

Mark 12 (Part 1) - Jesus and the Religious Leaders

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As we get into Mark chapter 12 here. We're going to see that this is a series of confrontational conversations. Not all of them confrontational. There's a couple that are just flat out conversations, but between these various groups and Jesus. And one of the things I want to call your attention to, or at least remind you about going into this first parable that we're going to be looking at here in chapter 12.

Do you remember in the last week in chapter 11, we had that experience where Jesus was on His way into the city from where He'd been spending the night. And He saw a fig tree and He was hungry. And He desired to eat of it. And there was, although the tree was in full leaf, there were no figs. And it says, He pronounced a curse over the tree and it withered from the roots.

We saw in our study last week, that is a picture of Israel. From the standpoint that God comes to Israel to look for fruit to see if there's any fruit there. And finding none, there is a time of judgment that then begins for the nation of Israel. As we get... And I'm calling your attention to that by way of reminder because He's now going to give a parable that is that exact theme once again.

Here we go. Verse 1. *"And he began to speak to them in parables. 'A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.'"* (ESV)

Stop there for just a moment. Let me just give you a little quickie. It says that a man built this vineyard, put together everything that needed to go along with it and he left. He literally went to go live in another country. This was not uncommon in that area back in that time. They were called absentee landowners.

And they would set up a vineyard, or whatever they were doing on their property. And they would hire tenant farmers to work the land. And to bring in the crop, whatever the crop might be. And then of course they would get a cut

from that and pay their tenants. And sort of, so forth and so on. But this was a well-known thing to the people who are listening to this story.

In fact, we've even archeology, we archeologists have uncovered in the region of Galilee, documents between absentee landowners and their tenant farmers. And they even talk about disputes over the land, which I guess was also, not uncommon.

Secondly, you'll notice here that this man planted a vineyard. And that's very significant. Because the type, or the symbol of a vineyard, is often used in Scripture to give a picture of Israel itself. We won't take time to look it up. But if you're taking notes and you want to do it later, Isaiah chapter 5, is one such passage where God uses a vineyard to depict the nation of Israel. In this parable, the vineyard is the nation of Israel, the tenants would be the leaders of Israel, the religious leaders, and obviously, the landowner is God.

“2 When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 (But) they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.”

Now we understand from reading the Old Testament what's going on here. These servants who are being sent and mistreated are a type, or a picture of the prophets, who have come in many years in the past and spoken to the people about God. And have been mistreated and so forth.

It's amazing, isn't it how long God bore with the nation of Israel. When you and I, read this story... And this is a parable. How true it is in terms of real life, I don't know. I can't imagine a landowner continuing to send servants when they keep getting beaten and killed. Can you? I mean, after like the first, maybe the second guy, if I were the landowner, I'd have sent my army. Right? And I'd have wiped them out and said, we're starting from scratch here, because these guys are criminals.

But notice here in this parable as Jesus is telling it, He's making another point. He's talking about God's long suffering. And how He just keeps sending servants; keeps sending representatives who are mistreated, and abused, and some even killed. And it's just, it's such an amazing picture of God's patience with us.

Verse 6 says, *“He still had one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’⁷ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. (And then Jesus added this.)¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:*

“‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;¹¹ this was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous (or amazing) in our eyes?’”

And what Jesus is doing here is quoting Psalm 118. Which, by the way, was recognized even back in those days, as a Messianic Psalm; meaning pertaining to the Messiah. Jesus is quoting a psalm that they understood to be related to the Messiah. He quotes it to them. And you can obviously tell that they're connecting the dots that He is speaking this parable against them.

In fact, it goes on to say in verse 12, *“And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.”*

The religious leaders would have had no problem understanding that Jesus was speaking of Himself as the stone in the passage, the stone the builders rejected. And He's accusing them as the builders of rejecting Him, and He is basically, also saying of Himself that He is, and will become the chief cornerstone. And you can imagine why this infuriated them to the point where they wanted to kill Him.

