

As we carry on in Luke 12 the next section is only 4 verses, but they are important and should open up plenty of opportunity for application and discussion.

The division between the last study and this study is artificial as Jesus is continuing to address his disciples, with the crowd listening in. He is still applying his warning against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Jesus' command in verse 4 is that we "do not fear those who kill the body". This is another way of saying - do not fear men! He puts it this way, both to underline how high the stakes are - following Jesus rather than the Pharisees will mean suffering. But he goes on to say we need to put it in proportion "and after that have nothing more that they can do". If death is our greatest fear, then hostile human beings will terrify us. But Jesus message is that there is one who has power even over death.

Before we see that, it's worth pausing to apply that command to our situation. We may not ever face hostile humans who may threaten to kill us for following Jesus, but any fear of man rather than God involves some kind of fear of death. This death may be a kind of social death (losing friends or popularity) academic or career death (losing position or marks for standing up for Jesus), or death of relationships (losing friendships over trusting Christ). These are all real and painful. It's worth exploring in our groups where we are affected by the fear of man.

Jesus brings in this issue as it is intimately connected to the danger the Pharisees pose. Remember the Pharisees were respected, so to go against them would have taken a lot of courage. It would mean going against the flow to trust that Jesus is the Christ - both before and after the cross.

Also, it is clear from what we see in the gospel accounts that the Pharisees were themselves deeply motivated by the fear of man. See for example the exchange between themselves in John 7:45-52. They would not let each other even consider Jesus' claims. We also see that when it came to acting on their hatred for Jesus they were worried about the crowds.

As well as this, if the fear of man is what motivates us in our life, we won't take seriously Jesus' warnings in vs 2-3. We will ignore that warning about the future, because the people around us seem so big and so terrifying. That is why Jesus gives a positive command/warning in verse 5. We can't get rid of our fear of man just by trying harder not to be afraid. Some men are terrifying - especially if they are opposed to us and Jesus! But fear of man can be replaced by a greater fear - the fear of God.

Yes, men can kill the body (vs 4), but God's authority and power goes beyond death. He can cast people in to hell, to be judged for their sins. This underlines the warning Jesus has already given in verses 2 and 3. The Pharisees may seem terrifying but their power is limited and they will be judged and condemned. And so, it's right for us to tremble at God not at them.

But, how does this fear work in the life of the disciple of Jesus Christ? Are we meant to go through life utterly terrified of God? No. Jesus shows us that by what he goes on to say in verses 6 and 7. This true fear of God is a combination of recognising the power and majesty of God, along with knowing his love and care for his people. If sparrows (small and cheap birds) are not forgotten by God, then how much less are we - made in his image and saved by Christ. He knows and cares us even to the extent of numbering the hairs on our head!

True fear of the Lord is both trembling at his awesomeness and delighting in his love. For biblical examples of this look at verses like Psalm 145:19-20, Deuteronomy 6:1-5, Isaiah 11:1-3, Jeremiah 32:40, Proverbs 28:14). So we grow in this fear by hearing and meditating on what he is like and what he has done. When we fear the Lord like this, we will be quicker to repent of our fear of men, and more than that, we won't want to fear men - because that fear is terror, and is very different to the love we have for the Lord.

Drawing these first 7 verses together, we can see that this right fear of God is the true alternative to hypocrisy. If we have this right, loving fear of God it affects our hearts - it isn't just about right behaviour, but it can't but affect every aspect of who we are and what we do.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS (Please don't ask a question you don't understand!)

Who does Jesus tell us not to fear in verse 4?

What are some of the ways the fear of man shows itself in our lives?

Why might the disciples be in danger of fearing the Pharisees?

How are the Pharisees motivated by the fear of man (eg see John 7:45-52)?

How will the fear of man mean we won't take seriously what Jesus has said in verses 1-3? If we fear men, why might we ignore what Jesus has said in verses 2 and 3?

Do we get rid of the fear of man just by trying harder not to be afraid? How do we deal with it? (see verse 5)

Why does the fear of God drive out the fear of man? Compare verse 5 with verse 4.

Is Jesus telling his disciples to be terrified of God? What does it mean to fear God rightly?(For example look up some or all of these verses - Psalm 145:19-20, Deuteronomy 6:1-5, Isaiah 11:1-3, Jeremiah 32:40, Proverbs 28:14)

How does Jesus go on to show that this kind of fear is not terror? (see vs 6-7) Why is it a good thing to fear God?

How does Jesus illustrate God's love and care for us? Compare that with how those people we are frightened of love and care for us. How does this change our fears? How will recognising this affect how we live?

How can we grow in the fear of the Lord?

Why do you think Jesus brings this warning, immediately after warning us about the danger of hypocrisy in verse 2? How is the fear of God the answer to hypocrisy?