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CHAPTER 6- CRIPPLED BY EVIL SPIRITS AND AMNESIA

The Problem of a Religious Spirit

The term religious spirit is a name given to a class of satanic agents assigned to prevent Christian growth and maintain mediocrity by using religious processes. They often work in cahoots with the world and they also aid and abet self. Religious spirits are demons that seek to substitute religious activity for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. These spirits would like us to have the form of godliness but not the power of it (2 Timothy 3:5). They are what Jesus was referring to when He warned His disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6). Their major thrust is in substituting a relationship with religious activity for a personal relationship with God. Religious spirits are the most dangerous and destructive enemies of God's people, not because they are so powerful and ferocious, but because they are so subtle and deceptive. They are adept at hiding openly in the midst of the congregation of the believers. They work amongst non-Christian believers to keep them loyal to whatever they believe in, as long as it isn't Jesus. They will devise laws against conversion to Christianity in areas dominated by non-Christian groups such as Moslems, Hindus, and communist controlled countries. They work amongst Christian believers to assure them that membership in a church and doing religious things can save them, and they have need of neither the cross of Jesus nor the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead, they give emphasis to the traditions of the elders (Mark 7:7-9). They will also create laws against evangelicals in Orthodox controlled areas. Religious spirits are especially skilled in misleading those who have a passion for God but are ignorant of His written Word (Hosea 4:6). They press people to worship religious ritual instead of God, and even promote having a deity as long as it is one made in our image and not the God of the Bible. The effectiveness of the religious spirit comes from the fact that most people under their sway are completely certain they are doing what God wants them to be doing individually, and they are totally blinded to the manipulations of the demon.

Religious spirits make great use of pride in all its many appearances. They produce personal pride in being a godly person, in the gifts we have been given, and in our own self-righteousness. They cause people to believe that they are completely accurate in their own understanding of Christianity and the Christian walk with God to the point that they cannot accept rebuke or correction, and they become unteachable. Under the influence of a religious spirit some may compare their own maturity and self-discipline to others, and decide that they are closer to God and more in His favor, a sort of "daddy loves me best" attitude. The result is that they believe God is including only them in whatever great thing He is doing at the moment, and that God has personally appointed them to fix everyone else. The truth is that there are authoritative offices within the Body of Christ called deacon, elder, and overseer, but no office called First Vice Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us like Jesus and the Holy Spirit transforms us to be what God intended us to be (2 Corinthians 3:17&18). That is not the job assigned to us. God really does not like human pride (Proverbs 16:5). A characteristic of pride is a need to be in control. Under this influence people tend to impose their own standards on others, not because the Word of God requires the standards, but because the standards seem appropriate in their personal judgment. The ultimate deadly silliness of control is exemplified when two opposing groups are determined to get their way even if it destroys the Body of Christ. Such a case would be the installation of a new carpet in the sanctuary, when one faction insists it should be red and the other faction insists it should be green. Both sides believe that if the other got their way it would be the unpardonable sin; both are wrong. Both sides believe that an evil spirit is influencing the other side; both are right. People influenced by the need to be in control tend to be bossy and overbearing. Jesus told us that we were not to be bossy and overbearing (Matthew 20:25-28).

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Consider this description of pride, author unknown:

My name is pride. I am a cheater. I cheat you of your God-given destiny because you demand your own way. I cheat you of contentment because you "deserve better than this." I cheat you of knowledge because you already know it all. I cheat you of healing because you are too full of me to forgive. I cheat you of holiness because you refuse to admit when you are wrong. I cheat you of vision because you'd rather look in a mirror than out a window. I cheat you of genuine friendship because nobody's going to know the real you. I cheat you of love because real romance demands a sacrifice. I cheat you of greatness in heaven because you refuse to wash another's feet on earth. I cheat you of God's glory because I convince you to seek your own. My name is pride. I am a cheater. You like me because you think I'm always looking out for you. Untrue. I'm looking to make a fool of you. God has so much for you, I'll admit, but don't worry. If you stick with me, you'll never know.

