

RELIGION OF THE FLESH OR RELIGION OF THE SPIRIT?

TRUE AND FALSE RELIGION

If we just glanced at church history, we could see both true and false religion in a constant state of development. Seldom or never have we seen a false religion grow and develop into a true religion. A false religion seems to only grow worse and worse and deeper into error. On the other hand, there have been many true religions that have turned into a false religion. The history of true religion that has turned into a false religion follows a fairly consistent pattern. A man of God gets a burden, an anointing, a revelation, a message and a ministry. He may remain faithful to his revelation and calling all his life. When he dies another generation takes over with no burden, no anointing, no revelation, a second hand message and a hand-me-down ministry. They continue the work that was begun but a religion develops in the place of reality. It is a short step from religion to false religion.

A false religion can be either Christian or non Christian. We are concerned here with false Christian religion. Not just a Christian religion that once was true but fell into error. A false Christian religion is any pseudo Christian organization that names Jesus Christ but is either against Christ or takes the place of Christ in our lives. All false religions appeal to the flesh and is understood and practiced by the flesh. It may use confusing spiritual language and be mystic in it's concepts but the energy behind it is the flesh. It may be intellectual or it may be legalistic or it may be conservative or it can be liberal. All these terms cannot define true from false. They generally just describe different emphasis of false religion, if they take the place of Jesus Christ in our lives.

If we could reduce the reason for false Christian religion down to a simple statement, we could say it overflows out of ignorance of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in the individual and in the life of the church. In researching for these papers on the Holy Spirit, it has become abundantly clear the unmeasurable loss that occurs for eternity, if we neglect or ignore the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit. It seems impossible to overestimate the loss to the church or the tragedy of not giving the Holy Spirit His proper and God given place in the individual life or in the life of the church.

It is almost unbelievable how the church has remained ignorant of the Holy Spirit's God given position. The Devil has to be behind this great deception. He has inspired the church to get involved in everything except being led or being taught by the Holy Spirit. To summarize what we have said in previous papers we could say , all the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in us and all the objective work of the Holy Spirit through us is dependent upon each of us being constantly in the process of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

If we were filled with the Holy Spirit but are not now filled with the Holy Spirit that will seriously affect His work in us and through us. We saw in the Book of Acts that they were filled with the holy spirit on the day of Pentecost and then in Acts 4 Peter and John were filled again and later the same day they were filled again, twice in the same day. Many times the Bible says they were filled with the Holy Spirit and then "The Power" was released. An example is seen in ACT 7:55 **But being full of the Holy Spirit**, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and

Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ACT 7:56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ACT 7:57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. ACT 7:58 And when they had driven him out of the city, they {began} stoning {him,} and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ACT 7:59 And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon {the Lord} and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ACT 7:60 And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep.

Another example is seen in ACT 13:9 But Saul, who was also {known as} **Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit**, fixed his gaze upon him, ACT 13:10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? ACT 13:11 "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

An example of how the Disciples were in a state of constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit is seen in ACT 13:50 But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ACT 13:51 But they shook off the dust of their feet {in protest} against them and went to Iconium. ACT 13:52 **And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.** ACT 14:1 And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

ACT 4:8 Then Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, This phrase and also in acts 13:9 is in the continuing presence tense and the New American Standard translates this in the margin "Having just been filled with the Holy Spirit". The doctrine of a one time filling with the Holy Spirit and then wait until Jesus comes is not scriptural. If we were filled but are not now filled, it simply we are now walking in the flesh. You can't walk in the Spirit unless you are filled with the Spirit.

Whatever time "we walk with the Lord" that we are not filled with the Spirit is lost time. The reason is found in Romans 8. If you are not in the Spirit, you are in the flesh. If you are in the flesh, you cannot please God, even if you do good and religious things. If you are in the flesh, you are not in the Spirit. We can't have one foot in and the other one out.

In the flesh means, attaining to fleshly satisfaction through some religious exercise or being inspired by the flesh. Those who are in the flesh are hostile toward God but can still be doing their religious duty. There are churches today that are 100% in the flesh but appear to be successful and prosperous and entertain large numbers of people. They even hold to a doctrine about the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit is just a doctrine and not a reality in their lives or in the church on Sunday morning. He has been assigned a prominent place outside the church and may be referred to as an influence for good in the world.

