

Break Free from Religion

If it is for freedom that Christ set us free, why do we seek to entangle one another in yokes of bondage, otherwise known as religious traditions?

Before I became a Christian, I had a reputation for being a “worldly woman.” Once I accepted Christ, my heart’s desire was to be accepted as a “church sister.” The problem was, I didn’t look like one yet.

I wore extremely tight clothes, my hair was three colors, and I had a mouth full of gold teeth. At one church I was called “Jezebel” and asked to leave. A deacon pulled me aside and warned me that the people there didn’t like “my kind.”

In tears I called a Christian friend who was in the same denomination but a different church. She invited me to her service. I went, and afterward some of the women invited me to go to dinner with the “church sisters.”

I was elated!

I changed into a pair of long shorts. They went down to my knees, but they were so tight, a butter knife couldn’t slip between my leg and the material.

Driving separately, I trailed some of the women to a beautiful house in the middle of nowhere in Frankfurt, Germany, where I was stationed with the U.S. Army. The house was full of “church sisters.” But every time I tried to talk to one of the women, she would walk away from me.

Finally I asked the owner of the house if something was wrong. She looked down at my pants and asked me to leave.

I was hungry, scared, and I didn’t know my way back to town; but by God’s grace, I made it home safely. It wasn’t until later that I realized there were rules in some

churches—including dress codes—that just couldn't be broken.

Eventually I found a church home and became active in evangelism and intercession. One day the leader of our prayer band announced that the group was going to go to a military prison to minister. I quickly shared my desire to take part.

No one had the heart to tell me that ministry was strictly reserved for men. Women were allowed to pray with the group but forbidden to go out to minister.

Instead of leveling with me, the leader of the group told me to meet the men at 11 the next Saturday morning. What I didn't know was that the group was planning to depart for the prison at 9:30 a.m. I arrived early, though, and their plan to leave me behind was foiled.

Next they told me there wasn't enough space on the bus for me. "I will drive my own car," I politely responded.

The bus took off down the Autobahn at lightning speed. I wasn't comfortable driving on the German superhighway; but with tears rolling down my face, I purposed to stay close. It was obvious they were trying to lose me.

The drive seemed to take forever. Finally we arrived at the prison and began the necessary processing procedures.

That's when the leader of our prayer group pointed at me and told the prison guard, "She's not with us."

I was shocked that the rules of the ministry had superseded the first commandment of God—love!

Spirits in the Doorway Eventually I left the military, and I moved to Florida to open a facility for drug-addicted women. In time I became their pastor.

One day I met an evangelist setting up for a tent meeting. After noticing the title "pastor" on my card, he told me in no

uncertain terms, "Sister, God has not called women to oversee churches. You are only a handmaiden of the Lord!"

By this time the tears I'd shed after so many rejections had dried up. Something radical rose up inside of me, and for the first time I recognized the spirits that were standing in the doorway, trying to block me from entering the call of God on my life: religious spirits of tradition.

These religious spirits are strategically set up in church doorways to stop people from coming in. Luke 11:33 says that those who "come in" must see the light. Religious spirits of tradition have mind-blinding and mind-binding assignments that keep people from seeing the light.

The task of these spirits is to make the spiritual eyes and ears of new believers deformed from the start. Just as the developmental stages of babies in the womb are important, so are the stages of conception and development of new converts.

The "light" of Luke 11:33 produces an atmosphere for proper spiritual growth. When that light is not provided, however, souls are miscarried or aborted. That's why the Bible warns believers to be careful that the light in them does not become darkness (see Luke 11:35).

Darkness descends when the light of the gospel is overshadowed by traditions handed down by men. In such cases, the Word of God is set aside, deprived of its authority and power.

The result, according to Matthew 15:6-9, is that the Word is not effective in the lives of God's people. Whenever a church's focus turns from the Word of God to the doctrines of men, worship becomes useless.

Avoiding Darkness How can we avoid letting our light become darkness? By steering clear of religious traps!

The Greek word for "darkness" is skotos, which means shadiness

or obscurity. The bondage of tradition is part of the shadiness that shuts out the light of the gospel in us.

Understand, tradition in itself is not a bad thing. The problem arises when church people attempt to make their generational rules and regulations equal to the Word of God. When they pass down their religious traditions, social customs and belief systems by mouth or by practice, without validating their origin or explaining their purpose, they breed shadiness and darkness.

Their doctrines and traditions become like cement that has settled. The church is bound, with no room for any person, place, or thing that doesn't fit with what's already there.