Religious spirits also promote being critical. Critical people have a tendency to believe they know the motives in another's heart, and judge others on the implied motives. We are not supposed to do that (1 Samuel 16:7) because only God knows the hearts of men (1 Kings 8:39). The religious spirit promotes legalism and sees only what is wrong in others, never what is right. It causes people to become intolerant of the immaturity and failings of others. The Word of God tells us that such attitudes are not His way (Galatians 6:1-3). The critical influence focuses on the failures of others and views everything as entirely black or entirely white with no shades of gray. Unless others achieve perfection they should not be allowed to get involved in ministry. The Word of God tells us that there is no one perfect (Romans 3:23). The family of God is not a group of spiritual super heroes; it is a gathering of fallen humanity working together to become more like their savior. The critical person will also become very suspicious of any new move of God, and will attempt to prevent it. The most common reason given for stopping it is because "We never did it that way before!" There is a definite predisposition for tradition, preventing any progress. However, God said he was going to do a new thing (Isaiah 43:18&19). When the Father sent His Son to earth it wasn't the demons or heathens who opposed Him, it was the conservative Jewish religious leaders under the influence of a religious spirit. The advice given them by a Pharisee named Gamaliel is also appropriate for those in today's church (Acts 5:38&39).

Religious spirits are proficient at getting the church to compromise on the Word of God, both by obscuring the Word of God, and by mentally wearing us down so we have unclear thinking. The result is that we are led to rationalize making concessions about the Word of God because we believe that the ends justify the means, or because what we want to do isn't all that serious a violation in our own opinion; God said we should not do that (Proverbs 3:5-7). We think we can gossip about someone our listeners are not familiar with, but God said that is wrong (Leviticus 19:16, Proverbs 11:13). It only causes strife and discontent (Proverbs 18:8, Proverbs 26:20). We should avoid people that gossip (Proverbs 20:19). Jesus said gossip would follow us past the grave (Matthew 12:36&37). We labor to earn extra money on the Lord's Day, but God is adamant about not working on that one day (Exodus 20:8-11). There was only one exception allowed (Matthew 12:10-13), which is doing good, not working for money. We tell a little white lie that we believe won't really hurt anyone, but God said that is an abomination (Proverbs 12:22), and we should put away lying (Ephesians 4:25); just do not do it (Colossians 3:9). We cheat on our taxes because the government doesn't deserve all that money, but all authority comes from God (Romans 13:1&2). We are supposed to submit to authority

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(Romans 13:3-5, 1 Peter 2:13&14), and pay our taxes (Matthew 22:17-21, Romans 13:6&7). The list goes on and on. No matter how we try to rationalize it away, it is disobedience. All the while we are dulling our own consciences and making it easier for more and greater compromises in the future. We are also setting a horrible example for immature Christians to follow. God requires diligence in obedience (Deuteronomy 6:17, Joshua 22:5). Failure can keep one out of God's presence (Matthew 7:21).

Religious spirits are so comfortable with religious activities that they will participate in and influence the results of Sunday services. Most services include a time of worship and a time of preaching the Word of God. A worship team should lead the congregation into true worship of the Lord to the point that all the congregation remembers is the majesty and awesome presence of God. The worship team can be as hard working and meticulous as possible, but if all that is remembered is the wonderful singing and instrumental talent, the religious spirit has won another round. We are to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The sermon should make the word of God come alive to the point that people are convicted in their hearts and the Holy Spirit can work sanctification in them. However, if the Reverend Feelgood is building up numbers and multiplying income by tickling ears, the religious spirit has won another round. Such is another sign of the times (2 Timothy 4:3&4).

If you should detect some of these symptoms in your congregation you can be sure that the enemy is in your midst. That information alone should be cause for concern and two different sets of actions need to happen. The first action is to ask the Holy Spirit to examine you to be sure that you are not also an unwary victim. You need to clean yourself up before you can step in (Matthew 7:3). The second action is to know that it is a poorly trained soldier that cannot recognize the enemy. The enemy is not the individual exhibiting symptoms; the enemy is the evil spirit (Ephesians 6:12). If you could see the situation through God's eyes you would see one of His beloved children is a prisoner of war, with spiritual eyes blinded and spiritual ears stopped up, being dragged over the edge of a precipice. He believes he is being obedient to God but has been bewitched, beguiled, and misled by the spirit. Instead of criticizing and condemning your brother or sister and helping and assisting the demon push them over the cliff, you should be desperate to rescue them from destruction. Intervene on their behalf through intercession, with tears if necessary. Don't underestimate the power of prayer (James 5:16). Above all, leave the convicting and repairing work to the Holy Spirit. When your brother or sister has been rescued, rejoice (Luke 15:22-24). Join in what is happening in heaven (Luke 15:7).