The scriptures present the Holy Spirit as God, Himself. He is God with us and God in us. He is

God's presence on the earth. Some ignorantly beg for God's presence but ignore the Holy Spirit. If we are going to be visited by the presence of God, it will be the Holy Spirit.

Our theme is true and false religion or a religion of the Spirit or a religion of the flesh. All religion of the flesh is a false religion, even if it has orthodox doctrines. Those who seek for heretics in the church generally judge according to whether they hold to orthodox doctrines but take no notice if they walk in the flesh or in the Spirit.

It is true that all who walk in the flesh will produce a false religion . A false religion will produce a system that takes the place of God in our lives. The system of religion will be a substitute for a relationship with God. Since it is of the flesh, it will seek to satisfy the desires of the flesh.

A religion of the flesh will build upon name and fame with positions and titles. False religion is man conscious instead of God conscious. Men, in the flesh, like to be called "Leaders" or "Teachers" or "Fathers".

MAT 23:1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, MAT 23:2 saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; MAT 23:3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but **do not do according to their deeds;** for they say {things,} and do not do {them.} MAT 23:4 "And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with {so much as} a finger. MAT 23:5 "But they do all their deeds to **be noticed by men;** for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels {of their garments.} MAT 23:6 "And **they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, MAT 23:7 and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi.** MAT 23:8 "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. MAT 23:9 "And do not call {anyone} on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. MAT 23:10 "**And do not be called leaders;** for One is your Leader, {that is,} Christ. MAT 23:11 "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. MAT 23:12 "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. MAT 23:13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you **shut off the kingdom of heaven from men;** for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

The religion of the Jews was established by God, Himself. These scribes and Pharisees were the ones who were to interpret the law of Moses to Israel. They, themselves were very careful about their religion. They were very precise about their Tithing. MAT 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. God had ordained the Tithe. Why be critical of people who were doing what God said to do? Their religion, that was at one time acceptable to God, was no longer acceptable. What had changed? Their religion was no longer directed toward God but was directed toward men. What they did was for the purpose of being seen by men.

They had a religion that was just outward. MAT 23:25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery

and self-indulgence. MAT 23:26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. MAT 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. MAT 23:28 "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

These people were very evangelistic and had a good outreach program and a lot of zeal. MAT 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

The scribes and the Pharisees were the orthodox church of their day and checked and rechecked their doctrines. We must ask, is God really looking for orthodoxy or for a life lived in the character and nature of Christ?

MAT 23:14 ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while **for a pretense you make long prayers;** therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.] It is possible to be very orthodox and lack the basic human instincts that are in the heart of God. These are also praying people. Oh, God. You are the provider of all good things and you care for the widows and orphans. Oh, God. Provide a place for this poor widow that we are throwing out of this house. Please have mercy Oh great and merciful God.

False religion is identified as being outside the heart of God but all the time naming the name of God, for a pretense. This has very little to do with orthodox doctrine but falls because there is no orthodox life.

The chief obstacle to Jesus' ministry was orthodox religion. It was the very religion that God, Himself established. The difference was when God designed it, it was focused in God and it became a false religion when it got focused in man.

This was not a new problem then and it is not a new problem today. What was truly God designed religion only remained true as long as men of God with vision and a relationship with God continued to lead the people into God's ways. When laws and a religious system took the place of communion with God, the religion soon became fraudulent and a pretense.

ISA 1:2 #Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the \Lord\ speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. ISA 1:3 "An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, {But} Israel does not know, My people do not understand." ISA 1:4 Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! **They have abandoned the \Lord**, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, **They have turned away from Him.** God is speaking to His own people who He had personally reared but they had turned away from God to their own systems of religion.

ISA 1:10 Hear the word of the \Lord\, You rulers of **Sodom**; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of **Gomorrah**. ISA 1:11 "What are your multiplied **sacrifices** to Me?" Says the

\Lord\ "I have had enough of **burnt offerings** of rams, And the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in **the blood** of bulls, lambs, or goats. ISA 1:12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of **My courts?** ISA 1:13 "Bring your worthless **offerings** no longer, **Incense** is an abomination to Me. **New moon and sabbath**, the **calling of assemblies**-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ISA 1:14 "I hate your **new moon {festivals}** and your **appointed feasts**, They have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing {them.} ISA 1:15 "So when you **spread out your hands {in prayer,}** I will hide My eyes from you, Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

All these things, that are highlighted, were all designed and commanded by God as orthodox religion. Israel was doing all the things that God commanded but God was rejecting them all. They were doing all the right things for the wrong reasons and with the attitude of Sodom and Gomorrah. This was the very religion that God established but it was a false religion. Both true and false religion look the same on the outside. Both can be very devout and appear pious. Both could pass the test of orthodoxy. False religion can be very exact and demanding and enforce a strict adherence to the religious system but God still hates it, even if He designed it.

