

**The Religious Spirit**

By Todd Bentley

Most people that are set free from a religious spirit, or religious ways, are not actually walking free like Jesus. Instead, they simply switch from religion to rebellion. The heart begins to be in rebellion toward religious people and religious churches rather than the religious spirit. The religious spirit always tries to get people to camp in one place. It will hold on to that which is familiar and comfortable rather than moving on from glory to glory. Remember Peter, under the inspiration of satan, tried to rebuke Jesus because He was going to the cross to suffer and pay for the sin of mankind. But Jesus turned and rebuked satan in Peter because it was actually Peter operating with a religious spirit. His mindset was that of man rather than that of Christ.

**Free From the Religious Spirit & Without Rebellion**

In the same way that Jesus talked about the Pharisees shutting off the kingdom of God, we have shut off religious people from coming into the move that God is now doing. Our attitude is one of rebellion and spiritual pride saying, "We've got a corner on the market of what God is doing and if you would just get it together, Buddy, maybe you could have one too." Jesus came to set men free from that by which they are bound. He didn't come to bind them up more. The truth is, many of us do not care to reach them.

People think that because they go to a church that is religious, then that makes them religious. We tend to think that if something or someone, especially a leader, is religious, then everyone in the church is religious. I believe that we can walk in freedom in any place that we are in. Jesus was in the same places that the Pharisees and Sadducees were. He was able to go into their churches and be around the people without, himself, becoming bound by the spirit of religion.

The religious spirit breeds fear and intimidation. To those who are not religious, religion breeds rebellion. Our automatic tendency when someone says, "you have to..." is to say, "I don't have to do anything, man. Forget that!" We are just as wrong as they, because of our attitude. We are responsible to react with character and integrity to a person bound by the religious spirit. When it looked like Jesus was dealing harsh with man who was religious, He was really dealing with the spirit behind religion. Ephesians 6 says that we wrestle not against flesh and blood. That is why Jesus, when placed on the cross by religious people, asked the father to forgive them. He said they didn't know what they were doing.

We need to realize that we do not wrestle with men, churches or ministries. We need to reach those that have not yet come into the river. We are not better than them. We are just free. We should never use our freedom to cause unnecessary offences. I love to dance before the Lord in worship. But if I go into a church and the pastor asks for people to not dance, I will not. If I do, then it is not freedom but rebellion.

**John 8:31-37**

31.) Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32.) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." 33.) They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, "You will be made free?" 34.) Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35.) And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36.) Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. 37.) "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me

They sought to kill Jesus because they were bound by the religious spirit, and they were working under the power of the devil. But Jesus realized that they were in bondage. That is why He said to them, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Most people who are in this type of bondage do not know that they need to be set free. We should pray that may see, so that they might be set free. Jesus knew, when the Sadducees came, that they were looking to trap Him and ultimately slay Him. But He, realizing that they were bound by the religious spirit, tried to reach them by bringing them into truth. He could have gotten an attitude with them and even exposed them and their motive publicly.

**Matthew 22:23-32**

23.) The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 24.) saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 25.) Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. 26.) Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. 27.) Last of all the woman died also. 28.) Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." 29.) Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30.) For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. 31.) But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32.) "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

**Passion vs. Obligation and Duty**

Much of what we do as Christians begins with fiery passion and a drive from the Holy Spirit and becomes an obligation and a duty that we perform because we know it is what we are "supposed" to do.

Religion keeps you in control. We like religion because it tells us what to do externally and when we do it, our conscience feels a whole lot better. This takes the place of inner peace that comes from being in right relationship with God. With this religious mindset we feel like we are right with God, and yet it is the complete opposite of how Jesus walked. Though some of us are not as steeped in tradition like many religions, we still have rituals of our own that we do to make us feel better. And through this process it loses the passion and becomes obligation.

The religious spirit likes to keep us from the things of the spirit. Under its influence, many times we become so law-focused, or doctrinally obsessed, that we lose the passion for power and anything that involves feelings. We also can easily walk in law instead of love. When we become more determined to punish someone for not following the letter of the law than to love them and see human need, it might be a good sign that we are operating under the influence of this spirit. Many times when we are giving ourselves over to this judgmental heart, we ourselves are doing the same or worse things.

The religious spirit likes to get a person stuck on one particular passage of scripture. They will war over that teaching, even at the sake of losing the character of Jesus, getting angry and raising their voice to argue the point. Even if what the person is saying is real truth, because they get out of the character of Christ, the words are no longer spirit and life. The religious spirit loves to get a person stuck on doctrine. The religious spirit gets people into doctrinal error, actually. Remember the Sadducees who were controlled by the religious spirit? They were determined and obsessed that there was no resurrection. They were not open to anyone showing them differently from scripture. Their outward appearance when they came to Jesus tried to look teachable, when all along their motive was to get Jesus to speak what they considered blasphemous so that they could get Him in a trap.

**Matthew 12:1-8**

1.) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2.) And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" 3.) But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4.) how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5.) Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6.) Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. 7.) But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8.) For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The religious spirit has a voice. It speaks in this way, "You have to get up early in the morning and pray; You have to tithe; You have to bless your meal each time you eat, before you eat; You have to have a good outward appearance; You have to be at every prayer meeting." These are all things that I do or have done. However, I don't want to do anything because I feel I have to. We do so many things out of obligation and duty. It is called pretense or hypocrisy when we draw near to God with our lips, but our heart is far from Him. There is nothing wrong with doing the outward things. Many of them were commanded in the Old Testament. But none of them were commanded with the intention that obedience would take place based on duty and not passion and thankfulness of heart that God gave man a way to be forgiven.

**Matthew 12:9-13**

9.) Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. 10.) And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him. 11.) Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12.) Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13.) Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

Nothing is more damaging than a religious spirit binding a life. By placing rules and expectations on people, unbelievers or new believers, it cuts them off from wanting anything to do with God. Many times we are worried about what we are going to look like than the value of a person's soul. How quick we are to come against people's outward sins and forget about our own inward darkness. If we value the heart of God toward His people rather than our own judgmental opinions, we will seek to guide with a gentle heart those who are bound by religion into truth.

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