Spiritual Amnesia

As we move farther in time from the day of Pentecost we seem to be moving farther from the reality of God. We know things about God but we do not know the Jehovah God of the Bible on a personal basis. If we are living loosely within His will we tend to overemphasize His mercy and ignore His justice. If we seem to be getting away with something we confuse His patience with acceptance. We try to remake Him in the image of man, so we can deal with Him without pangs of guilt. Some people envision God as an over-indulgent grandparent that will give baby everything baby might want, not as a parent that will discipline us for our own good (Proverbs 3:11&12). Others see Him as an overly strict disciplinarian without compassion, and want to stay as far away from Him as possible. The scriptures tell us that God is, in fact, a parent who loves us very much and cares about our personal welfare (Jeremiah 9:24, John 3:16, John 16:27, Ephesians 2:4, 1 John 4:16). Then there

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are some who see God as Santa Clause and their only communications with Him is "Dear ~~Santa~~ God, I want, and I want, and I want, . . ." There is never a mention of thanksgiving and praise, but the Word of God tells us that is what He desires (Psalm 47:6&7, Psalm 150:6, Isaiah 43:21, Revelation 19:5). His desire, command, is to know Him (Psalm 46:10). He alone is God and is not willing to impart His glory and majesty to any false gods, even ones we invent. God would not let His people Israel get away with their Golden Calf created in a furnace (Exodus 32:4-10, Isaiah 42:8), and He will not accept our false images created in our own minds. The reason He said we need to be still is that He speaks in a soft voice (1 Kings 19:11-13), which we cannot hear with other distracting sounds around us. We live in a noise generation. Look around you and you will see many people with headsets on all the time unless they are talking on a cell phone. When at home the television or radio or stereo has to be on all the time. By personal choice there is never an opportunity to hear the voice of God. Our generation looks suspiciously like the small child that says "I'm not going to listen" then shuts out a rebuke by sticking his fingers in his ears and shouting.

We also have a lopsided view of Jesus. Some of us have a tendency to focus on His humanity and ignore His divinity. We see Him as another human like us and attribute all our weaknesses and motivations to Him. It is true that He is human and that He experienced the same emotions and temptation we do (Hebrews 4:15&16), but He did not fail as we have. Though He was like us, we are no longer like Him. He died (Matthew 27:45-50), overcame death (Matthew 28:1-6), and has ascended into heaven (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:9-11). If He were just like we are now, there would be no need for us to be changed (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53) and become just like Him (1 John 3:2). We have a predilection to see Him as sweet Jesus, meek and mild. That is not how He will be coming back (Revelation 19:11-16). He is our brother (Mark 3:35) and called us His friends (John 15:14&15). He is also our creator (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:2), the King of kings and Lord of lords (Isaiah 9:6, Revelation 19:16). We ignore His majesty (John 17:5) and authority (Matthew 28:18) and do Him a dishonor. Alternatively, some of us will focus on His divinity and ignore His humanity. Then we see Jesus as some other sort of being completely different from us. We may see Him as aloof and unapproachable. We may even despair of ever becoming like Him because we certainly are not divine. It was as a Holy Spirit filled human that He did His work on earth (Isaiah 11:1&2, John 3:34).

Some of God's children are marginally familiar with the Word of God. For some individuals their exposure to the scriptures is limited only to what is preached from the pulpit. Others may read it as a novel, skimming through it without understanding. Some may even study the scriptures, seeking to glean some nuggets from them. The truth is most present day people would rather be entertained than educated. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us (Job 37:23). It tells us He is Spirit (John 4:24), He is love (1 John 4:8), He is supreme (1Chronicles 29:11&12), He is merciful (Exodus 34:6&7), He is perfect (Psalm 18:30), and He is eternal (Psalm 93:2). The Bible contains all we need to know to live and grow in accordance with His plans for us (Joshua 1:8, Psalm 19:7-11, Psalm 43:3, John 20:31, Acts 20:32, 2 Timothy 3:15-17). His Word has to be moved from our heads into our hearts (Romans 2:29), and must be lived out in all of daily life (Romans 8:4-6, Galatians 5:16&25). As was previously said, we perish for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