It's interesting, in the early church, this idea of Jesus as the cornerstone was a common theme. In fact, it seemed to be a favorite of the apostle Peter. Because in the very early stages of the testimony of the apostles, they would speak this very passage. Let me show you an example from Acts chapter 4 on the screen. Verse 11, this is Peter talking to the Sanhedrin. And he says,

Acts 4:11 (ESV)

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, (notice he's connecting that you are the builders that were spoken of or prophesied of in this Psalm) which (now Jesus, this rejected stone) has become the cornerstone.

And then later in Peter's first letter, he made a reference saying,

1 Peter 2:5-7 (ESV)

...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

...you yourselves, (now he's talking to believers here now... you yourselves) like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. "For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (that's, by the way, a quote from Isaiah 28. Then he makes reference to that Psalm saying) So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," Or the capstone.

Meaning the critical stone in the building of God's kingdom, of which we are all a part. They realize that he's speaking this parable against them, they're infuriated. But there's nothing at this point that they can do about it.

Next scene. Interesting, here now verse 13, it says, *"And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians,"* And right away, if you knew anything about the Pharisees and the Herodians, you'd go, what? Pharisees and Herodians? These guys have, like, nothing in common. In fact, they don't like each other. But this is a clear case of, my enemy's enemy is now my friend because we have a common goal and that's to get rid of this Jesus guy.

And it says that they came to him to *"trap him* (And that was their intent from the very beginning) *in his talk. 14 And they came* (to him in verse 14) *and (they) said... "Teacher, we know that you are true and (you) do not care about anyone's opinion. ...you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way (Word) of God."*

Now, of course, that's all true. But they're saying it as a form of flattery. You know what the Bible says about flattery, right? It says, the flattering mouth works ruin. (Proverbs 26:28) And they're buttering their bread on both sides here. Because they're, trying to lure Jesus into a potential trap in what He's about to say.

And they go on and they say, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"* Alright, before we get into Jesus' answer, let me give you just a little quick history. It hadn't been very long at all since the Jews had been forced to start paying taxes. It had only been like 25 years, to the point where they were right now. It was like A.D. four, or so when they actually started paying taxes. Maybe a little bit more than 25 years.

Anyway, point is, not very long. And they hated it. In fact, there were some groups within the Jewish people who just refused to pay taxes all together. They were the zealots. They believed that by paying taxes, they were admitting the Romans were within their right to rule them. But they did not want to make that statement of principle, that the Romans had any right. And so they withheld their paying of taxes completely. Of course, there were a lot of other people that did pay their taxes. But the Pharisees didn't like it, paying taxes to Rome. But they didn't openly tell people not to.

The Herodians, on the other hand, were people who believed that it was a good thing to pay taxes to the Romans. Because they were in-bed with the Romans, as it were. So, they come to Jesus with the question, with an intent, to try to lure Him into a situation where they can possibly impale Him on the horns of this hot-button issue, that's going on in Israel.

Because if they can get Jesus to say, oh no, you shouldn't pay taxes. That's ridiculous. Well, now they can get Him in trouble with Rome. But if Jesus, if they can get Him to say, yeah, you ought to pay taxes, then He's going to be less than something to admire among the Jewish people. Because again, this whole tax thing smarts really bad. It hurts.

Let's see what happens here. Verse 15 says, *"But knowing their hypocrisy, (in other words, what they're up to) he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.'"* ¹⁶ *And they brought (Him) one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?'* *They said to him, 'Caesar's.'"* ¹⁷ *Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him."* It says.

And we read this and we're all pretty impressed. Jesus took a very, very tense, very difficult situation, He diffused it with what sounds like, a perfect answer. But the question you and I need to ask here this morning is: What exactly is Jesus saying when He says, Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and so forth.

Well, first of all, I'll apply it to those of us living in the United States of America. And I am aware that we're coming up on tax time. What Jesus is saying here is, if you live in the United States and you take advantage of the blessings of what it is to live in the United States, then it is entirely proper to help pay the bills. That's basically what He's saying.