The Pharisees were bound by their customs and traditions. Jesus called them hypocrites! In Matthew 23:13 He told them, "'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'" (NKJV).

Two verses later He said, "'You travel land and sea to win one proselyte [or convert], and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.'" Apparently there is a demonic double portion that operates through this religious, anti-evangelistic spirit!

Not only does the Word of God warn us to beware of the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Luke 12:1); it also warns us to beware of the "concision" (Phil. 3:2, KJV). The Greek word for "concision," *katatome*, is related to the word for circumcision, *peritome*. Both mean "to cut."

Circumcision has to do with the law ordained by Moses that distinguished God's people from heathens. When this law of *peritome*, which is good, is forgotten, it becomes *katatome*, which is evil.

Katatome, or concision, is the mutilation of the Word of God.

People involved in concision violate the Word in a type of spiritual rape.

They never get intimate with God's Word but use it for self-gratification. Philippians 3:2 calls those who operate in this realm "evil workers" and "dogs."

There is good news, though. Although religious traditions and the abuse of God's Word can affect the attitudes, customs and institutions of the religious world, they cannot penetrate the true kingdom of God!

As Paul boldly proclaimed, "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20, NKJV). The Greek definition of "word" in this verse refers to the limited word of God that is made of no effect by man's interpretation of it.

This type of word is manifested in church teachings concerning women in ministry, appropriate dress, speaking in tongues and demons, among other things. But the kingdom of God is in power—and this violent, miracle-working power is not subject to man-made traditions.

Religiously Correct As the return of Jesus draws closer, you would think that the hearts of God's people would grow closer to Him. The apostle Paul knew differently.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul spoke about the apostasy, or the falling away from the truth. He listed numerous spirits that would be operating in church people in the last days.

These people, Paul said, would have "a form of godliness." The Greek word for "form" is *morphosis*, which means "an appearance."

There are fashions in the church world today that put pressure on Christians to present a certain appearance, to be religiously "in vogue." In many churches, if a ministry gift isn't wrapped in the right package, it's not considered

religiously correct.

But Romans 12:1 shows us how we must present ourselves as believers. We must not have a “form of godliness” that is worldly in nature. We must not be conformed to the world but transformed!

The Greek word for “transformed” is related to our English word “metamorphosis,” which means “to change appearance.” Only as we are changed in appearance will people see the light of the gospel in us and “come in.”

Religious spirits of tradition work to keep a church from being transformed. They block the light necessary to draw in new converts. When we finally deal with frivolous church customs and traditions, great evangelism will begin to take place!

The Greek word for “customs” is ethos, which means habits. Many of the issues that cause controversy and division in the body of Christ are rooted in religious habits that no one takes the time to challenge.

We need to rise up to that challenge! Otherwise, if we continue to base our doctrines on man-made belief systems that have been passed down from generation to generation, we will limit the work of the Holy Spirit in the last days.

Hope in the Spirit Thankfully, there is hope. First Peter 1:18 tells us that we have been “redeemed...from [the] aimless conduct received by tradition” from our forefathers.

The Greek word for “tradition,” paradosis, is related to the word paradidomi, which means “to put in prison” or “to be a hazard.” Clearly, some church traditions have been hazardous to believers, causing them to be imprisoned in a yoke of bondage.

The prince of the power of the air uses these customs and

traditions as a cover of darkness to infiltrate churches—and then rules over those believers who don't renounce them.

But we have been redeemed! Through the power of God's Spirit, we can reject dark, aimless and harmful traditions that are based on man-made doctrines and not on the Word of God.

Will it be easy? No, but the reward will be great. It was for me!

Remember when the men in my German prayer group told the prison guard that I wasn't with them? Well, the guard let me in another door and allowed me to go cell to cell, ministering to every woman in the facility.

From that day until the day I moved back to America, I ministered every month at the prison. In fact, it was through that prison ministry that my own ministry, Spoken Word Ministries, was incorporated.

The men who tried to keep me out? They never ministered at the prison again. Remember the "church sisters" in that house in Frankfurt who rejected me because of my appearance? Over time, God used me to personally minister to almost every one of them.

And last but not least, remember the tent evangelist who told me I couldn't be a pastor? Another pastor who was passing by at that moment heard the conversation. He invited me to speak at his church—and that one meeting grew into a citywide revival.

My prayer is that God will anoint and empower you to see the religious spirits of tradition standing in the doorway of your calling. Don't let your light become darkness! Reject these religious spirits, and make a path for the next generation to see the light and come in.

Read a companion devotional.

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