

Good morning, everyone! Welcome to our Sunday School class at the Clay County First Church of God. We're so glad to have each and every one of you with us today, whether you're here in person or joining us from the comfort of your homes through Facebook Live.

We're gathered here this morning, ready to learn, share, and grow together. No matter where you are, we hope you feel the love and fellowship that binds us all together.

Thank you all for being a part of this spiritual journey.

**Introduction:** Today, we are going to dive into a topic that is often overlooked but is of great importance – the “hard sayings” of Jesus. These are teachings that challenge us, make us uncomfortable, and force us to confront the reality of judgment.

### **Luke 12:1-7**

**12** In the meantime, 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.**

**<sup>2</sup>For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.**

**<sup>3</sup>Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.**

**<sup>4</sup>And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.**

**<sup>5</sup> But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.**

**<sup>6</sup> Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?**

**<sup>7</sup> But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.**

### **“Hard Sayings”**

Jesus, in His infinite wisdom and love, did not shy away from speaking hard truths. One such teaching warns us of the painful consequences we may face on the day of judgment. This is a warning that, unfortunately, few people heed or even care about. Yet, it comes with the authority of Almighty God. I urge you to take it seriously, for it is meant to guide us towards righteousness and away from the path of destruction.

As we navigate through the Bible, it's important to remember that the chapter divisions and verses we see today were not in the original manuscripts. They were added later for ease of reference and study. Sometimes, these divisions may not seem to make sense. For instance, the beginning of chapter 12 could fit very nicely in the conclusion of chapter 11. But when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, He did not say, “That’s the end of chapter 11; let’s start with chapter 12.”

Chapter 12 begins with a powerful confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees, leading to a judgment pronounced upon them due to their hypocrisy.

Jesus, in His divine wisdom and righteousness, did not hesitate to confront the Pharisees and pronounce judgment upon them. The main reason for this judgment was their hypocrisy. After this encounter, we pick up the history in verse 1, where Luke says, “In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another.”

Everywhere Jesus went, huge crowds followed Him. People were eager to witness every miracle He performed and hang on to every word He spoke. Perhaps word got around that Jesus was dining at the home of a Pharisee, and as the news spread, the crowds swelled in anticipation of His appearance. Their eagerness to see Him was so great that they began to trample one another just to get closer to Him. This shows the level of excitement and anticipation people had to see Jesus.

As we reflect on this, let's consider our own eagerness to hear the word of God. Are we as excited and eager as the multitudes that followed Jesus? And let's also remember to guard against hypocrisy in our own lives, as Jesus warned the Pharisees.

Jesus began by issuing a warning to His disciples. It's important to note that when Jesus spoke of His disciples in this context, He was likely referring not just to the Twelve, but to the larger number of followers He had. His warning was clear and direct: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

This was not the only time Jesus used the metaphor of leaven. Leaven, a substance used in baking, has the ability to permeate and expand dough. In this metaphor, Jesus was speaking of a small thing that, when introduced into a substance, can spread and fill it up.

Jesus was teaching us that just a little bit of hypocrisy, when it enters your life, is like the camel who puts his nose into the tent and, before you know it, occupies the tent to such a degree that he expels the owner.

In other words, Jesus was cautioning us that even a small amount of hypocrisy—of Pharisee-ism, of play-acting, of pretending, of deceitfulness—if you allow it in your life, you will not be able to contain it. It will spread like cancer. It will fill your soul and destroy your character.

As we reflect on this lesson, let us examine our hearts and ask God to help us root out any trace of hypocrisy. Let us strive to be genuine in our faith, transparent in our actions, and sincere in our love for God and for others.

Jesus warned us, **“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.”** This statement holds a deep truth about our lives and our actions.

Let’s journey back to the beginning of humanity, to the very first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Upon transgressing God’s law, they immediately experienced an awareness of their nakedness, a symbol of their shame. Their instinctive response was to hide, to flee from God’s presence, hoping that even God would not see what they had done. But can we really hide anything from God?

Consider the old story of a small town where a mysterious letter was sent to the men of the town, stating, **“Flee, all has been discovered.”** Upon receiving this message, about twenty men fled the town. This story may seem amusing at first, but it reflects a deep-seated fear within all of us. We all have aspects of ourselves

that we are ashamed of and would prefer to keep hidden. We often pretend these things are not part of our character.

Jesus cautioned us to **“Be careful.”** He warned us that deceit, like leaven, can destroy us. Moreover, any attempts to conceal our sins will ultimately prove futile because everything currently hidden will be revealed. There is nothing that will not be made known.