I don't know how many of you have been overseas, particularly in countries that are less developed than are we. Anybody? Put up your hand if you've been in another country that's underdeveloped. Yeah, several of you. You guys probably came back to the United States of America and wanted to kiss the ground. Because you came back and you realized, we've got real roads here. I mean, we complain when there's a pothole or two, right? Yeah, a pothole, I'm going to wreck my car. You go into another country that's less developed, and that's what the road is. It's one big pothole.

And I don't know if you've ever, seen like a video of an intersection in India. It's chaos. Right? There's no light. We sit and we curse the light when it goes red on us, ah, rats, I got to wait for 30 seconds. And you look at these pictures in India and they are like, (Pastor Paul imitates with his hands and voice cars moving at high speeds randomly) And it's like, I'm surprised they don't die every day—every minute of every day. Going through these crazy...

And yet we come back to the United States of America and things are... And we have laws in place that create order and safety. And we enjoy beautiful roads. And clean drinking water. Not everybody in the world has clean drinking water. You and I, just turn on the tap and we have expectations along those lines. And if we want to put up our own little reverse osmosis filter to go on top of that, no problem. That's just life here in the United States of America. We have that freedom, we have that ability, we make enough money to be able to do things like that. It's amazing.

And yet we easily take it for granted. Jesus is saying here, pay your taxes. And if he's not saying it clearly enough for you, then let me give it to you from the Apostle Paul, because he's going to clear it up. Let me show you this passage from Romans chapter 13,

Romans 13:7 (ESV)

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

And all that junk and stuff. And there you go. Now you're fully prepared for April 15th. Yeah, it's just... It's sort of a thing. Alright, that's so we understand what He's saying here. Render, to Caesar what is Caesar's...

But there's another element of this that is just as important. And that is, "Give to God what belongs to God." What does He mean by that? It's interesting to me that when Jesus is making this statement, He asked for a denarius. He's like, hey, anybody got a denarius? Yeah, here you go.

Takes the denarius. Alright guys, look at this thing. Whose portrait do you see on there? And whose inscription is right under it? Caesar? Then give it to him. If it's his, give it to him. Right? Whatever He asked for, give him. Here's the point. He says, ...but give to God what is God's?

Now here's the interesting correlation. As human beings, we bear the image of our Creator, our God. Do we not? He showed a denarius with the image of Caesar on it. He could have just as easily held up a human being. Whose image do you see here? That's the image of God. That's what the Bible says. Right?

We were created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27) Then give to God what is God's. And that's really a very simple way of saying, you belong to Him. We were created for God. And we should, therefore, offer ourselves willingly. And in fact, you and I as Christians, it is our heart of worship. Let me show you a passage here that the apostle Paul, once again gives us. Romans chapter 12. He says,

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, (Look what he says here) which is your spiritual worship.

Okay. The act of worship for you and I, is to offer ourselves to Him, Lord, I am Yours. That's what we ought to be doing during worship. Worship is not singing songs. We use songs to help us to worship. But music is not worship. Lifting

your hands—that's not worship. Clapping your hands, doing a happy dance right by your chair, that's not worship. Even falling down on your face. That is not worship. Been a lot of people who've fallen down on their face before and it wasn't an act of worship.

What is worship? Paul describes it. It's offering yourself as a living sacrifice. It's saying to him, "I belong to You. And now I offer myself to You. I give myself to You. That's worship, you guys. That's what it means to worship God. I am Yours.

And as believers, we have a double connection here. We not only bear the image of God, as do all human beings. But we have that extra added element of having been purchased by the blood of the Lamb from death to life. The Bible says, you are not your own. You've been bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Therefore, as Christians, there's this double understanding of our belonging to Him by the blood of Christ. We're His, you guys. We belong to Him. Right?

Okay, next, we got the Sadducees who are going to take a crack at Jesus. Let me just give you a quickie understanding about the Sadducees. They were less numerous and less popular than the Pharisees. But they were very influential because they held seats, just like the Pharisees, on the Sanhedrin which was the Jewish ruling council.

