

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 ἐαυτοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων, ἢτις 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 ὡστε καταπατεῖν
an innumerable multitude of people insomuch that they trode
G3461 G3588 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 ἐαυτοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν
first of all Beware ye of the leaven G3588 G3588
G4412 G4337 G1438 G575 G2219

Φαρισαίων ἦτις 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.