

## **SPIRIT OF RELIGION**

- A high level spirit.
- Could attack corporately or regionally
- Collaborates with other spirits to gain strength, e.g. Anti-Christ, Great Prostitute and Babylon.
  - E.g. to get rid of Jesus, the Pharisees collaborated with the political Rome to crucify Jesus on the Cross.
  - E.g. China govt persecuting churches is a work of spirit of religion.
- Works subtly, not easy to detect.
  - For centuries, it has come across as something good for society and everybody.
  - E.g. we view atheism or countries w/o religion as more of a problem than countries with lots of religions.
  - We view being religious as something good or better than being non-religious.
  - But however good it is, we will find that it eventually 'silences' Jesus and kills Jesus.
  - E.g. Christmas is something that people could generally accept or talk about. But eventually, they remove Christ from the picture.
- Person/Church that is attacked by spirit of religion will become LIFELESS, POWERLESS.
  - E.g. Church of Sardis -> reputation of being alive but are dead.
  - Church of Laodicea -> lukewarm
- Spirit of religion aims to kill church through killing prayer, love, truth and work of Holy Spirit.
- E.g. introducing of things that are man-made or counterfeit.
- As mentioned, Vatican has many statues, icons, arts and paintings done by famous artists and craftsmen, which attempt to make Vatican like a 'heavenly city' or gives people a sense of heavenliness. But God's presence could not be felt.
- The Western wall has nothing but just a wall, yet God's presence is strong.

- Counterfeits and Substitutes
  - E.g. Works substitute faith.
    - Person who does a lot of good works = person who has faith (truly believes in Jesus/is more holy)
  - Emotionalism substitutes work of Holy Spirit
    - Feel-good, soothing music = God's presence
    - 1000-person choir = God is great
  - Godliness without power
    - E.g. Christmas – many people focus on doing good works and charity, giving reasons for it as 'Christmas is about bringing joy to the unfortunate'
    - Of course, doing charity is a good thing, but without realising, it diminishes the true meaning of Christmas.
    - Why does the church want to do that?
      - Reason is because these are things that the world can accept.
      - Things such as 'Virgin birth' or 'Saviour being born' is something that people could not accept, and therefore they water it down.
  
- Basically, when spirit of religion attacks the church, it would make the church strive for popularity and acceptance by the world.
  - E.g. fear of offending people.
    - Want to be accepted by world and therefore compromise truth.
  - E.g. Christmas is something that people don't mind celebrating.
  - Having Christmas celebrated everywhere, in the streets or in the malls makes Christianity appear to be a popular and influential religion.
  - Truth is that nobody is truly believing in Christmas.
  
- So spirit of religion is a spirit that makes Church focus on things that makes Church/Christianity looks good.
  - E.g. buildings, rituals/heritage/tradition, possessions, influence, etc.
  - Pastor with good standing in society (E.g. used to be well-known lawyer or singer) = that church must be a good church.
- Not only that it makes Church or Christians look good, it also wants to make them feel good.

- E.g. message without repentance
- 'comfortable' worship (one which approves of every member in spite of members not walking rightly with God.)
- Worship that provides a comfortable feeling.
  - Message short and crisp. ('grace' messages)
- Respect of privacy (E.g. person having extramarital affair is not openly rebuked, it is kept a secret and nobody knows.)
- Focus on self (e.g. 'family wellbeing' messages, 'self-improvement' messages, 'how to be happily married?', 'how to be successful in work?')
  - These are things that people or world could accept.
  - But 'Giving up everything to follow Jesus' – no way.
- Without realising, bring in the world -> worldly church.
  - 'Church that world accepts is a church that accepts the world.'
  - Focus on performance, stardom and fame.
    - Highlight what they have, e.g. healing ministry, good preacher, long history.
    - Glory in what they have, instead of God.
    - Glory in what God did in the past than what God is doing in the present.
- Create an image of a 'good' church.
  - 'everything in my life is well taken care of.'
    - E.g. For my kids, they could go to a good and exciting Sunday School, or study in a good church affiliated school.
    - If have problems, there is a good counselling service to seek counsel.
    - If have problems in finances, there is a good welfare service to provide financial aid.
    - If sick, prayer ministry people will go to your house, visit and pray for you.
    - If die, funeral service will be taken care of, and place of burial will be taken care of.
      - Nowadays, they can even buy a burial ground for their ashes to be placed in the church.
  - Problem is with all these services or facilities available, there is no avenue for people to seek God or put trust in Him.

