

How to Deal With the Religious Spirit

To be spiritual is not a problem, but using religion without love and mercy to enforce rules against another person can enter into abusive territory. This is when the religious spirit is most evident.

In Episode 39 of my show *Self Talk With Dr. Ray Self*, I discuss the cruel religious spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:6 says, “[God] who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

Paul wrote that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6b), which is such an accurate description of the religious spirit.

As a former pastor, I have always been concerned about anything that would hurt my church members. The shepherd is responsible for the care of his sheep.

I once discovered a spirit, disguised as holy and righteous, creating nothing but condemnation, shame and guilt. This spirit believes that telling somebody a scriptural principle is all they need to be set free. This spirit abandons all other critical elements every believer needs.

When Jesus spoke hard truths, He talked with the most incredible amount of love the world has ever known. His love was so great that He was willing to give His life for us.

A person operating in the religious spirit, however, speaks the truth and believes that being right gives them the right to impose their views on another person. Speaking the truth without giving people unconditional acceptance, love and time

to practically walk in it can cause substantial damage. Victims of the religious spirit feel a continual sense of condemnation and shame because they can never measure up to all the imposed rules.

At some point, most victims just give up and say to themselves, "I can't do this; it's impossible." This is what Paul was referring to when he said the "letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Perfect obedience to the law of Moses was impossible. That is why we needed the Savior. Jesus came to fulfill that law with an incredible act of love.

Contrary to that, the religious spirit is not motivated by love. It is motivated by the desire to be proven right at all costs and will sacrifice a relationship to prove it is correct.

The answer is to pray for the discerning of spirits. This wicked spirit disguises itself as holy and righteous but is causing people to become victimized in the church. Instead of feeling safe and accepted, the victim feels rejected.

I believe the truth will set us free, but the truth is Jesus Christ—and Jesus loves us unconditionally. Jesus is patient, giving us time to grow and mature. That is what we need, and Christ is always our model.

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Dr. Ray Self *is the president of the International College of Ministry.* {eo}

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