Following Jesus on the Way to the Cross: The Influence of Satan and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

1. Read Luke 12:1–7. Here, Jesus gives another serious warning: don't become like the Pharisees, whose outward image looked spiritual while their hearts were far from God. He calls that hypocrisy, and he says it works like leaven—small at first, but powerful enough to spread through a whole life. Commentary: even a little hypocrisy in one area of life can spread to and affect every aspect of our lives as God's people. Take the example of how often we are quick in public to rebuke hotbutton issues like homosexuality, transgenderism or abortion, decrying how society has disregarded God's Word. But then we go home and never actual read the bible, we make TV, our phone, or video games more important than devotions. We never go to bibles study or Sunday school and even in worship, might be thinking of our week ahead and our busy schedule or even just doodle on a piece of paper rather than do as the Luther says in the meaning to the Third Commandment: We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His word, but gladly hear and learn it…"

   Jesus then gives two sobering reminders. First, nothing can be hidden from God. We may be able to manage appearances in front of other people, but God hears what we say in private, sees what we do in secret, and knows what is truly in our hearts. So no matter what kind of Christians we say we are, God knows the truth.

   Second, Jesus shows that hypocrisy is often driven by fear, especially the fear of people. We hide, pretend, soften the truth, or act against our convictions because we want approval, want to avoid rejection, or are afraid of what others may think or do. All of us have felt the temptation to say or do what is socially acceptable, even when it goes against what we know is true and right. At times, we also stay silent because we are afraid of what others will say about us.

   But Jesus says that if we are going to fear anyone, we should fear God. He sees our hypocrisy and holds authority not only over this life, but over eternal judgment. He has the power to send us to hell!

   But Jesus does not leave his disciples with only warnings—He also gives comfort. The God who sees everything is also the God who cares deeply for His people. He knows every sparrow, and not one is forgotten before Him. And you are worth more than many sparrows. He even knows the number of hairs on your head.

   What part of that comfort do you think Jesus most wants his disciples to take to heart—and why?

2. Read Luke 12:8–12. These are weighty and even unsettling words from Jesus. He speaks about confessing Him before others, about the danger of denying Him, and about the serious reality of resisting the work of the Holy Spirit. If we're honest, this passage presses on a real fear in all of us: the fear of what others might think, say, or do if we openly identify with Christ. That fear can lead us to silence, compromise, or even denial.

   But this struggle is not just theoretical—it has a face in Scripture. One of Jesus' own disciples, Peter, knew exactly what it was to love Jesus deeply and yet still deny Him under pressure.

   Look at Luke 22:54–62. How does Peter's failure help us understand our own weakness? And what comfort do we find in knowing that Jesus did not cast Peter off, but forgave and restored him?

3. Why does Jesus say that speaking against Him can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot? What's the difference, and what is Jesus warning us not to miss?

   Jesus is not saying that He is less important than the Holy Spirit. But He is the one who set aside His divine glory to be rejected by sinners, so that He could in turn save them. People may misunderstand, doubt, or even reject Him during His earthly ministry out of ignorance, confusion, fear, or spiritual blindness—and later repent and be forgiven. We see this in people like Peter, and even in those who helped crucify Jesus, for whom He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Later consider Peter's response to the people of Jerusalem in Acts 2:38-39.

   Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is different because the Holy Spirit is the one who opens our eyes to the truth about Jesus, convicts us of sin, and leads us to repentance. If someone persistently and knowingly resists, slanders, or hardens themselves against the Spirit's witness, they are rejecting the very means by which forgiveness comes. It is "unforgivable" not because God is unwilling to forgive, but because that person is refusing the Spirit who brings them to repentance and faith. As many a pastor has said: If you are worried about the sin against the Holy Spirit, you are likely not guilty of having committed it. Concern over sin and desire for forgiveness are signs that the Spirit is still at work in them. Instead, we should seek the Holy Spirit and look for opportunities to bear witness to Christ.

4. Read Luke 12:13-21. After warning against hypocrisy—and how hypocrisy can lead a person to denying Jesus and harden their heart against the Holy Spirit—Jesus now turns to another serious danger: covetousness. What is covetousness and how does it drive us away from God?

   Covetousness is wanting more of something even when we already have enough. It can slowly pull us away from God because it shifts our focus onto what we own, what we want, or what we think we're missing. Instead of being grateful and trusting God, we can become consumed with getting more. Over time, God gets pushed to the side. But when we learn to be content with what we have, our focus turns back to Him, and we grow in trust, gratitude, and dependence on God.

5. In the parable, what specifically would you say is the rich man's sin? This is a trick question, because Jesus doesn't spell it out. He's just a fool. What matters is that on the night he died, his heart trusted more in his barns full of stuff than in the Lord. Although, we might wonder why he was hording so

much and not using any of it to help his neighbors. In fact, it's interesting that when he survey's his barns, he speaks not to God but to his soul and says, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years…". Why is he not thanking God and praying to Him about the future? Count how many times the man refers to himself in these two verses (look for words like "I", "my", "myself"). The man refers to himself about 8 times.

6. What are some signs that consumerism is influencing our identity more than our faith is? How do we know when something we want has started to take God's place in our hearts?

Consumerism is influencing our identity more than our faith when what we own, want, or project becomes the main way we define our worth. If I feel more secure because of my money, appearance, status, or possessions than because I belong to God, that's a warning sign. Another sign is when comparison starts controlling me—when I constantly look at what others have and feel envy, insecurity, or pressure to keep up. Consumerism also shapes us when we assume happiness, meaning, or peace can be bought, upgraded, or achieved through having "just a little more."

Something we want may be taking God's place in our hearts when it begins to rule our thoughts, decisions, and emotions. If I am willing to compromise my values, neglect my relationships, or let anxiety and frustration consume me because I might not get it, that desire has probably become too important. A good test is to ask: What *If God said no to this, would I still try to have it?*

7. If this man is deemed a fool, what would a wise man have done in this situation?

Hypocrisy & Covetousness turns the Christian Life Upside-down

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