But something you should know about the Sadducees is they denied the existence of spiritual beings like angels, demons. They did not believe in a resurrection from the dead. And they only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as Scriptural. What you and I would call the Pentateuch—first 5 books. The rest of it they did not accept as biblical, inspired, and the whole nine yards. And as a side note, this is Mark's only reference to the Sadducees in his Gospel.

It goes like this, the *"18 ...Sadducees came to him, who say there is no resurrection. (And that's an important point that Mark is making there.) And they asked him a question, (which was all about the Resurrection which is incredibly confusing. Anyway,) saying, 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.*

(But) 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died, left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. 22 And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also

died. (In other words, they were all married to her; none of them had children by her. That's a bad family, by the way) 23 In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."

All right. Again, very interesting question in light of the fact that these guys don't even believe in the Resurrection. Makes you wonder if they're concocting this whole story just to make the Resurrection sound dumb and Jesus with it. But I love how Jesus shoots a question back to them that is so insightful.

Look what he says in verse 24. *"Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?"*

Boy, what a great question. Right? In other words, aren't you wrong because of two things? You don't know the power of God. And you don't know the Scriptures. That's why you're in error. Makes me wonder how many errors over the years have been the product of people not knowing the power of God or the Scriptures appropriately. How many errors have entered into the Church - the body of Christ, over the years. Not knowing the power of God. That's key to just about believing anything the Bible has to say, it doesn't it?

Have you ever had a conversation with an unbeliever, and they start bringing up some story from the Old Testament. And they are like, okay, all right. Let's just talk. So, you Christians, you guys think or you believe that there was this little kid, aged 13, who took a slingshot and just happened to hit this big, huge, seasoned warrior in the head; knocked him down to the ground, and then took the guy's own sword and cut off his head? You believe that? And of course, the question assumes - that that's ridiculous.

You could come back with the same response of Jesus, and say, are you not in error because you don't know the power of God? I mean, think about the power of God. What is impossible for God? If you believe that God is who He says He is? And the fact that He says, nothing is too great for Me. Then what can't He do? What is it are you going to read in the Bible and say, I don't think so.

Well, there's nothing. Right? Because God can do anything. Right? If you believe in the power of God, it doesn't matter. A global flood? Sure. Why can't God do a global flood? What's a big deal? What's that to Him? I mean, is that any different than anything else that He might do? God creating a fish big enough to swallow up a man and keep him there for three days? People look at that and they're like, you guys gullible. Hey, the power of God. If you believe in the power of God, why is that a big deal? Just because you've never seen it. Right?

People respond that way all the time. But they are in error because they don't know the power of God. The other thing they don't know is the Scripture. Guys, do you understand that's one of the reasons why we study through the Bible, Genesis to Revelation? These Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Bible. And there were huge blank spots in their understanding related to God. Because they only decided they were going to accept a certain part of God's Word.

And we have learned over the years that there is such an important element connected to embracing the whole counsel of God's Word. Right? Genesis to Revelation, taking it all in. And what happens when we do that? We're insulated largely against a lot of heretical and unbiblical teaching. Because we have a better, broader understanding of the Word of God.

And somebody else quotes a single verse and they say, well, I believe, whatever it is, based on this verse." You say, yeah, but there's a greater understanding in the Scriptures. And we've talked about some of those in the past. Whether it's about prayer, or whether it's about the nature of God, or whatever it may be. Right? There's a lot of things in the Scriptures, for which a full and complete understanding of the Scriptures is required, that we might be balanced and comprehensive in our understanding of those things.

Jesus says through an insufficient knowledge of the Scriptures and an insufficient knowledge of the power of God, you have entered into error, as it relates to this. And then check out His response—the response that He gives. Verse 25 in your Bible, *"25 For when they rise from the dead, (He says) they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."*

Alright, this is an important thing to take note of. In the first part of Jesus' response, He tells them that marriage is just for this life. See, they were in error about it. And they were like, okay, if some guy, all these 7 brothers marry the same woman, and then in the Resurrection, who's bride is she going to be? Nobody's. Because marriage doesn't follow you into the Resurrection. Some of you are really bummed to hear that. Some of you are probably delighted. Be that as it may, the fact of the matter is, the Bible says marriage is for this life. It's not for the next.