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People in our modern western world have been so blessed with everything that we have lost our need for God. We are doing just fine on our own, thank you, until some calamity beyond our control comes along. Most people most of the time do not seek God. Most people most of the time are not interested in a closer walk with God or a more intimate relationship with Him. Most people most of the time are much more interested in the things of this world than in God, and that is idolatry. God's plan for us always was and still is that we become a large family of beings like Him among which He can live and have fellowship. His repeated instructions to us are to seek Him. He wants us to seek Him, not signs (Matthew 12:38&39, Matthew 6:33). If we do that, the rest will come. We are to seek the face of God (2 Chronicles 7:14). The Jews were told to seek Him with all their heart (Deuteronomy 4:29). God is looking for people who seek Him (Psalm 53:2) and He will never forsake them (Psalm 9:10). God loves those who seek Him (Proverbs 8:17) and we will find Him when He is our top priority (Jeremiah 29:13). God set things up so that we would seek Him (Acts 17:26-27) and He will reward those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Now is the time to Seek the Lord, because there will be a time when He cannot be found (Isaiah 55:6). Be careful what you are seeking though, because if you find it, and it is not our Creator and Redeemer, you might end up in a disaster.

Distractions can keep us from our God. We can become so sidetracked looking backwards and regretting what we have done, or have not done, that we are at a standstill. While we are studying what we have done and working out what we should have done we are not looking forward to the goal, and we may even forget our goal. The Word of God says we should not be looking back (Luke 9:62, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Hebrews 12:1&2). We cannot go back and redo anything. Even if we could go back ten or twenty years it would be with the knowledge we had then, not the lessons we learned over the years, and we would repeat the same mistakes. All we can do is learn from the past and do better in the future. God desires that we grow and progress (Ephesians 4:15, Hebrews 6:1, James 1:4, 1 Peter 2:2).

Because of our lack of understanding of the nature of our God and of His Word, we have lost our sense of awe for Him. Our casual attitude towards Him has reduced our reverence and appreciation to lip service. While God's presence was visible to His people in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, He would not tolerate casual treatment (Leviticus 10:1&2). While God's presence was displayed to His people in signs and wonders that accompanied the Apostles, He would not tolerate disrespect (Acts 5:1-10). When Moses was in the presence of God, God told him that he was on holy ground (Exodus 3:4-6), and to act like it. When Joshua was in the presence of God, God told him that he was on holy ground (Joshua 5:15), and to act like it. If we do not see God's sanctuary as holy ground, and do not treat God's sanctuary as holy ground, it is because God doesn't feel welcomed by our attitude and His presence is not being revealed. It is only His longsuffering mercy that has spared us, but time is running short. He is a Holy God (Leviticus 20:26, 1 Peter 1:15&16) and a mighty God (Job 36:5) who demands obedience (Deuteronomy 13:4, Luke 6:46, John 14:15, James 1:22) and respect (Psalm 33:8, 1 Corinthians 6:20, Hebrews 12:28&29). Look around the sanctuary on Sunday and you will find people visiting and talking, both during worship and during the sermon. Cell phones are left on to disturb everyone else. There is a definite lack of respect for God and for what is happening during services.

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Prognosis

There is clearly a sickness in the Body of Christ. Some have lost their fervent love for Christ, while others tolerate immorality. Some tolerate idolatry and some tolerate cults of idolatry. Some embrace heresies. Some are indifferent to God, and some are spiritually dead. This is not a new condition, recently diagnosed in the twenty first century church, but something that Jesus talked about thousands of years ago in His letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2:1—3:22). Many Christians seem to have lost their identity. They see themselves the same as everyone else around them and no longer recognize who they are: children of God (Romans 8:16), His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18), children of light (Ephesians 5:8). They have forgotten whose they are: they are the Lord's (Romans 14:8), they were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20); God has called them and chosen them (1 Peter 2:9). None of us are our own. True, people can be told who they are, and then respond with the correct answer when asked. However, they do not have the awareness of the relationship that characterizes the Body of Christ. We are all apart of one body, and we belong to one another (Romans 12:4&5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14). That one body is the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). We are called to live and act as one body (Ephesians 4:25) and be at peace (Colossians 3:15).

