



# T.A.S.K. MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Fivefold Leadership Training Center Manual

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The Spirit of Religion – Unseen Thief

## **Lesson #1: The Spirit of Religion “The Unseen Thief”**

The term “religion” refers to man-made effort that utilizes works to please God. It is very easy to mistake being religious for having a relationship with God. All religions in the world are based on religion which is a man-made attempt to reach God. However, Christianity is supposed to involve having a genuine relationship with God (2 Cor. 13:14).

Unfortunately, it is very easy to unwittingly replace this precious relationship with a religious spirit (meaning a lifestyle or attitude), which is the default position of sinful human nature. The purpose of this teaching is to help you become self-aware, not to condemn or judge.

A religious spirit is a type of demonic spirit that influences a person, or group of people, to replace a genuine relationship with God with works and traditions. When people operate out of a religious spirit they attempt to earn salvation. This evil spirit has established nonbiblical beliefs and customs for generations. Yet, as Believers, we shouldn’t turn a blind eye to the work of the religious spirit. It is lurking around attempting to cause judgment and destruction among Believers and in the Body of Church.

This religious spirit is out to imitate the work of the Holy Spirit. We must be clear that no matter how hard Satan tries to forge the work of the Holy Spirit, he cannot. But he can cause great confusion and deception. The good news is, when you seek to be led by the Holy Spirit, you will be able to identify and deal with this bitter and hypocritical spirit.

There are a number of trademarks of the religious spirit. But the Holy Spirit has equipped us with God’s full armor. You can identify this spirit and overcome it!

What are some of the common religious spirits?

Religious spirits, like many other types of demons, have relatives or similar demons in their groupings. This is a basic list of demons that you might find in somebody who has a religious spirit:

- judgementalism
- self-righteousness
- religious pride
- criticism
- legalism
- perfectionism
- division
- error (doctrinal falsehood)
- unbelief
- doubt
- confusion
- argumentativeness
- false holiness

- salvation by works
- guilt
- condemnation
- fear of losing salvation
- fear of God (unhealthy, scared feeling)
- intolerance

These are only a few ways the religious spirit manifests itself in a Believer. If there is bitter fruit of pride, self-righteousness, anger and resentment, the religious spirit is actively seeking more ways to cause chaos.

### **Characteristics of the Religious Spirit**

#### **A. 25 Characteristics of the Religious Spirit**

- 1) Will be unable to accept a rebuke, especially from those they judge to be less spiritual than themselves.
- 2) Will have a philosophy that, "I will not listen to people, but only to God." Since God frequently speaks through people this is an obvious delusion, revealing serious spiritual pride.
- 3) Will be inclined to see more of what is wrong than what is right with other people, other churches, etc. Those who are in a place of true vision will have their attention on what God is doing, not men.
- 4) Will be subject to an overwhelming feeling of guilt that they can never measure up to the Lord's standards. Guilt is a root of the religious spirit because it causes us to base our relationship with God on our performance rather than on the cross.
- 5) Will keep score on their spiritual life. This includes feeling better about ourselves because we go to more meetings, read our bibles more, etc. These are noble endeavors, but the true measure of spiritual maturity is getting closer to the Lord.
- 6) Will believe that they have been appointed to fix everyone else. These persons become the self-appointed watchmen or sheriffs in God's kingdom. They are seldom involved in building but serve only to keep the Church in a state of annoyance and agitation, if not causing serious division.
- 7) Will often see their primary mission as the tearing down of whatever they believe is wrong.
- 8) Will have a leadership style that is bossy, overbearing, and intolerant of the weakness or failures of others.

