

Encounter Church
Sunday August 2, 2026

Against the Grain
Being Bigger than Self (Part 1)

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (GNT)- “(1) Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days. (2) People will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited; they will be insulting, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and irreligious; (3) they will be unkind, merciless, slanderers, violent, and fierce; they will hate the good; (4) they will be treacherous, reckless, and swollen with pride; they will love pleasure rather than God; (5) they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power. Keep away from such people.”

WE WANT TO GO AGAINST THE GRAIN OF THE CULTURE OF THIS WORLD IN THE LAST DAYS!

Against the Grain- Choosing a path or belief system that goes against what most people do or think.

In the above scripture Paul is exhorting Timothy to continue to share the Good News of Jesus Christ even in the “LAST DAYS!”

Paul tells him that people will be characterized by all kinds of selfish, self-centered characteristics.

Notice where all these characteristics begin! Being self-centered! Selfish.

The Bible views self-centeredness as a core form of sin, a barrier to knowing God, and the opposite of true love.

NOTICE VERSE 5 IN OUR TEXT:

“they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power....”

WHEN JESUS WAS ON EARTH HE TALKED ABOUT AND TO PEOPLE LIKE THIS!

Matthew 23:13 (NKJV)- “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”

Jesus is telling them, “you refuse to go into a Kingdom that’s bigger than just you!”

Matthew 23:23-28 (NKJV)- “(23)Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (24)Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (25)“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. (26)Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. (27)“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. (28) Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

NOTICE AGAIN VERSE 5 IN OUR TEXT:

“they will hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power....”

And It all begins with selfishness! A focus on self!

The public religious acts of the Pharisees were not the result of a deep devotion to God and the work of His Kingdom!

They did not do these religious acts for God and His Kingdom at all!

It’s all about our inner motivations!

Matthew 15:8 (NLT)- “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Matthew 22:37 (NLT)- “Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.”

***True Christianity is always a matter of the submission of the heart to God!
Something that only God’s rescuing grace can produce in me!***

GOD YOU’RE FIRST!

(JESUS TAKES IT ONE STEP FURTHER)

Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)- “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

God’s grace not only forgives you, but enables you to live for something hugely bigger than yourself!

THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

WHY WOULD I WANT TO GO BACK TO MY LITTLE KINGDOM OF ONE!

It's way bigger than the surface Christianity to which it is often reduced! It's about so much more than me and my ticket to heaven!

You could read your Bible everyday and read the Bible through in a year and still live for yourself!

You could be faithful to your church attendance and still live for your little kingdom!

You could place your hard earned money in our offering boxes and still not live with God's Kingdom in view!

You could be an expert in theology of the Word of God and still shrink your life down to only what you want and what you think only you need!

You could participate in ministries that feed the poor and needy and still not live for God's Kingdom!

You could do all these things, and the trajectory of your life could still be more toward the kingdom of self rather than the Kingdom of God!

HERE'S OUR "AGAINST THE GRAIN" BIBLE VERSES:

Mark 8:34 (NKJV)- "When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Luke 9:23 (NKJV)- "Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Matthew 16:24-26 (NKJV)- "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (25) For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26) For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

CONCLUSION: To deny oneself is to put the interest of God's Kingdom first! To take up your cross means to renounce self-centered ambitions. That's against the grain!

Such sacrifice results in eternal life and a full experience of God's Kingdom life here and now!

Let's pray!