- 'good' church says 'we have it all taken care of'
  - But true church says 'we can only look up to God and depend on God and God alone.'
- Definition of 'good' church
- Comfort and security.
    - E.g. accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour, saying 'sinners' prayer' and being saved is good enough.
    - Having a passport to heaven is all that is required.
    - No need for holy living, growth, commitment, sacrifice and change.
- Next, the idolization of God.
- Baal worship -> worship only for blessings.
  - Seek blessings w/o the need for walking in holiness.
- Bring God down to something that people can grasp.
    - E.g. simple sermon, simple prayer phrases
    - use of prayer booklets, formulated prayers.
      - Prayer w/o having need for intimacy with God.
      - 'I recite the prayer from the prayer booklet and my prayer for the day is done.'
      - 'I read a simple page from 'The Daily Bread' booklet and a little bible verse attached to it, and my devotion for the day is done.
    - E.g. in kindergarten, they taught the song 'In the name of Jesus (2x), we have the victory.' But the next line, 'In the name of Jesus (2x), satan will have to flee' is omitted and changed to something else.
    - Why? Because they think that it is difficult for the children to understand spiritual warfare, and therefore not teach children to do spiritual warfare.
  - Salvation by works
    - Getting people to serve or do work in church (even do evangelism) becomes something that supersedes the need for growth.

- Spiritual maturity is determined by length of service in church, how active that person is serving in church, or the position that the person sits in church committee.
  - Salvation by works - Focus on flesh, carnality, programs, methods, tactics to get people saved or response. (e.g. use of altar calling to manipulate people and getting people to respond, without unction of the Holy Spirit.) (e.g. preach something that has got nothing to do with truth or gospel, then get people to pray and receive Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour.)
  - Idolization of God – make use of God.
    - To satisfy own desire, for fame, achievement and blessings.
- How to detect if we are attacked by spirit of religion?
- Checklist:
  - 1) Examine our prayer life
    - Whether we are walking in intimacy with God.
    - If prayer life becomes mechanical (even if we attend church prayer meeting), then is high possibility that we have been attacked by spirit of religion.
  - 2) Examine our joy
    - After prayer or worship, there must be joy.
    - Check if we lack joy.
  - 3) Examine our growth into holiness.
    - If after coming to church for years, not growing into intimacy, not changed -> attack by spirit of religion.
  - 4) Examine our purpose of coming to church
    - Is it because of convenience that I come?
    - Is it simply because I have the time, and so I come?
    - E.g. I want to attend the conference simply because I have the time and money.
    - Is it because of people that come, people that I know and people I could hang out with, or for networking?
- Basically, it is the word 'side-tracked' – deviate from the main purpose of what church is supposed to be.

- E.g. church emphasizes on evangelism, mission, healing ministry more than anything else -> side tracked.
- 5) Examine life in the community.
  - Does people in the community knows us inside out?
  - Or if there is something we are hiding or being secretive about?
  - Something that is untouchable – people cannot touch (e.g. family issues, relationship issues)
  - And we do not want to share or talk about in the community.
  - Reason why we can't share is because we think church as a place that must respect privacy of everybody.
- 6) Examine if we have embodied the truth that is proclaimed in the church.
- Check if we are one of those who know nothing much of the truth, but for fear of being spotted as ignorant, or for wanting to portray that we know a lot, we resort to using of church lingo. (use of terms like 'vomiting', 'crucifying 5 things on the cross' etc)
- Check whether we are giving people an impression that we are spiritual or mature, whereby the truth is that we are not.
  - E.g. newcomers come, we could talk a lot to them. But in cell groups and discussions of the word, we have nothing to say.
- Check what we have been receiving in the Sunday messages, and see if we have accepted, repented and responded to the truth and are living it out.
  - E.g. If all we could say about the last Sunday message is 'It is about Christmas' then we are basically 'attending a church service' – going through a motion -> spirit of religion.
- 7) Do actions/special activities/highlights of the church thrill us (get us into a hype) more than normal church meetings?
- If yes, there is a high chance that we would only come to church when there is something interesting or spectacular.