And what Jesus is saying here is, as it relates to marriage, we will therefore be like the angels, in that the angels don't marry. Please note, Jesus is not saying people become angels. Very important that we understand that. Only in the area of marriage will we be like the angels. I can't tell you as a teacher, it bothers me so much when I go to funerals and I hear poems and statements made at

funerals about how God just, I guess God needed another angel. Not only is it tiresome and unbiblical, it's a slap in the face. It's a slap in the face to the God who saved you by His blood.

Listen, Jesus did not die to save angels. Angels cannot be redeemed. Mankind can be redeemed. The Bible says that God created angels to be servants—to serve those who would inherit salvation. (Hebrews 1:14) That's you and I, who have come to Christ. And for the time being, we are created a little lower than the angels. There will come a time when that will not be the case.

Listen, you are His master creation. There's nothing in the Word of God that says that angels are created in the image of God. That is only stated of human beings. There is a huge significant difference between angels and human beings. Please don't mess it up. I'm sorry that Hollywood has done their best to muddy the waters related to that and tell us that we become angels when we die. We do not. The angels wish they could be like us. Not the other way around. Please understand what Jesus is, and, is not saying here.

Next, He's going to talk to them about the Resurrection. Look what He says in verse 26. He says, *"And as for the dead being raised, (Here's a confrontation now. He says,) have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, (meaning the burning bush,) how God spoke to (Moses,) saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'?"*

He goes on to say in verse 27. *"He is not (the) God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong."* You know what I love about this? He's using their Scripture. Remember, they only accepted the first five books. He's going to point him back to Genesis. When God spoke to Moses and... Or is that Exodus?

Anyway I know my Bible really well. Yeah, Exodus. Anyway, you know the story. God says, I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Not, I was. They had passed from the scene years ago. And if, as the Sadducees believed, there was nothing after this life, God would have been forced to say I was the God of Abraham. I was the God of Isaac. I was the God of Jacob. But He said, present tense, I am. What is He saying about them? They're alive. They are alive.

You know what, I'll tell you something. Whenever I've done a funeral for a believer, I absolutely delight to get up when I'm sharing my thoughts during that funeral and look at the family of that person who died in Christ and say to them Your loved one is alive right now and enjoying the presence of Jesus Christ. And is delighted in that presence and wouldn't come back for anything. And

they don't feel like they've been cheated." They feel like, "It's like you guys are the ones having a rough time, I'm on easy street sort of a thing, Oh, what a delight it is to tell people, your loved-one is with Christ right now. Alive and you'll see him again.

So often I see in the face of believers at a funeral, this thing, like, Oh yeah!" It's like they've given into grief to the point where they've almost let go of faith or hope. And grief is a very real thing that should not be minimized or simplified in any way. But we must always maintain hope. The hope of the Scriptures, the hope of the promise that is ours in Jesus, that this is not all there is. Right? As, He's saying to the Sadducees, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive. And that's why God says, I am their God.

Verse 28, *"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"* ²⁹ *Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* ³¹ *The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* Very important statement.

"32 And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. 33 And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared (Him... no, no one dared) to ask him any more questions."*

This is such a beautiful passage. And this is the one where it's not a confrontational give and take. But rather just a conversation between a scribe who... Scribes were basically those who wrote down the Scriptures. But over the years they became known as "teachers" and experts in the Scriptures.

And in this conversation, Jesus distills down for us in very simple terms, what is important in life. This is important for all of us to hear: What is important in life. And using the commandments, Jesus outlines what ought to be the priority of our lives, the priority of our living. And it comes down to this: Love God, love people. There you go. That wasn't so hard, was it?

