

Jesus speaks of a future experience of the wrath of God against sin

The disciples must fear no one because instead of fearing people they are to respect the anger of God against sin. *'I will show you the One you are to fear. Fear him who after the killing has authority to throw into the Gehenna ... Fear him'*^{□1}! Jesus speaks of a future experience of the wrath of God against sin. John the Baptist had used the pictures of useless trees being burned up^{□2}, and of chaff being purged out of a granary with irresistible fire that cannot be extinguished^{□3}. Jesus had used the picture of a house that collapses into ruins on a day when it is tested by wind and storm^{□4} and had spoken of how 'in that day' it would be more tolerable for Sodom than for some of the towns of Galilee^{□5}. The punishment of wickedness is a matter of being 'brought down to Hades'^{□6}. The generation contemporary with Jesus will be condemned in the judgement, says Jesus^{□7}. Secret sin will soon be exposed^{□8}.

□1 12:5

□2 3:9

□3 3:17

□4 6:48

□5 10:12-15

□6 10:15

□7 11:29-32

□8 12:2-3

• Only God can destroy the soul

The disciples are not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot do anything more than that; rather they are to fear God who can destroy body and soul in Gehenna. Persecutors can snuff out the life of the body in this world, but they cannot extinguish the life of the soul. God can see that sin is thoroughly paid for, and can 'destroy'^{□1} the soul.

□1 Matthew 10:28

• Gehenna – a place of punishment

The Greek word *Gehenna* is the most important of the words for 'hell'. It is used twelve times in the New Testament ^{□1} and always denotes a place of punishment. Gehenna is 'hell' either as the place for the punishment of the devil (James 3:6, which seems to use 'Gehenna' as the devil's home), or as the place where Christians are severely chastised and 'taste' hell^{□2}, or where those who reject Jesus are eternally destroyed^{□3}. The word can be used in a setting where sinners and saints are warned at the same time^{□4} and that seems to be the case here also^{□5}. 'Gehenna' is also the term used in connection with punishment after the resurrection. Punishment **before** the day of resurrection is a reality^{□6} but in this connection 'Gehenna' is not used.

□1 Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6

□2 Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; Matt. 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47

□3 Matt 23:15,

33

□4 Matt 10:28

□5 Luke 12:5

□6 Luke 16:23

1. Confidence in God

1. Despite the opposition of traditional religion, **the disciples must be quite confident in God**. God cares for sparrows; He will surely care for human beings^{□1}. He has intimate knowledge and concern over every aspect of our lives^{□2}.

□1 12:6

□2 12:7

2. Always acknowledge Jesus boldly

2. Despite the opposition of traditional religion, **the disciples must always acknowledge Jesus boldly**^{□1}. If they openly speak of their faith in Jesus, then Jesus will openly speak of them to the Father and before the angels. It is generally thought this takes place at the judgement day, and rightly so, but there is no reason to restrict it to the judgement day. God openly 'confessed' Job before the angels during his lifetime^{□2}. Jesus takes pleasure in us before God when we confess Him. Those who deny Jesus because of their fear of mockery or enmity – and Jesus is speaking to disciples^{□3} – will suffer loss in the day when Jesus presents His people to the Father.

□1 12:8-9

□2 Job 1:8

□3 12:1

3. Rejection of Jesus is unforgivable

3. Jesus still has the opposition of the Pharisees in mind when He warns that **rejection of Jesus is unforgivable**^{□1}. The Spirit often worked with great power when Jesus was ministering to men and

□1 12:10



• *Resisting the Spirit's convicting work is more dangerous than resisting Jesus in ignorance*

• *'Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' is not a sin that a Christian can commit*

• *No matter how powerfully the Spirit was at work the Pharisees – generally speaking – did not seek the forgiveness of their sins from Jesus*

The special help of the Holy Spirit amidst opposition

• *The right words to say will be given in agonisingly difficult times*

women in dependence on His Father. When the Pharisees attributed His power to Satanic help^{□2} they were deliberately rejecting Jesus despite the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. They were 'blaspheming' (slandering, rejecting with scorn) the Spirit's testimony to Jesus as God's Saviour. It was unforgivable because it was rejecting the means of forgiveness. To speak against Jesus out of ignorance is forgivable. Even Saul of Tarsus who blasphemed against Jesus and persecuted Christians^{□3} was forgiven. He acted ignorantly in unbelief. But to deny Jesus when there is clear and convincing evidence that Jesus is indeed from God is a different matter. Resisting the Spirit's convicting work is more dangerous than resisting Jesus in ignorance. The latter is forgivable. The former is unforgivable, because it is resisting the way of forgiveness (Jesus Himself presented to us in the power of the Spirit). It ought to be added that the 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' is not a sin that a Christian can commit, since it involves deliberate, unbelieving rejection of Jesus.

Everything Jesus says about the Pharisees is sobering and challenging. Much depends on whether we boldly acknowledge that we have confident faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Pharisees, although they were religious people, rejected Jesus and fell into a sin that cannot ever be forgiven. The Pharisees were generally unforgiven because their wilful rejection of the Holy Spirit's powerful testimony meant that it never had any impact upon their hearts. No matter how powerfully the Spirit was at work the Pharisees – generally speaking – did not wish to seek the forgiveness of their sins from Jesus.

4. Amidst the opposition the disciples will face, **they will receive the special help of the Holy Spirit**. On occasions they will be brought before their persecutors^{□1} but at such times they need not be anxious. In difficult circumstances a special working of the Spirit is promised, and they will find themselves being given the right words to say^{□2}.

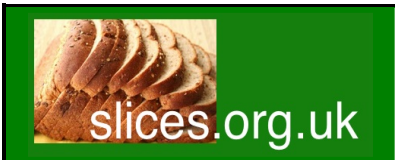
People like the Pharisees would become persecutors of any who declared their faith in Jesus, and it was this that led to Jesus' words of challenge and encouragement. The greatest promise of all was the assurance that in agonisingly difficult times the special help of the Holy Spirit would be given.

□2 11:15

□3 see 1 Timothy 1:12-13

□1 12:11

□2 12:12



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