

Not All Religious Spirits Are Created Equal

Religious spirits are nefariously nasty. The **spirit of religion** works to murder reputations, pervert the revelation of who we are in Christ, put us in bondage to legalism and much more. But I've discovered in recent years that all religious spirits aren't created equal.

Actually, a more accurate way to state it may be that all religious spirits don't manifest in the same way. Or, put yet another way, religious mindsets express themselves through manifold methods. I've often said you can't put a prophet in a box. Well, it turns out you can't put a religious mindset in a box either.

What do I mean?

Well, practically speaking, "**religion**" doesn't like a woman to preach. A man may support his wife completely in ministry, defying the **spirit of religion** that would keep her in bondage, yet offer prophetic words of judgment and cursing that stem from a Sons of Thunder mindset.

By the same token, a woman may not think of speaking an ill word against anyone—even if she doesn't agree with them—but nevertheless hold them to a set of rules and regulations to which she cannot even live up. That's called legalism.

The point, again, is that the **religious spirits**—or religious mindsets—manifest in different ways. We need to discern the operations of this wicked spirit in whatever form it reveals itself and resist it. Make no mistake, the **religious spirit** wants to keep you from entering into the fullness of the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17).

Religion's Hypocrisy

One of the earmarks of the **religious spirit** is hypocrisy. One may walk in obedience to the Lord—walking in love with their brothers and sisters in Christ—up until a certain point. Unless you cross that line, you'll never see their **religious spirit** in all its wickedness.

The woman caught in the act of adultery is a good example. You remember the story. The scribes and Pharisees brought Jesus a woman caught in sin—in the very act of adultery. They wanted to see her stoned and asked Jesus what He had to say about it (John 8:1-5). Of course, they didn't drag the man alongside her to be punished. Hypocrisy.

Of course, that's not the only way religion manifests hypocrisy, either. The apostle Peter wasn't likely to stone anyone for adultery. He understood the work of the cross—up to and only up to a point. Peter and Barnabas were enjoying eating with the Gentile converts in Antioch until the Jewish brethren came to visit from Jerusalem. Then he distanced himself. Paul rebuked him for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-21).

Religion's Manifold Manifestations

I focused on hypocrisy because it's the heartbeat of the religious spirit (or mindset). Although not reserved for believers—nonbelievers can have a legalistic mindset as well—Christians with a **religious spirit** are essentially working against the gospel in which they say they believe. Jesus said, "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" (Matt. 23:13).

Now, many of the Pharisees quite literally would not enter in to the kingdom of God. Still today we see that some Christians who have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5). Religious spirits deny the power and grace of God to change

people and in doing so wax judgmental, self-righteous, prideful, critical, legalistic and argumentative with fellow believers (and lost souls).

That's hypocrisy because anyone who receives Christ should obey Him from the heart, and we are given one new commandment: to love one another (John 13:34). The religious spirit manifests with anything but love. Religious mindsets are often divisive, perfectionistic, guilt-heaping, condemning, intolerant and more.

Don't Go on a Witch Hunt

With all that said, it's important not to go on a witch hunt against people who are influenced by **religious spirits**—or any other spirit—or you may start flowing in the same mindset you are trying to combat!

I've discovered that most of us have religious mindsets about something or another. So we need to check our own hearts and motives above all—and when we see a person operating in a religious spirit, we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). Sometimes we're called to confront it like Paul did with Peter, but most of the time we're called to our knees to ask God to break through their religious mindset with His light.

Let me repeat that: Most of us have some form of religious thinking. We don't need to be hypocrites by rebuking the religious around us. Amen.

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