- 9) Will have a sense that they are closer to God than other people, or that their lives or ministries are more pleasing to Him. This is a symptom of profound delusion that we draw closer to God because of whom we are, rather than through Jesus.
- 10) Will take pride in their spiritual maturity and discipline, especially as compared to others. True spiritual maturity involves growing up into Christ. When we begin to compare ourselves to others, it is obvious that we have lost sight of the true goal-Jesus.
- 11) Will believe that they are on the “cutting edge” of what God is doing. This includes thinking that we are involved in the most important thing that God is doing.
- 12) Will have a mechanical prayer life. When we start feeling relief that our prayer time is over or that we have finally prayed through our prayer list, we should consider our condition. We will never feel relief when our conversations are over with the One we love.
- 13) Will do things in order to be noticed by people. This is a symptom of idolatry of fearing people more than we fear God.
- 14) Will be overly repulsed by emotionalism.
- 15) Will use emotionalism as a substitute for the work of the Holy Spirit. This use of emotionalism includes such things as requiring weeping and wailing as evidence of repentance, or “falling under the power”. Both of these can be evidence of the true work of the Holy Spirit, but when we require these manifestations we are beginning to move in another spirit.
- 16) Will be encouraged when their ministries look better than others. We could also include in this being discouraged when it seems that others are looking better or growing faster than they are.
- 17) Will glory more in what God did in the past than in what He is doing in the present. A religious spirit will always seek to focus our attention on works and on making comparisons, rather than on simply drawing closer to the Lord.
- 18) Will tend to be suspicious of, or opposed to, new movements, churches, etc. This is an obvious symptom of jealousy, or the pride that asserts that God would not do anything new without doing it through us.
- 19) Will tend to reject spiritual manifestations that they do not understand. This is a symptom of the pride and arrogance of presuming our opinions are the same as God’s. True humility keeps us teachable and open, patiently waiting for fruit before making judgments.
- 20) Will overreact to carnality in the church. We need to recognize that people are making progress and do what we can to help them along the way.

- 21) Will overreact to immaturity in the Church. The idealistic religious spirit only sees immaturity, without considering the other important factors.
- 22) Will be overly prone to view supernatural manifestations as evidence of God's approval. This is just another form of keeping score and comparing ourselves with others.
- 23) Will be unable to join anything that they do not deem perfect or nearly perfect.
- 24) Will be overly paranoid of the religious spirit. We do not get free of something by fearing it, but by overcoming it with faith in Christ Jesus.
- 25) Will have a tendency to glory in anything but the cross of Jesus, what He has accomplished, and who He is. If we are building our lives, ministries, or churches on anything else, we are building on a shaky foundation that will not stand.

### **Ten Signs You May Be Influenced by a Religious Spirit**

1. You judge other people by their appearance. God judges us by our hearts, but man judges by outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7). I have heard of many churches where young people have not felt welcome or have even been condemned by church leadership because they had a tattoo, a nose ring, or dressed a certain way. (In legalistic churches men had to wear a suit and tie to attend church, and ladies were not allowed to wear makeup, pants or cut their hair.)

Although I believe mature believers should dress modestly, we especially need to allow visitors to come as they are and all believers should dress as they feel comfortable (with moderation). Legalistic churches that forbid folks to attend services because of their attire have exhibited one of the signs of having a religious spirit.

2. You try to earn God's love and salvation. Since religion in this article refers to a man-made effort to please God, the motivation behind those in this category has to do with following certain rules and regulations regarding the outward man in order to be in right standing with God. This is a clear violation of passages that teach us that we are saved by grace and not by our own works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

3. You try to conform to outward holiness without inward transformation. The scriptures teach us that God is more concerned with cleansing the inward man (Psalm 51:6), then our outward conformity to rules and regulations. Those that only have a form of godliness without inward transformation deny His power (2 Tim.3: 5). Jesus strongly rebuked those who merely attempted to cleanse the outer man without allowing God to deal with the heart (read Matthew 23).

In my experience I have observed that very religious people usually have sinful habits and patterns that eventually manifest because they don't allow God to change their inner being. The more we attempt to follow God merely by the letter of the law, the more it will incite our sinful tendencies (Romans 7:7-25).