Jesus further stated, **“Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed.”** This proclamation will not be made through radio or television, but on that day, it will be shouted from the housetops. It will not be a rumor that spreads from person to person, but a shout so loud that everyone will hear the truth.

Let us remember that living a life of deceit is not only spiritually damaging, but also futile. For in the end, all truth will be revealed, and all hidden things will be made known. Let us strive to live authentically, embracing the truth of who we are, and seeking God’s grace to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus, in His infinite wisdom, warned us that all would be revealed. He was referring to the **Day of Judgment**, a day when every idle word we speak, every action we take, even those we thought were hidden in the darkness of privacy, will be brought to light. This includes everything we said in private that we did not want others to know, and everything we did in the secrecy of our rooms that we did not want others to see.

Many Christians are under the misguided notion that they do not have to worry about this disclosure on Judgment Day. They assume it is only the pagan, the corrupt, or the Pharisee who must fear the ultimate disclosure of the truth of our character on Judgment Day.

However, the Bible makes it clear that **every one of us** will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Yes, it is true that as Christians, we have passed from judgment to life, and there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. On the last day, our judge and our defense attorney will be Jesus Christ Himself. However, this does not mean that our actions here on earth are without consequence.

Even though our entrance to Heaven is not based in any way upon our good works, and our good works contribute nothing to our salvation, every one of us will be evaluated on that day according to our works. All the things we have hidden will be made clear so that the truth about our obedience, sanctification, and profession of faith will be made manifest before God, the angels, and all people.

So, let us live our lives in the light of this truth, striving each day to walk in obedience to God's commands, knowing that one day, all will be revealed. Let us encourage one another in love and good deeds, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

We often hear complaints about the lack of justice in our world. There are countless instances where justice seems to be thwarted or not fully realized. However, the New Testament assures us that this will not be the case at the Last Judgment. In that final reckoning, **perfect justice will prevail**. There will be no room for injustice. It's a comforting thought to realize that, in the grand scheme of things, justice will ultimately triumph.

Another liberating concept is the understanding that there is **nothing we can hide from God**, either now or in the future. This is beautifully expressed in the words of David:

**“Oh God, You’ve searched me and know me. You know everything about me. If I ascend into Heaven, You’re there; if I make my bed in Hell, Thou art there. Before a word is formed on my lips, Thou knowest it altogether.”**

David then implores God to search him, know him, and cleanse him from his hidden faults. He acknowledges his lack of awareness about the extent of his own disobedience and corruption, and asks God to reveal it to him so he can turn away from it.

While those who do not know God might fear His omniscience, we as believers should find joy in it. God knows us completely, and even though He is fully aware of our flaws and failures, He redeems us completely.

So, let’s take comfort in these truths today. Despite the injustices we see in the world, we can trust in God’s ultimate justice. And though we may not fully understand our own failings, we can rest in the knowledge that God does, and He loves and redeems us nonetheless.

Jesus went on to say: **“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast you into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”**

When we talk about the fear of God in Scripture, such as when the Old Testament says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” we often interpret this fear as a sense of awe and reverence. And while that is true, the word in our text is not translated as “reverence” or “awe.” The operative word is “fear.”

As followers of Christ, we need to understand what it means to fear God in a righteous way. This fear is not the fear that a prisoner has for his torturer, but rather a fear of offending our Heavenly Father. It's about living before God with a deep sense of respect and reverence.

Even though we are invited to come before Him boldly and we can call Him Father, we must remember that He is not our buddy or pal. He is the Lord God. When He appears, we find ourselves on our faces before Him, trembling before His majesty.

It is said in the Bible that there is no fear of God before the eyes of the ungodly. It's astonishing how fearless the average person is of God. How is it possible that a creature made in the image of God, who lives unrepentant in rebellion against God, has no fear of what he is doing? Let's ponder on this as we go about our week.

Since October 12th, 1987, I have observed a common trend. Not once has someone told me they came to faith in Christ because they were overwhelmed by a fear of hell. It seems that many people go through life without believing in hell, or if they do, they are not afraid that they will end up there.

There is a prevalent belief that if there is a God, Heaven would not be right if we were not included in its membership. This belief is often reinforced by pastors and Sunday School teachers who tell people that God loves them unconditionally. But is this what the Bible teaches? Yes, the Bible does express the concept of God's unconditional love. Here are some key verses that highlight this:

- **John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>12</sup>**



- 1 John 4:8: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."<sup>12</sup>
- Romans 5:8: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>12</sup>
- 1 John 4:16: "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."<sup>1</sup>
- 1 John 4:9-10: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."<sup>1</sup>

**These verses suggest that God's love is expressed towards His creations despite their disposition towards Him<sup>3</sup>.** His love is not motivated by personal gain<sup>4</sup> and there is never a moment when God does not love<sup>5</sup>. Everything God does is out of love<sup>5</sup>. However, it's important to note that interpretations can vary.