God's children are not living in the power that comes with being a member of His family. Jesus told His disciples to wait for the power (Luke 24:49), the same power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus used (Acts 1:8). Everything we do should be by the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:4&5), which works in us (Ephesians 3:20). Many of us look and act more like we are children of the world. Jesus was speaking to the people of the church when He told them they were of their father, the devil (John 8:44). Paul was speaking to the church in Corinth when he said they were carnal, more like men than children of God (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). We should not love the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). The children of God are supposed to be noticeably different, characterized by love (Matthew 5:44-45), peace (Matthew 5:9), a spirit lead life, (Romans 8:14), sharing in our Father's nature and being fruitful (2 Peter 1:4-8). We seem to be unaware of our true heritage. People who confuse attending church with being the church compound the problem. Attending is simply gathering with the saints, which we are told to do (Hebrews 10:25). Being the church is a call to a transformed godly life (Romans 12:2).

Our focus has been distracted from God to things of this world. We should not be concerned with competing in the world; we should be about God's business (Isaiah 30:1). Instead of striving for things we should be seeking kingdom treasures (Matthew 6:19-21), which have nothing to do with food and drink and things of the world (Romans 14:17). Our focus needs to be only on what is good and pure (Philippians 4:8). Our lives are so cluttered with worldly concerns that our spiritual growth is stifled. We are so busy catering to the physical that we have no time left for fellowship with God (Psalm 46:10, Mark 6:31&32) or for what He has called us to be about. When Jesus told the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-24), He was not talking about the world's children. The parable was about the Kingdom of Heaven. Those invited to attend were the citizens of the country. They made their excuses for not participating for strictly worldly reasons. So it is today within the church. We are invited to partake of the Lord's Word, and occasionally the Lord's Supper, on Sunday morning. We decline because we are going fishing, or going to a ball game, or going on a drive in the country, or going shopping; we just do not have time for God. Some may say, "I just don't have the time available that you do!" That is so mistaken. Every one of us has the same twenty-four hours a day available. The difference between what people do has no relationship to the time available. It has to do with how each of us chooses to use our available time. If you have no time for God because you choose to

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devote that time to something else, then that something else has become your god. That is a form of idolatry. In the words of Joshua, "Choose whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Read Luke, chapter 14, verse 24 again.

Lack of a close personal relationship with our Creator because of a lack of faith obstructs the flow of His power (Matthew 13:58). It is possible to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Unbelief and lack of any expectations can be fatal. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Only faith counts (Galatians 5:6) and without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). It is difficult to really trust your all to someone you really do not know (Romans 10:14).

God's blessing come with conditions. When we neglect our responsibility, whether through ignorance or just being too busy, we have effectively blocked the flow of His grace. When we try to earn our own way we fall from grace (Galatians 5:4-6). We must not fall short of the promise (Hebrews 4:1). When we become worldly we step outside of God's grace (Hebrews 12:14-16). Many of us have contracted spiritual Alzheimer's disease, and are oblivious to what is going on in the spiritual realm.

There was evidence of divine power and glory among God's chosen people while they were being obedient and had a zeal for their God. The Lord promised to go with His people Israel (Exodus 33:14). His presence was both visible and tangible (Exodus 40:34&35) and it continued to be that way while they were obedient (Numbers 9:15&6). When they became lax in obedience and lost their love for God there was no evidence of divine power and glory (1 Samuel 4:22). There was evidence of divine power and glory following the first disciples while they were being obedient and had a zeal for their God (Acts 4:33, 2 Corinthians 13:4). When the church became lax, disobedient, and lost their love for God there was no evidence of divine power and glory. There still is no evidence of divine power and glory in the weekly services of most congregations today, and most people expect no evidence. However, God has always had a faithful remnant (Ezra 9:8). He said His remnant would return (Isaiah 10:22): He would bring it back (Isaiah 11:11). Even today, there are individuals and isolated congregations that routinely see wonders and works of power, miraculous healing, and experience the powerful presence of God (Romans 11:5). For the rest of us, we are in danger of becoming spiritually septic if something does not happen soon. We have become so congested with the garbage of the world that we are in desperate need of a spiritual angioplasty. God's love and power cannot flow through us in our present condition.

God has chosen to restrict Himself to working through His church. If the church isn't doing our Father's work, it isn't being done, and it will not be done. In most cases He must do a work within us before He can do a work through us. He requires a clean vessel (Psalm 24:3-5) because He is too pure to even look upon evil (Habakkuk 1:13). Jesus came to purify us (Titus 2:14). We are commanded to be pure (1 Timothy 5:22). Nothing is going to happen until we are willing to humble ourselves, repent, and turn to Him (2 Chronicles 7:14).