

Luke 12:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Analysis

Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων, ἥτις ἐστὶν ὑπόκρισις)—Jesus addresses an innumerable multitude (μυριάδων τοῦ ὄχλου, myriads of people) so dense they trampled one another, yet He speaks **first of all** to His disciples. The metaphor *zymē* (ζύμη, leaven/yeast) denotes something small that permeates and corrupts the whole batch of dough (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 5:9). Leaven represents the Pharisees' *hypokrisis* (ὑπόκρισις), from which we derive "hypocrisy"—literally play-acting, wearing a mask, pretending to be what one is not.

The Pharisees maintained outward religious correctness while harboring inward corruption. They tithed mint and cumin while neglecting justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23), cleaned the outside of the cup while full of greed within (Luke 11:39). Their religion was performance for human approval rather than genuine devotion to God. Jesus warns that this hypocrisy spreads like yeast—it starts small but eventually permeates entire communities, destroying authentic faith. The warning comes immediately after confrontation with Pharisees (Luke 11:37-54), emphasizing the danger of their influence.

Historical Context

This discourse occurs in the context of growing opposition from religious leaders. Chapter 11 records Jesus' scathing denunciation of Pharisees and lawyers, pronouncing six woes upon them. The Pharisees began to oppose Him vehemently, seeking to catch Him in His words (Luke 11:53-54). Despite this hostility—or perhaps because of it—massive crowds gathered, creating dangerous conditions where people trampled each other. Jesus uses this teachable moment to warn disciples about the primary spiritual danger: not Roman persecution but religious hypocrisy. The Pharisaic system emphasized external conformity to hundreds of oral traditions while allowing internal corruption. This 'whitewashed tomb' religion (Matthew 23:27) appeared righteous outwardly but was dead within.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does hypocrisy function like leaven, starting small but eventually corrupting an entire community of faith?
2. In what ways might contemporary Christians prioritize outward religious performance over inward heart transformation?
3. Why does Jesus warn His disciples about Pharisaic hypocrisy before warning about persecution or other dangers?

Interlinear Text

Ἐν	οἷς	ἐπισυναχθεισῶν	τῶν			
In	the mean time	when there were gathered together	G3588			
G1722	G3739	G1996				
μυριάδων	τοῦ	ὄχλου	ὥστε	καταπατεῖν		
an innumerable multitude	G3588	of people	insomuch that	they trode		
G3461		G3793	G5620	G2662		
ἀλλήλους	ἤρξατο	λέγειν	πρὸς	τοὺς	μαθητὰς	αὐτοῦ
one upon another	he began	to say	unto	G3588	disciples	G846
G240	G756	G3004	G4314		G3101	
πρῶτον	Προσέχετε	ἑαυτοῖς	ἀπὸ	τῆς	ζύμης	τῶν
first of all	Beware	ye	of	G3588	the leaven	G3588
G4412	G4337	G1438	G575		G2219	
Φαρισαίων	ἣτις	ἐστὶν	ὑπόκρισις			
of the Pharisees	which	is	hypocrisy			
G5330	G3748	G2076	G5272			

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:1 (Parallel theme): Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

James 3:17 (Parallel theme): But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.