own personal lives are a mess. They function one level above depression because deep down they must know they are frauds. The deceptive thing is that these actors are good at acting. They look good on the outside. They appear to have great families and they appear to have it together. Please don't be fooled. When people are right there to give you advice as to how you should think or behave, be very careful to examine their lives first before acting on their advice.

Why do I say that? Because Jesus calls the hypocrisy, yeast. The characteristics of yeast are that it rises, spreads out, and affects the whole lump of dough. In other words, when you add a little bit of yeast to a huge lump of dough, it permeates every bit of it and causes it to rise. For the most part, with few exceptions, yeast is a bad thing in the Bible. In the last chapter Jesus told us what characterized the Pharisees. They looked good on the outside. They read the Bible. They knew how to quote and argue the Bible. They gave a tenth of everything they made to the penny. They even made sure to give a tenth of the vegetables from their vegetable gardens. These guys carefully and ritualistically washed before each meal. And here Jesus says that all these things have nothing to do with righteousness. They are merely good actors. The problem in the modern day church is that these people look so good on the outside, they easily confuse and affect weak Christians who don't know what the Bible actually says and have no idea how to apply it to their lives. Because these weak Christians don't have a mature walk with God, they are easily confused by people who appear to be wise, righteous, and holy because they can quote Scripture and advise you how to apply it to your life, even though they are wrong. They are like yeast. Because most Christians in most churches do not regularly read and study their Bibles, they are easy targets for these legalists. They can easily infect the whole church if not exposed for who they really are.

Mature leaders have to be careful in exposing these hypocrites because they can look like bullies. But not to fear, as verses 2-3 point out, God has a way of exposing hypocrites for who they are. Verse 2 describes that by their very actions hypocrites will be exposed. In the past, I have tried to warn leaders of these legalists and hypocrites. And then I would merely start to pray that God expose them for who they are. Now look at verse 2 carefully. Hypocrites love to expose

the sins of other while hiding their own sins. These legalists walk around the church as if they have been appointed by God to be fruit inspectors. But in the end, God will expose their sins for everyone to see. God has never failed to do this. When these legalists, hypocrites, pastor killers, and church killers meet up with people who are not fooled by them, they tend to show who they are. God exposes them.

And look at verse 3. These people use all sorts of religious language under the guise of concern to gossip and spread dissent throughout the church. Since they are liars, they will always manage to slip up. Again, good leaders can easily expose these lies. Let me give us a couple of principles to live by. If you are focused on the sins of others, take a step back because you are in danger of being one of these hypocrites. First examine your own life. The chances are that you are trying to remove a toothpick from someone else's eye when you indeed have the whole tree in yours.

If you run into someone who is always quoting the Bible and applying it to your life or someone else's life, run away from that person as fast as you can. Most people who are truly in a passionate relationship with God and spend time in the presence of God find enough to keep them occupied. Believe me, as I spend time in the presence of God, I have plenty of sin to look at in my own life without looking for sin in yours. Being in a vibrant personal relationship with God will keep you safe from hypocrites. KNOWING THE BIBLE AND HOW TO APPLY IT TO YOUR LIFE IS THE BEST GUARD AGAINST BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES. Jesus thought these people were dangerous enough to warn His disciples to steer clear of them because they look and sound good on the outside. Paul who had to constantly argue against these hypocritical legalists said this:

*"8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. ...*

*18Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. ...*

*23Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Colossians 2:8, 18, 19, & 23).*

Let me restate this one more time before we leave this section. Legalistic hypocrites are not that hard to identify if you are willing to look beyond the surface. They will come off as very caring people but in reality, if you look beyond the surface, you will find them to be very confused and angry people. If someone is trying to tell you how to manage your money, look to see how they are managing theirs first. If people are telling you how you should parent, look at their parenting record first. If they are telling you what your marriage should look like, look at

their marriage first. I hope you get the idea. Jesus said to beware of them but not to fear them. Keep in mind that Jesus will expose them for who they are.

