

There's a Devil in the Church!

Did you know that one of the craftiest agents of Satan hides in our churches? It is called the spirit of religion—and we must oppose it if we want to follow the Lord fully.

I have heard the term “the spirit of religion” mentioned in sermons probably a thousand times. But until about ten years ago I had never heard a teaching on the subject. In 2003 I heard three. That was a confirmation to me that God is emphasizing this to the body of Christ.

The apostle Paul tells us that if we are ignorant of the devices of Satan, he will take advantage of us (see 2 Cor. 2:11). I believe one of his principal agents for carrying out his evil devices is the spirit of religion. And the Spirit of God is urging us to begin to take action—now!

What do we know about the spirit of religion? We know that it is bad, that we don't like it, that we must break it or bind it, that we must warn others against it. But not too much else.

Part of the problem is that “spirit of religion” is not a biblical term. You can't find it in the concordance.

That does not mean it is not a useful term. You can't find Trinity or abortion or Christmas in the concordance, either, to take just a few examples, but they are good words that we frequently use.

Even the word religion by itself appears only two times in the Bible. Because the Bible says little, we must depend, more than with some other subjects, on God's fresh revelation.

But if we are going to use the term, we must define it. As I

have studied, I have come to the conclusion that the spirit of religion is an agent of Satan assigned to prevent change and to maintain the status quo by using religious devices. I'm using the term religion in the common sense of the word, namely beliefs and activities involved in relating to supernatural beings or forces.

Knowing what we do about the invisible world of darkness, we can surmise certain things. For example, there certainly must be many spirits of religion, not just one. Consequently, our term "spirit of religion" should be understood as a generic term, embracing however many of these demons there actually might be.

Now I am going to use my imagination a bit. In doing so, I am identifying with Paul, who said at one point concerning a certain matter: "I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy" (1 Cor. 7:25, NKJV).

Here, then, is my hypothesis. It is my personal attempt to explain a rather complex state of affairs in simple language.

Let's imagine that Satan's kingdom has a Luciferian Department of Religion. If it does, there could well be two divisions: (1) The Division of Non-Christian Religions and (2) The Division of Christendom.

The issue for the spirit controlling the Division of Non-Christian Religions is allegiance. To whom does an individual or a group give allegiance?

Keep in mind that the spirit of religion always attempts to preserve the status quo. In this case it uses religion to keep people from switching their allegiance to Jesus Christ. In other words, it devises strategies to keep Muslims committed to Allah, Japanese worshipers to the Sun Goddess, Thai people to Buddha, the Aymaras of the Andes to Inti and so on.

Let's also assume that there are at least two offices in the Division of Christendom. The first could be an Office of Personal Religious Security. This would primarily target individuals, and the central issues for it are either salvation or fullness.

The spirit of religion's first strategy is to promote the idea that belonging to a Christian church or doing religious things is what saves you. It succeeds if it can, for example, persuade Catholics to think that they can be saved by lighting candles to Mary or Baptists to think that they can be saved by going to church every Sunday carrying a Bible or Lutherans to think they are saved if they have been baptized and confirmed.

If the personal spirit of religion cannot prevent an individual from being saved, it then tries to keep that person on dead center. It does not allow believers to move on to the filling of the Holy Spirit or freedom in Christ or the fulfillment of God's destiny for their lives. Paul specifically warns that the devil, by his craftiness, can corrupt minds and keep them from "the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

The second Christendom-related office could be an Office of Corporate Church Structure. Here the spirit of religion targets the religious power brokers who determine the destiny of whole organizations, such as denominations.

The central issue is God's new times and seasons. The demonic strategy is to preserve the status quo through adhering to tradition.

The Corporate Spirit of Religion

This is what I call "the corporate spirit of religion." Although I believe there are other manifestations of the spirit of religion, the corporate manifestation is the one I have been faced with most because in my personal ministry I deal with hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches

collectively about new times and seasons.

It is important for us to study this manifestation because we now live in the Second Apostolic Age. We are currently witnessing the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation. That is why I like to call what we are seeing the “New Apostolic Reformation.”

How do we handle this radical change?

One of the most radical changes recorded in the Bible was the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. When Jesus was addressing the disciples of John the Baptist, the last prominent representative of the Old Covenant, He used the phrases “old wineskin” and “new wineskin” (see Matt. 9:17).

When God has new wine for His people, He will pour it only into new wineskins. He doesn't pour it into old wineskins because He loves His people and doesn't want to destroy them.

The change from an old wineskin to a new wineskin, such as the New Apostolic Reformation, always meets powerful resistance. However, the resistance does not come from the anointed leaders of the old wineskin. For instance, John the Baptist blessed the new wineskin, saying that “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Nicodemus and Gamaliel are other examples of anointed old wineskin leaders.

No, the opposition to change comes from the unanointed leaders of the old wineskin. The attitude of the Pharisees was the opposite of John the Baptist's attitude. They ended up killing Jesus! The last thing they were willing to do was decrease and thereby lose the position of power they were enjoying.