I mean, hard to do, as far as understanding: Love God, love people. In fact, love people even as yourself. In other words, what really counts is, God first, then people. That's what matters.

And did you notice there's nothing here about loving yourself, necessarily? I mean, there's no command... There's no 11th commandment, thou shalt love thyself. You can go look for it, but it's not there. And there's nothing about being happy as your primary goal. Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor and be happy. No, there's nothing there about loving self and being happy.

And I'll tell you why those are the goals of a godless society. That's what godless people run after: love of self and personal happiness. Those are the goals of the world. That's what we see repeated over and over again in movies, and books and shows, and really in life.

And I can understand, I guess, from the standpoint that, if you've rejected God, what else do you have but to love yourself and to be happy? Because without God, this is it. Right? This life is all there is. So, let's just try to be as happy as...And there's nothing else but to be happy. Because after this you're dead, and you lay in the ground, and you turn to dust over time. So, Gee, let's have a party! And let's make it the biggest party we can have because this is all there is.

In fact, the Apostle Paul wrote to us in the Scripture, and said that self-love would actually be a hallmark of the last days, which he talked about as terrible times. Let me show you this passage on the screen. From 2 Timothy chapter 3, it says,

2 Timothy 3:1-2 (ESV)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (And then he begins to explain those times of difficulty by saying) For people will be lovers of self.

And that's a hallmark of the terrible times of the last days. Now, let me ask you a question: Do you think we're in the last days? Yeah, I think so. We are living in that period of time when love of self has trumped all other loves. How many times have you heard people say, you just need to... Before you can love others, you need to learn to love yourself. People, that is a lie from the pit of hell. It is totally, 100 percent untrue, completely unbiblical, and it is the voice of godlessness.

What the Bible says is, love the Lord your God and love other people. There is nothing in the Word of God commanding you and I, to love self. But that's what we do, even though we were created to love God. We were created to love God, but what happened? Well, sin came into the equation, didn't it? Sin entered the picture. People forget that. There was a point in time when sin entered God's creation. And what happened? The commands of God - and this is what happens when sin always comes in, the commands of God get twisted and turned. And we turn them inward.

Listen, you and I, were created to be conscious of God, just like Adam and Eve were conscious of God. The Bible says they were so conscious of God before sin entered, they didn't even know they were naked. They hadn't noticed and it wasn't just because they didn't have a mirror. They were so conscious of God and His presence, that they didn't even realize they were naked.

Then what happened after sin entered the picture? First thing they do is run around like a couple of dorks, finding leaves to sew together and cover themselves. And Adam even said to God, we realized we were naked. So we hid. And God said to Adam, who told you were naked?

People, he became self-aware. That's what sin does. It takes this huge mechanism that was created in us by God, with which we were created to be focused on God. And sin turned it this way. (Pastor Paul points to himself) And now, what is my focus? Me. My focus is me. I'm all about me. I care more about me than anything. I care about how I feel! I care about how hot I am, how cold I am, if I'm hungry, if I'm sad, if I'm happy. I care nothing about... as much as I care about me.

That's why happiness is the goal of the world. We've raised in our culture improving one's self-esteem and one's self-appreciation, as the highest goal of practically life. But again, that's what sin does. Sin always takes what was created by God to be focused heavenward and points it to us. Everything. Worship the Lord, your God. I'm going to worship me. Right? Be focused on the Lord your God. No, no, no, I'm going to be focused on me.

Do you guys understand that from the day we say yes to Jesus Christ and bow our knee to Him at the cross, until the day we breathe our last, He is working to reverse this mechanism inside of us that is so self-focused, and to draw us away from ourselves and to get us to focus on Him once again. To make Him the Lord of our lives, the purpose for our living, the focus of our very existence. That's His goal.

And He does it by convicting us day-by-day, of sins in our lives that only feed the fires of self-focus. And by responding to that conviction with confession and repentance, we offer that up to the Lord, as a sacrifice to Him, and we say, Lord, change me from the inside. Make me focused on You, not myself. But it's a lifelong work of the Holy Spirit.