### **DON'T BE AFRAID OF HYPOCRITES (VS 4-7)**

Paul was not afraid of the legalistic hypocrites. And in verses 4-7 Jesus commanded the disciples not to be afraid of hypocrites. **PROPER FEAR AND KNOWING GOD CAN PREVENT US FROM BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES.** When dealing with the legalists and the hypocrites you need to remember this first principle. Verse 4 demonstrates that hypocrites only have power you give them. Jesus makes it clear that you are not to fear them. In the end, the worst they can do is kill you. Believe me, if you give them power over you, they can make you miserable and they really have no concern for your life. They are only interested in making you into their image. They like to look good before others. They like to feel superior. If you don't play into their hands, they will have no power. If you don't like confrontation, just avoid them. Be very very careful who you share with and what you share. Do not share with someone unless you know they are absolutely safe. Even though you don't need to fear them in the ultimate sense, they can make your present life miserable if you let them.

The remedy is to fear God and God alone. The longer I have been in the ministry, the clearer this point becomes to me. You really need to follow God and God alone because although legalists and hypocrites can ruin your life and make you miserable, they cannot take away your salvation, again unless you allow them to. God cannot only make our lives miserable and kill us; He can send us to hell for an eternity. The word Luke uses for hell here is Gehenna. Gehenna was literally a trash dump southwest of Jerusalem. It was where garbage and dead criminals were dumped and burned. It was a place that constantly smoldered and had a constantly foul smell. When you look at these legalistic hypocrites think about this, "Would you rather face their disapproval or God's?" Hell is not only a place of putrid, never ending physical torment; it is separation from God for an eternity. Please do not fear people who go around pointing out your sins and others' sins. The Holy Spirit has not retired and turned His job over to these people. Let me say this as strongly as possible. They are not the Holy Spirit.

I love the way Jesus set this section up. He started out by telling the disciples not to fear hypocrites. Then He went on to say that the only legitimate Person to fear is God. And now He wraps up the section by telling us we don't have to be afraid of God. In fact His point in verses 6-7 is that if God is for us, who could be against us? You may be in a situation where legalists and hypocrites threaten to take away your peace, your security, and even your life. But Jesus said that God watches over you with tender loving care. He knows the number of hairs on your head. Not even a sparrow falls from the sky without His knowledge. Jesus makes it clear that we are much more valuable to God than a sparrow. The Apostle Paul faced all sorts of persecution from religious people and yet He knew what it was to have an authentic relationship with God. He coined the phrase, "If God is with us, who can

stand against us (Romans 8:31 / NIV)? I have learned over the years to identify those who want me to be conformed to their image. They don't intimidate me. Don't let them intimidate you. Remember God loves you. If you fear God, there is no need to fear any human being. It's important to remember this when dealing with hypocrites because they will want you to conform to their set of rules and regulations. All you really need to do is to conform to God's plan for your life. Knowing the Scriptures, knowing how to apply them to your life, and being in an authentic relationship with God will keep you safe from hypocrites. PROPER FEAR AND KNOWING GOD CAN PREVENT US FROM BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES.

### **DON'T HESITATE TO REJECT HYPOCRITES (VS 8-12)**

Jesus has nothing good to say about legalists and hypocrites. He warned the disciples to beware of them and not to be afraid of them. In verses 8-12 He tells the disciples not to hesitate to reject hypocrites. HAVING A KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE AND HAVING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WILL ENABLE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WORK IN YOU TO REJECT HYPOCRITES. Ultimately only being in touch with the Holy Spirit can give us the confidence to reject hypocrites and legalists. In verse 8 we see what submitting to the Holy Spirit looks like. Here is what life is all about. Jesus said that whoever acknowledges Him as the Son of Man in this life He will acknowledge us in heaven. This is the key. James says that the demons know exactly Who Jesus is. But it takes the Holy Spirit working in us to acknowledge and submit to Jesus as Lord. Now watch this. The hypocrites claim to operate according to the Holy Spirit but watch their lives and listen to their words. They are only interested in laws and getting you to follow their rules. But they really don't have the heart, the compassion, and the love of Jesus. And they don't have the sense of freedom that Paul describes to the church in Corinth:

*"17Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom II Corinthians 3:17 / NIV).*

Let me say this to all of you. I cannot protect you from hypocrites and legalists. I can warn you of them. But if you just give Christianity a half-hearted effort, you are easy prey for them. But I promise you that if you practice reading and applying the Bible to your life, and if you passionately pursue your relationship with God, He will give you His Holy Spirit to guide you and protect you.