One thing I want to stress to you is that the kingdom of God is not a children's television show. It is ruled by a just and holy Creator, for whom we should have fear. Jesus Himself said, "You are afraid of strong people. You are afraid of criminals who might attack, maim, and even kill you and destroy your body. Don't be afraid of them. Rather, fear the One who not only can kill your body, but after you're dead, can send you to hell forever."

In our daily lives, we prepare for everything - education, business, careers, marriage, and old age. We take out insurance, worry about our 401K, retirement, pensions, and social security. But how often do we prepare for the ultimate moment of judgment? How often do we worry about our relationship with Christ?

The Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Yet, it seems that people have lost their fear of God. When asked if they believe in Heaven and Hell, most people affirm their belief in Heaven, but not in Hell.

The Bible continually warns of a place called hell. There are over 162 references in the New Testament alone which warn of hell. Over 70 of these references were uttered by Jesus Christ himself! The word 'hell' is mentioned 54 times in the Bible – 31 times in the Old Testament and 23 times in the New Testament. It is referred to as 'Sheol' 65 times in the Old Testament, 'the pit' 10 times, and 'Gehenna' 12 times in the New Testament. There are 18 references that talk about the fires or flames of hell, and 3 different times, complete and total darkness is associated with Hell. Seven times, the Bible says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In total, Hell is described and mentioned 167 times in the Bible.

The devil does exist—He is as real as Moses, Abraham, David, Peter, Paul, John, and Jesus. He is mentioned in 7 Old Testament books and found in 19 of the New Testament books. He is referred to by every New Testament writer and by Jesus some 15 times. Hell is real and the devil is real. And he wants people to think they have all the time in the world.

The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom. As we go about our daily lives, let us not forget to prepare for the ultimate moment of judgment. Let us nurture our relationship with Christ and remember the reality of Hell and the existence of the devil. For in doing so, we gain true wisdom.

Jesus, in His wisdom, said: “Consider the sparrows, sold for mere pennies, yet not one is forgotten by God. Even the hairs on your head are all numbered.” This statement alone could amplify our

fear, couldn't it? Jesus was emphasizing that God is aware of every minute detail about us. Every strand of hair on our head is accounted for. Every time a sparrow lands, it does not go unnoticed by God.

The concept of God's omniscience is beyond our comprehension. How can God know everything there is to know about everything that can be known—every thought, every word, every hair on our head? It seems like Jesus could have used this as an opportunity to intensify our fear of God, but then He added these surprising words: “Do not fear.” First, He said, “Fear,” then He said, “Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” We are to fear God, but in that fear, we should not feel insignificant under God's gaze.

Even though God knows everything about you as a believer and as His child, He places an immeasurable value upon you. On one hand, we should fear Him. On the other hand, we should not fear, because He has redeemed us in His sight. Do not fear, for you matter to your Father.

From Genesis to Revelation, it is clear that we are to “serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling”. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”. Jesus spoke more on the fear of hell than on the glory of heaven. He thought it to be timely and urgent. That makes me both love Him and fear Him! I love Him because He is my Savior, and I fear Him because He is my Judge.

It seems to be difficult for Christians today to get away from the idea that Jesus was a passive, amiable, meek—and—mild being who walked through the world making people feel good. Because actually, when Jesus was here on earth, people were quite often

afraid of Him. It was overwhelming for people to come face to face with the living God incarnate. In fact, it might be fair to say that whenever someone stood face to face with Jesus and came to a true understanding of who He really was, the normal reaction (from believers and skeptics alike) was fear. He traumatized people.

Even the disciples were fearful when they faced the reality that He was God. In Mark 4:37–41, we read that while the disciples were crossing the lake in a boat with Jesus, a storm struck, and their boat began to sink. The disciples panicked and awoke Jesus, who was sleeping through it all. He calmed the storm, and rebuked them for their unbelief. Verse 41 tells us that after Jesus calmed the storm, they were exceedingly terrified. There's at least one thing that's more frightening than a fierce storm outside your boat: It's having to face the holiness of God inside your boat.

In the next chapter of Mark, Jesus encountered a man possessed by a legion of demons. When Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs and they went into the water and drowned, the people of the town came out and pleaded with Him to leave their country. Their reaction to Jesus was not because they were resentful about the loss of the pigs. If that had been the case, they would have demanded compensation. Rather, they were terrified in Jesus' holy presence. They clearly sensed that the One to whom all judgment has been committed, had come into their midst, and they were terrified of Him. They did not want to face their own sin in His holy presence.

