

Prophecy: God Is Rooting Out These 3 Religious Spirits

Believers have talked about religious spirits for years. Seeing them as traditional mindsets, old-fashioned ideologies and outdated ministry methods, many might assume we are finally free from these bondages of the past. However, the Lord has been revealing a whole new generation of demonic strongholds posing as righteous beliefs that will strangle our witness if we don't recognize them and deal with them.

During a recent sabbatical, the Lord took me through three of the deadliest religious mindsets I was dealing with, totally unaware that I've been feeding a religious spirit and opening a door to deception. I believe these same belief systems are at work in many believers right now, choking off the life of the Spirit and robbing us of our anointing and authority.

The Pride of Discipline

I have been an intercessor all my life. I've never struggled with a lack of desire or motivation to pray for hours on end. Regardless of the circumstances or challenges, I've always known that my intercession was making a difference, many times bearing much fruit. Where many saw this as a strong spiritual discipline in my life, it was simply a part of who I was. Until three years ago.

In an intense prophetic dream, I was lying on an operating table surrounded by "assistants" (angels) who were reassuring me of what was about to take place. I knew that my left arm was being cut off. I wasn't scared, and it wasn't an emergency. I just knew my left arm needed to come off ... for my own good. I knew upon waking that the Lord was about to do some serious pruning in my life, but I couldn't imagine what He would "cut off" that would feel like my left arm was being

taken.

It was several months later when the Lord revealed what it was: my call to intercession. I couldn't have imagined such a thing. Why in the world would He cut off something so powerful, so needed and so much a part of my call? It had become my lifeline and, unknowingly, a source of my identity. And there was the problem. My intercession had become a source of spiritual pride; a badge of honor. Without realizing it, I was gaining my self-worth from my prayer life instead of from the cross. For my own good, the Lord needed to lift the grace of intercession off my life in order to bring me back to Christ alone as my identity and purpose.

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting are good and have their place, but if they begin to feed a sense of pride and self-righteousness, don't be surprised if the grace is lifted off them for a time. They will actually feed a religious spirit if we think we are more spiritual, more powerful or more righteous because of these disciplines. Where my prayer life used to be a primary source for prophetic information, it has now become much more focused on simply knowing Him. Big difference.

The Seduction of Standards and the Self-Deception of Grace

In our pursuit of truth, there are two other deadly mindsets the Lord revealed. The Word of God cuts both ways. On the one side is His standard for righteousness. It is His holiness that separates the wheat from the chaff and serves to mold us into Christlikeness. If we aren't careful, however, the principles and practices of righteousness can quickly lure us into a self-imposed code of conduct based on rules and regulations. This feeds the religious spirit because it focuses on our efforts rather than on God's mercy, our behavior more than our heart. We then deal with constant condemnation because we just never quite add up. Gone unchecked, we begin to impose these same standards on others

and soon disqualify anyone who doesn't look or act holy.

It is only when the heart changes that actions change. Even in our quest for a righteous standard to be established in our nation, we must not allow this religious mindset to blind us to God's redemptive work in seemingly unregenerate people. We must pursue people's hearts more than criticize their actions. God loves to redeem and restore the broken and He does it from the inside out.

On the other side of truth is grace. It represents the power of forgiveness, His unconditional love and acceptance, and His ability to make all things good for our sake and His glory. Though these are powerful truths, they can also lead to self-deception if we miss the lessons of failure and deny the consequences of our actions.

I had to personally face this reality when the Lord confronted me with the consequences of some heated words spoken to a loved one several years ago. Soon after, I had asked forgiveness from the person and from the Lord, but I couldn't face any future ramifications of my spontaneous rant. Assuming His grace covered me, I ignored the potential for any painful consequences and went on my way believing all was well. Recently, He reminded me that with the authority I've been given comes the responsibility of wielding that authority—for either good or bad. Though I was freed of guilt, I had to accept responsibility for the negative seeds sown and the weeds that were growing as a result. Where I had deceived myself into thinking there would be no consequences to my actions, I humbled myself and embraced this painful lesson.

I believe there is a level of self-deception rising within the body of Christ as many are buying into their own press and presuming upon His kindness. In our desire to demonstrate the goodness of God, we cannot afford to preach entitlement or become irresponsible with the authority we've been given. Even as we champion His grace, we must accept the responsibility

we've been given and walk in the fear of the Lord. Especially for those who have been given prophetic voices in this hour, we must realize that the power of our words can bring both life and death. We must bear responsibility for how we use them.

All three of these religious mindsets could really be summed up in one: self-righteousness. "For, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness for every one who believes" (Rom. 10:3-4).

In God's grace and mercy, He is peeling back the layers of our own efforts in order to show the power of true redemption. None of us will be good enough or holy enough to earn His favor or blessing. We can't presume upon His grace or even the gifts and anointing He has given us to receive our prize. He is exposing our own attitudes of self-righteousness in order to open the way for *His* righteousness to be known and embraced.

Let's not allow our pursuit of spiritual disciplines, our conviction for righteous standards or our celebration of His grace to open the door to a new generation of religious spirits. We must guard against any thought that places our privilege as sons and daughters above His sacrifice on the cross. He is doing a work in many of us, revealing the true nature of our hearts in order to free us from ourselves. It's in Christ alone that we will be delivered. Anything else is just dead religion. {eoa}

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