False religion is careful about all the outward observances but neglect the very things that God values. God's plan and God's methods are very subjective. His work in our inner person is very subjective, even mystical. The very things that God values are first revealed to the spirit of man by the Holy Spirit. One man cannot teach another man "to know God". This is the subjective work of the Holy Spirit. HEB 8:10 "\For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel\ \After those days, says the Lord\: \I will put My laws into their minds\, \And I will write them upon their hearts\. \And I will be their God\, \And they shall be My people\." HEB 8:11 "\And **they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen\, \And everyone his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,** \For all shall know Me\, \From the least to the greatest of them\." JOH 6:45 "It is written in the prophets, \And **they shall all be taught of God\.**' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. This teaching is subjective and beyond the capacity of man.

True religion is the very heart of God manifested as outward life. This must, therefore, be the religion of the Spirit. False religion is a religion of the flesh.

False religion has it's own set of religious spirits who's goal it is to deceive. These spirits operate from gross deception in the cults, to a subtle deception in the church. In either case their method is to operate through the flesh. They create something that appeals to the flesh and can be accomplished by the flesh. False religion satisfies the flesh. However, those who are in the flesh can never satisfy God. Rather, they are hostile toward God. ROM 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, ROM 8:7 because **the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God;** for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able { to do so}; ROM 8:8 and those **who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Most of us can see the world's seduction all around us but there is a seduction that is not so obvious. That is the seduction of flesh that is operating through false religion. Flesh that is operating through pornography is easily recognized. When we are deceived by a religious system that satisfies the flesh, it is a much more subtle deception.

What, then, are the safeguards that God has established to protect the church? To surrender, submit and to be taught by the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Reality and will deliver us from the illusion of pseudo Christianity. The Holy Spirit is only really effective in our lives when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

ROM 8:5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those **who are according to the Spirit**, the things of the Spirit. ROM 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you**. ROM 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

GAL 5:16 But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

GAL 5:17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

GAL 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. It is clear that the overcoming life is by walking by the Spirit and not by walking by the flesh. It is also clear that we cannot walk in the flesh and in the Spirit at the same time. The genuine Christian life can only be lived by walking in the Spirit! But how do we do that? By being in a continuous state of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This may be several times in one day, or at least once a day. Too much of our "Religious life" is totally irrelevant to the Kingdom of God. We have depended upon a pseudo Christianity that "will meet our need" but does not join us in a vine-branch relationship to Jesus Christ. This joining is an inner work of the Holy Spirit and has nothing to do with outward religion.

The curse of false religion is that it looks real outwardly and has the appearance of righteousness but inwardly is full of dead men's bones. MAT 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. MAT 23:28 "Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

When we become so Holy, so exact and precise in our religious life that people are afraid to come near us, is a sure sign we are in the flesh. As Holy as Jesus was, He was not that Holy. When "Holiness" leaves no room for normal living we have identified a hypocrite, an actor who is on stage. This kind of "holiness" makes us constantly aware of ourselves and how we appear to others. It has its source in the flesh. A life in the Spirit will always be God conscious and not self-conscious.

To sum this up ; True Christianity is a life in the Spirit that has its goal to please God and fulfill the purpose of God. Pseudo Christianity is a religion of the flesh and seeks to please the flesh. Its goal is to establish an earthly structure that has a heavenly purpose. The Tower of Babel is the picture of flesh trying to attain unto heaven by its own methods. Babylon the great is the great harlot religion that has evolved from that first illusionary attempt to gain heaven by the zeal of flesh. Our greatest and closest enemy to fulfilling God's purpose is the flesh. This is the Devil's territory and the place of his deception. The Devil has no power over the Spirit but his success is in the realm of flesh. If we walk in the Spirit we will stay free of the deception of the flesh and

therefore the power of the Devil.