4. You are always critical of other people's walk with God I have noticed that the more religious a person is, the more critical they are of other believers and ministers. Since they are so hard on themselves (religious people generally don't understand grace and walk in self-condemnation), they are also equally hard on other people.
5. Your closest Christian relationships are based only on ministry activities. Religious people are not only superficial with God but with others as well. Since they attempt to connect with the "other" merely by activities, they are dis-engaged emotionally and do not know how to connect heart to heart with those they interface with. Church related ministry and/or functions usually hold their friendships together.
6. You perform Christian duties but have no passion or hunger for God. Religious people sustain their version of Christianity by performing ministry and/or church attendance. They do not have a deep relationship with God, nor do they hunger and thirst for Him.
7. You desire position and honor in the church more than honor from God. Those with a religious spirit center their lives and identities on their outward man. Hence, they are drawn to having recognition and titles in the church world. If they cannot legitimately get a ministerial title from their local church, they will hook up with an online course or other entities that will give them some kind of badge or card signifying they are a minister or chaplain.
8. Your identity is rooted in a lifestyle of Christianity instead of in Christ. Mature Christ followers receive their main identity in the fact they are "sons" of God, whereas religious people receive their main identity in the things they attempt to do for God and their church.
9. You know about the truth of Jesus but not the way of Jesus. Religious people make a big deal about the doctrines they accumulate through head knowledge. They make the mistake of thinking that having good doctrine means they are mature believers. Just because we may know about God doesn't mean we commune with God and know Him experientially.
10. You project righteousness but inwardly are filled with anger and resentment. Religious people know the entire Christian lingo, know how to act and project themselves in certain settings and use this "act" to gain influence in church circles. However, projecting ourselves to create a Christian persona will not last long. Those who depend upon this superficial personality projection are merely being religious and will not have the sustainability to deal with the hurt, pain and disappointments of life. This results in a duality in which they appear righteous but inside are filled with anger, resentment and envy.

### **Discerning Toxic Leaven Of The Pharisees**

"In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.'" —Luke 12:1

### **Toxin #1: Religious Spirits Are More Interested In Judgment Than Forgiveness**

Somebody who has a religious spirit will often be more interested in seeing somebody 'pay' or be punished for their wrongdoing, than they are in seeing the person repent and receive the forgiveness and grace of God. A good example of this is found in John chapter 8:3 -11.

The Pharisees were known for laying heavy burdens (spiritually speaking) on others, yet omit the more important matters such as justice, mercy and faith:

### **Toxin #2: Salvation Apart From Works Does Not Settle Well With Religious Spirits**

People who have spirits of religion, legalism, etc. find it hard to accept the fact that their sins have been paid for on the cross, and that there is nothing that they can do but accept the gift that God has given them. Religion likes to 'earn' status with God, whereas relationship accepts the gift that Christ has given.

### **Toxin #3: Religious Spirits Are Easy Prey To Unforgiveness**

Do you feel like you've been wronged, and that person deserves justice for what they've done to you? This may very well be the workings of a religious spirit. Remember, religious spirits are more interested in justice and punishment than mercy and forgiveness.

Feeling this way is actually a form of pride, because it holds you up on a righteous pedestal while it sees the other person as a sinner who deserves to be repaid for the wrong they've done. There is no concept of mercy or forgiveness for the other person, nor is there any remembrance of how they themselves needed mercy in their own life at some time or another. They are only interested in seeing that person who wronged them repaid and receive judgment for their wrong. Beware, this can often be a dead giveaway of a religious spirit at work!

### **Antidote #1: God Provides An Antidote**

*The Lord will not leave nor forsake us. He always provides a way. His way is His Word. We must put on the full armor of God and guard our hearts and minds while praying in the Spirit.*

The religious spirit tries to steal our peace and joy, causing fear, doubt, and unbelief.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of this:

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."—Philippians 4:6-7*

Paul tells us not to be anxious, but instead make our requests known to God—with thanksgiving. When we pray in the Spirit, with thanksgiving in our hearts, we start to align with God's heart and mind. This imparts peace.

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”—Philippians 4:8-9*

We must remember the enemy is not the people in our lives; he is the ruler of darkness. When there is spiritual warfare, weapons of the flesh will not prevail. It must be fought with God’s armor. We need to wrap ourselves in His Word and trust in His righteousness while being sensitive to and praying in the Spirit.

*“Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...”—Ephesians 6:11-18*