

I. Read Luke 12:4-7

- A. Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers would have been alarming to His disciples and those who cared about His safety. They were *the establishment* in Israel. Consequently, He saw the need to establish the proper perspective toward any danger or threat they might present. What was Jesus' perspective toward the potential threat *the establishment* might pose?

He knew that threats to one's life and safety were incidental when compared to the eternal safety of one's soul. In all respects, His perspective was eternal rather than temporal.

- B. In our day it is unpopular to speak of hell and eternal damnation. How did Jesus approach the subject?

He was very concerned that people understand the reality of hell. It was a subject that He spoke of often.

Why are so many preachers/teachers reluctant to speak forcefully about hell today?

It is an unpopular subject, just as it was in Jesus' day. Lulling a congregation into a false security is not only unwise; it is reprehensible. People must know the eternal consequences of their rejection of Christ and His gospel. A great deal is at stake!

- C. What sort of ideas and philosophies in our day militate against speaking in black and white terms about right and wrong, heaven and hell, etc.?

Relativism is the most obvious answer. Certainly humanism is at the core of this reluctance to speak about anything in absolute terms. When man places himself at the center of his universe, he will judge all questions on the basis of *what he thinks* or *how he feels* rather than what God thinks. Hell will have no place in the *world and life view* of one given over to humanism and neither will firm ideas of right and wrong, or good and bad. When *man is the measure of all things*, standards and moral convictions become feeble indeed.

- D. Why do so many shy away from the idea of fearing God?

In our day, for the reason cited above, men have remade God into a grandfatherly idol. He is loving, but not holy. He is merciful, but not just. He is powerful, but not sovereign. The church has lost its vision of God as a consuming fire. (See Hebrews 12:29.) The Bible describes a loving God who is both caring and holy — both merciful and just. He maintains an immutable standard of right and wrong that is rooted in His own character and is woven into the created order. He is to be feared as well as loved. Further, it is important to note that believers have been granted a special privilege. They can relate to God as Father. This means that they are spared the judgment of God, though they will experience His discipline at times. So while it is true that God is to be feared, that fear in the heart of the believer is tempered by the reality of our adoption into God's family.

- E. In vss. 6-7, Jesus presents an important teaching on *providence*. Define *providence*.

It is God's "most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions." (from the Westminster Shorter Catechism)

- F. Why does Jesus use sparrows as a basis of comparison to God's care for people? (See Matthew 6:25-26.)

If sparrows, which are of marginal importance in the grand scheme of things, are noticed and watched over by God, how much more does He care for us!

- G. Why do you suppose Jesus begins teaching about God's providence at this point?
Because He had been speaking about fearing *the establishment*. Nothing would befall Jesus' disciples that Jesus did not allow. Hence, there was one more good reason for them to boldly speak the truth in spite of the Pharisee's reaction.
- H. How should the proper understanding of God's providence serve as an encouragement for believers?
When things seem to be out of control, it is our assurance that our God, who loves us, is very much in control!
- I. Does the proper understanding of God's providence preclude the fact that evil and tragedy do occur in the lives of believers? (See Matthew 5:45; Genesis 50:20; Acts 2:22-24; Romans 8:28.)
Not at all. It means that God can and does cause *all things*, both good and bad, to work toward His ultimate and perfect will for our lives. In the midst of difficult circumstances, we may not know why evil befalls us, but often, in retrospect, we can begin to understand – if not in this life, then certainly in heaven.
- J. What spiritual fact of life have those who advocate the idea that Christians should never experience problems either misunderstood or ignored?
The fall and its negative consequences on mankind – indeed on all creation. Justification and redemption do not correct all the consequences of the fall. That will only occur at Christ's second coming.