In Luke 5, Peter was fishing and couldn't catch anything. Jesus came along and told him where to let his nets down. Peter obeyed, and his catch was so great that he couldn't haul it in. When he finally got help from another boat to bring in the catch, there were so many fish that both boats began to sink. It was a demonstration to Peter of Jesus' deity. Peter "fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, 'Go

away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’”. All he could see was his own sinfulness when confronted with the power and presence of our holy God.

We need to cultivate that same attitude, remembering that we not only live our lives before the eyes of a holy God, but that His Holy Spirit dwells within us. Being ever mindful of God’s presence is vital if we’re going to live worshipful lives that glorify Him.

When we come to the subject of the fear of God, the Bible speaks of “fear” of the Lord in some 295 verses! Scripture speaks of men fearing God, His name, His Law or His Word. In the Old Testament, there are 235 references to the fear of God. In the New Testament, there are 43 references to the fear of God which, by the way, is the same number of references as man’s love to God.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible proclaims that the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, and those who drink deeply of it shall have the blessings of God in this life, and in the life to come. However, those who reject the fear of the Lord; There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. The fear of God is the predominant response to, and fundamental attitude toward God, His Word, His Law and His name, that God desires. This is why it is mentioned more times than any other aspect of vital piety.

Given the scriptural importance of the fear of the Lord, most of us must confess that although we have been going to church for some years, we have never heard many, if any at all, sermons on the fear of God! When was the last time you had a Sunday School lesson on the fear of God? Have you ever read a book on the fear of God? The typical Christian today has heard many sermons on the love of God but not a whole lot about the fear of God. This is sad, as well as unbiblical. Of course you should love God. That is not the issue.

What we are saying is that we must relate to God in more than one way. Loving God is not enough according to the Bible. We must also FEAR Him. If we take the Bible seriously, the fundamental aspect of our relationship to God should be the fear of the Lord! Fear goes hand in hand with love: love is the positive side, fear the negative; love prompts one to do what pleases God, fear prompts one to refrain from what displeases God.

## Closing

The fear of the Lord combines the two qualities of love plus respect. It is “loving respect” and “respectful love.” To fear someone in this sense is to love them and respect them at the same time. We can see this more clearly if we state it in the negative. Where there is no respect, there is no love. Repeat after me: where there is no respect, there is no love.

That applies to all human relationships. Where there is no respect inside a marriage, there is no love either. Where there is no respect in a family, there is no love either. Love and respect go hand in hand.

So how does this apply to our relationship with God? This is a good definition of the fear of the Lord. It is the choice we make to obey God because we love him and want to please him. The fear of the Lord is an ongoing attitude of our hearts that causes us to choose over and over again to obey God even when it might be easier to do something else. We make that choice because we love God and want to please him. The fear of the Lord is not cringing fear, which is respect without love. And it is not irreverent disrespect, which is love without respect. Respect plus love equals the fear of the Lord.

fear of the Lord is not the opposite of love. It's what real love is all about. A healthy sense of fear can be a positive motivation for doing

right. This sort of loving respect is the basis of our relationship with God. When I choose to fear the Lord, I am choosing out of respect and love to do the things that please him. All that I do in my life comes back to this principle. The fear of the Lord is therefore the most positive attitude you can have toward God.

For those of you in attendance here today, I want to ask you 3 questions. Those of you watching by way of Facebook, follow right along with us: For you in attendance, next week I want to hear your answers to these questions. Those of you watching online, let us know your answers in the comments on our page.

1. Can you think of a time when you showed love and respect to someone? How did it feel?
2. How can we show our love and respect for God in our daily lives?
3. What are some ways we can cultivate a healthy fear of the Lord?

## Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the wisdom and understanding that You have imparted upon us today. As we close this morning, we reflect on Your greatness and the reverence we owe to You.

We acknowledge, Lord, that in our journey of faith, there may be times when we lose sight of the fear of God, when we take Your grace and mercy for granted. We ask for Your forgiveness and pray that You guide us back to the path of righteousness.

Help us, Lord, to always remember that fear of You is the beginning of wisdom. Let this fear not be one of dread, but a profound respect and awe for Your infinite power and unconditional love.

May we carry this fear of God in our hearts, not just in our words, but also in our actions. Let it be a guiding light in our lives, influencing our decisions and interactions with others.

We pray that You continue to watch over us, guide us, and direct us. May we live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to You, reflecting Your love and fear in all that we do.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.