On the other hand, there are some serious consequences for rejecting the Holy Spirit as described in verses 9-10. Here is where Jesus talks about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This is a very harsh statement. Jesus said that if anyone blasphemes the Holy Spirit, they will never be forgiven. When I was in college, we all stressed about if we had ever blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. We made ourselves crazy trying to rack our brains searching for anything bad we said about the Holy Spirit. Professors tried to calm us down. They gave us some very good counsel. They said to us, "If you are worried about having blasphemed the Holy Spirit, you are safe. You have not committed the sin. If you had committed this sin, your heart would be so hardened that you wouldn't even be worried about it."

So what is this sin blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? If we take verse 9 in concert with verse 10, while contrasting them with verse 8, it seems as if blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to ultimately and finally deny that Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh. The Holy Spirit is the One Who convicts the world of sin and the One Who testifies to the deity of Christ and His work on the cross. If someone continues to reject Jesus as the only way for reconciliation with God, then that person can never find forgiveness of sin.

However, let's not forget the context in which this topic comes up. Jesus has been speaking against the legalism of the Scribes and the Pharisees. He has connected this to hypocrisy which He says can infect the whole church. If you think in any way that you are in danger of being a legalist and a hypocrite, please take some serious time out of your schedule before God in prayer and humility. If you know hypocrites and legalists, to be certain reject anything they try and get you to do, but also pray for them because in reality they are continuing to reject Jesus. One error people make is to turn Jesus into this Gandhi type character who accepts anything. That is clearly the error of people who do not have a high view of Scripture. But the mistake that legalists and hypocrites make is that they truly miss the grace, mercy, and compassion of Jesus. You see, even though they would say they are sinners because they know that is the right thing to say, you can see by their actions that they have no clue as to Jesus' grace and mercy. They know what they expect from other people but they really don't know what God's expectation of others is. Please don't be confused. These people are not hard to identify.

Again, don't be afraid to reject them because as you learn to depend on the Holy Spirit, you will be able to answer them. Look carefully at verse 11. Notice the setting. It's a religious setting. We are talking about the synagogue which is comparable to our local church. That's where you'll find the legalists and the hypocrites. Of course they have to be in church. Where else could they practice their religious legalism? They will be there to tell you how to run every part of your life. But again, if you have been reading and applying the Bible to your life, and if you are in a right relationship with God, you can easily identify them with the help of the Holy Spirit. Look, they are not hard to identify. They are going to target the weak Christians. If you are not growing in your Christian faith, you are an easy target for them. If you are a person always looking for others to solve your problems and give you advice, you are an easy target. If you are lazy in your spiritual walk and would rather have someone tell you what to do, you are an easy target. God has given us everything we need. **HAVING A KNOWLEDGE OF SCRIPTURE AND HAVING AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WILL ENABLE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WORK IN YOU TO REJECT HYPOCRITES.**

Jesus spends a great deal of His time warning us against the poison of legalists and hypocrites. This won't be the last word Jesus gives us in the Gospel of Luke. It's important because **BEING FOOLED BY HYPOCRITES CAN BE DEADLY TO YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK.** I love the way Dr. Ironside describes the danger of putting your trust in a legalist or a hypocrite. He says:

*"Some time ago there came to Los Angeles a so-called human fly. He announced that on a given day he would climb up the face of one of the large department store buildings. Long before the time, thousands of eager spectators gathered. Slowly and carefully he mounted aloft. Up and up he went against great difficulties. At last he was nearing the top. He was seen to be looking for something to support his weight and to carry him further. Soon he seemed to spy what looked to the spectators like a piece of grey stone protruding from the smooth wall. He reached for it but it was beyond his reach. He ventured all on a cat-like spring, grasped the grey-like object, fell to the ground and was dashed to pieces. In his dead hand was clutched a spider's web."*

Jesus has warned you. I have now warned you. When you reach out to a legalist or a hypocrite for help, like the human fly found out with the spider web, these people look good on the outside, but they will cause you ultimately to crash and burn. Be careful who you trust and who you listen to.