- We need something to hype us up or we would lose interest about church. Very dangerous.
  - Prayer life for people like this is usually weak, because he could only pray when there is something big, but could not pray on day to day basis.
- E.g. If church says after the conference at the prayer mountain, the following day we will go for a tour. If going for the tour is all about why we go for the conference, then we are side-tracked.
- This problem is more than just a problem of worldliness, it is the spirit of religion.
  - Why? Because the truth is we are more for the world, but we use the conference as a cover up to show others that we are holy people.
  
- 8) Examine the way we view other Christians.
- E.g. would we say that person is a good Christian because he goes to church, gives to charity, or doing well in job?
- If that is a perception of what a good Christian (or good Christian life) is, then it is sign that we have not completely gotten out of the spirit of religion.
- Do we envision a good Christian life as a life where everything goes well with us? E.g. the whole family goes to church together, children are blessed, do well in their studies, parents holding a good job? But reality is nobody prays, nobody seeks God or bothers to walk closely with Him.
  
- Do we say that a person is saved because he goes to church?
- Check our conversation with people and Christians outside church.
- E.g. We ask people 'How's your mother?'
- Answer is 'Oh, she's fine. She still goes to church.'
- And we say 'Thank God'. Of course, for politeness, we would say that. But if we are really concerned for the person, we would want to find out if the person is truly growing in the Lord.
  
- We should abolish the common worldly perception that one is saved simply by going to church or being baptised. Our common conversation with people could reveal how much we are accepting the truth or not.

- 8) When we see cases like this, such as Christians not walking rightly, do we have a sense of mourning, grief or holy anger?
- If we have no response to it, it just shows that somewhere within us, we are thinking that type of life is ok. -> spirit of religion at work.
- Basically, examine the area of spiritual sensitivity. How are we sensing the heart of God in all these things?
  
- 9) Do we have a sense of gratitude towards God's saving grace?
- Of course, we could thank God for many things. But if the gratitude towards God's saving grace is missing, then it is a sign that we have gone cold in our relationship with God.
- Need to examine if we have lacked holiness, joy, love, repentance and mourning spirit.
  
- 10) Am I at the stage of my life where everything is ok?
  - Family wise, no problem. Work wise, no problem.
  - Tendency is we could not cling on to God easily.
  - When we think we are at a stage where everything is ok, and now we could relax, it is a time that spirit of religion could set it.
  - Nebuchadnezzar – The moment when he looked at his kingdom and marvelled at his achievement, that was the moment he fell.
  - David – the moment he was walking at the roof and did not have to go to war, that was the moment he fell into adultery.
  - Peter – how nice if we could stay on this mountain and not have to go down.
  
  - We must always have the desire and expectancy for God to change us or move us.
  - Changing of circumstances or environment should not come as a surprise to us. We should see it as avenues which God would work.
  - Change in circumstances should not cause despair in us.



- Check if spiritual warfare is something that we grew tired and weary of, that we hope is removed and we don't have to fight.
      - Tendency is we lose zeal and passion, and we would not pray so much. That is a conducive ground for spirit of religion to set in.
- 11) Lastly, church must be bold to proclaim the truth despite whether people want to hear or not.
- Church must not have the fear of men and only say things people likes to hear.
- We got to watch out this area and pray for ourselves and pray for the pastor to be able to say what God says and move according to Him.
  - Cases like if God says that person should fast 40 days, we should not suggest 5 days, because we are concerned that the person is not able to cope.
  - Or if this person should quit his job, we should not say to the person, 'Pray and see how it goes.' Or pray for new opening before you quit. We should be bold to tell them, 'Quit your job and believe God to bring you to a new job.'
  - Because leaders fear offending members, fear members will surface, so they reduce the standard for the obedience of God.
  - When we invite a person to come, we should not tell them, 'Maybe try to come to weekday meetings and see how it goes, because Sunday service is long and they would not be used to it.'
  - We should not worry so much that the person is unable to cope. That is humanism.
  - We should just proclaim that this is the right thing to do and right way to live.
  - Jesus did not tell people to try giving up something first, then see if you can follow Me. No, He said, 'Sell ALL your possessions, give it to the poor, then come, follow Me.'