I see this type of resistance as nothing less than the operation of a demonic force that I call the corporate spirit of religion. It is a device of Satan.

Daniel 2:21-22 tells us that “[God] changes the times and the

seasons.'" Part of the character of God is to produce new wine and provide new wineskins. But Satan does not like Him to do that, and, later in Daniel, Satan speaks through the "fourth beast" declaring that he "'shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law'" (Dan. 7:25).

What device does Satan use to attempt to roll back God's new times and seasons? Look at that phrase, "persecute the saints." The Hebrew word for "persecute" is *belaw*, which means to wear out the mind.

In other words, the corporate spirit of religion does not play so much on the heart, emotions, personal holiness or the fruit of the Spirit, but on the mind. It causes people, especially religious power brokers, to think the wrong thoughts.

This implies that the way we can neutralize the power of the spirit of religion is to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s], that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Chances are you have come up against the corporate spirit of religion. Consequently, you will recognize the following four characteristics.

1. The corporate spirit of religion is a high-level demon. It is probably on the same level as some other principalities that are named in Scripture such as Wormwood, Beelzebub, the prince of Greece, the Queen of Heaven and so on.

2. The assignment of the corporate spirit of religion is collective. It is not the kind of demon that invades individuals, such as a spirit of trauma or lust, which must to be cast out. Rather, it works on groups. It casts a spell over the leaders of whole segments of God's people.

Paul refers to this type of spirit in Galatians 3:1: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not

obey the truth?" The Galatians were under the spell of the corporate spirit of religion. They hesitated to move into God's new times and seasons for them.

3. The corporate spirit of religion is subtle. It doesn't speak out loud or write on walls or move furniture around the room. People under its influence have no clue.

In fact, the corporate spirit of religion succeeds in making them think (below) that they are actually doing God's will! For example, the Pharisees said, in good faith: "'Look, why do they [the disciples, who were picking grain on the Sabbath] do what is not lawful?'" (Mark 2:24). They also asked: "'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread'" (Matt. 15:2).

4. The corporate spirit of religion manipulates leaders into opposing God's plan for new times and seasons. A good case in point is Peter. When he was with Jesus in Caesarea Philippi, he declared that Jesus was "'the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Matt. 16:16).

Jesus commended him: "'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'" (v. 17). But later that day when Jesus told His disciples He was going to leave them, Peter rose up at the prospect of the change.

After he voiced his objection, Jesus said, "'Get behind Me, Satan!'" (v. 23). Jesus traced Peter's statement to the realm of darkness. I don't think it would be stretching things too far to suppose that Satan's agent for making Peter think (below) the wrong way would be the corporate spirit of religion.

Dealing With the Beast

What satanic devices does this demon use to accomplish its

purposes? Jesus tells us seven times in the Book of Revelation that we need to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The tense is present tense, not past tense. The Holy Spirit continually tells us new things that we should not only hear but also obey.

However, the spirit of religion does not want us to hear new things. How does he keep us from it? Belaw. He wears us out mentally so much that we cannot hear.

When the Holy Spirit speaks to us about a new wineskin—recognizing the contemporary office of apostle, for example—the corporate spirit of religion goes into action among the leaders of the old wineskin. It manipulates their minds to emphasize what the Spirit said (past tense) to them when they were a new wineskin. In this example they might well affirm their adherence to what has become a doctrine of democracy in order to avoid submitting to apostolic government.

In order to accomplish its purposes, the spirit of religion administers what could be seen as an intravenous injection of fear. Old wineskin leaders fear losing their positions of power.

They fear being pulled out of their comfort zones. Their typical question is, “What am I going to lose by moving into God’s new times and seasons?”

They rarely ask, “What is the kingdom of God going to gain?”

They are hesitant to risk the possibility of losing either control or money. So they decide to do whatever it takes to preserve the status quo, honestly thinking they are doing God’s will.

How do those of us who are assigned to move into new wineskins deal with the spirit of religion? Here are some principles I’ve discovered:

1. Don't get sidetracked. The spirit of religion would love to weaken you by consuming your time and energy. It frequently uses enticements such as "let's dialogue" or "we need more prayer" or "do further study" or "give the old wineskin another chance." All of this is designed to wear out your mind, the literal meaning of below.

2. Engage in warfare. Keep in mind that the battle is a spiritual battle because evil spirits are trying to disrupt God's plans. The Bible says that our weapons are not carnal but mighty in God for doing several things including "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of God" (2 Cor. 10:3-5, emphasis added). We use our authority to bind the spirit of religion, who is trying to make leaders think wrong thoughts.

3. Show your opponents honor and respect. Keep in mind that the people who come against you are not your enemies. Your real enemy, the corporate spirit of religion, is simply using certain individuals to accomplish its ungodly desires to maintain the status quo. This is the time to be "clothed with humility" as the Bible tells us to because "'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Pet. 5:5).

The spirit of religion is defeated when its victims become "transformed by the renewing of [their minds]" according to Romans 12:2. This will happen to those who, like John the Baptist, become anointed leaders of the old wineskin, and together we will be ready to move triumphantly into our new times, our new seasons and our new destinies.

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