

10 Sure Signs You Have a Religious Spirit

In this article I am using the term “religion” to refer to man-made effort that utilizes works to please God. It is very easy to mistake being religious for having a relationship with God. All religions in the world are based on religion, which is a man-made attempt to reach God. However, Christianity is supposed to involve having a genuine relationship with God (2 Cor. 13:14). Unfortunately, it is very easy to unwittingly replace this precious relationship with a religious spirit (meaning a lifestyle or attitude), which is the default position of sinful human nature. The purpose of this article is to help people become self aware—not to condemn or judge them—hence, if you use this to judge others, you yourself are guilty of one of the following signs.

The following are eight signs you have a religious spirit:

1. You judge other people by their appearance.

God judges us by our heart, but man judges by outward appearance (1 Sam. 16:7). I have heard of many churches where young people have not felt welcome or have even been condemned by church leadership because they had a tattoo, a nose ring, or dressed a certain way. (In some legalistic churches men have to wear a suit and tie to attend church and ladies are not allowed to wear makeup and pants or cut their hair.) Although I believe mature believers should dress modestly, we especially need to allow visitors to come as they are and all believers should dress as they feel comfortable (with moderation). Legalistic churches that forbid folks to attend services because of their attire have exhibited one of the signs of having a religious spirit.

2. You try to earn God’s love and salvation.

Since religion in this article refers to a man-made effort to please God—the motivation behind those efforts in this category has to do with following certain rules, or regulations regarding the outward man, in order to be in right standing with God. This is a clear violation of passages that teach us that we are saved by grace and not by our own works (Eph. 2:8-9).

3. You try to conform to outward holiness without inward transformation.

The Scriptures teach us that God is more concerned with cleansing the inward man (Ps. 51:6) than our outward conformity to rules and regulations. Those that only have a form of godliness without inward transformation deny His power (2 Tim. 3:5). Jesus strongly rebuked those who merely attempted to cleanse the outer man without allowing God to deal with the heart (Matt. 23). In my experience I have observed that very religious people usually have sinful habit patterns that eventually manifest because they don't allow God to change their inner being. The more we attempt to follow God merely by the letter of the law—the more it will incite our sinful tendencies (Rom. 7:7-25).

4. You are always critical of other people's walks with God.

I have noticed that the more religious a person is, the more critical they are of other believers and ministers. Since they are so hard on themselves (religious people generally don't understand grace and walk in self-condemnation), they are also equally hard on other people.

5. Your closest Christian relationships are based only on ministry activities.

Religious people are not only superficial with God but with others as well. Since they attempt to connect with the "other" merely by activities, they are disengaged emotionally and do not know how to connect heart to heart with those they

interface with. Church-related ministry or functions usually hold their friendships together.

6. You perform Christian duties but have no passion or hunger for God.

Religious people sustain their version of Christianity by performing ministry or church attendance. They do not have a deep relationship with God nor do they hunger and thirst for Him.

7. You desire position and honor in the church more than honor from God.

Those with a religious spirit hinge their life and identity upon their outward man. Hence, they are drawn to having recognition and titles in the church world. If they cannot legitimately get a ministerial title from their local church, they will hook up with an online course or other entity that will give them some kind of badge or card signifying they are a minister or chaplain.

8. Your identity is rooted in a lifestyle of Christianity instead of in Christ.

Mature Christ-followers receive their main identity in the fact they are “sons” of God, whereas religious people receive their main identity in the things they attempt to do for God and their church.

9. You know about the truth of Jesus but not the way of Jesus.

Religious people make a big deal about the doctrines they accumulate through head knowledge. They make the mistake of thinking that having good doctrine means they are mature believers. Just because we may know about God doesn't mean we commune with God and know Him experientially.

10. You project righteousness but inwardly are filled with anger and resentment.

Religious people know the entire Christian lingo, know how to act and project themselves in certain settings and use this “act” to gain influence in church circles. However, projecting ourselves to create a Christian persona will not last long. Those who depend upon this superficial personality projection are merely being religious and will not have the sustainability to deal with the hurt, pain and disappointments of life. This results in a duality in which they appear righteous but inside are filled with anger, resentment and envy.

In closing, all of us can fit in one of these 10 categories at certain times in our life. The good news is: God is calling for us to go deeper in Him and experience His infinite love and peace. The only way to experience His life to the fullest is to let Him increase so that we can automatically decrease (John 3:30). When we try to reverse this, then we will merely be religious and God will allow us to fail.

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