

The Stolen Kingdom

In the days of Jesus, God's people were led and manipulated by religious leaders who were very far from God.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were leaders of a prominent Jewish sect known for its insistence on scrupulous Law-keeping.

Their reputation devolved over time into a caricature of devotion, synonymous with self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

Matthew 11:12

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

The Kingdom of God was being held hostage by violent usurpers, and God's good Name was taking heavy fire.

Luke 11:49-52

⁴⁹ For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute, ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."

Proverbs 9:10

¹⁰ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

A religious spirit hardens my heart toward God like almost nothing else, and it hides His true character from me.

Wheat and the tares

Like a tare, it seeks fertile soil to grow up in: a heart that sincerely wants to know the truth and follow God's Word.

As it grows up, it kills off sincere faith with hypocrisy, chokes out spiritual life, and quenches the Spirit.

Luke 9:52-56

⁵² and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. ⁵³ But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; ⁵⁶ for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."] And they went on to another village.

Luke 16:14

¹⁴ Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

Luke 18:25-27

²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ They who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

Mark 9:38-39

³⁸ John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.

John 3:25-26, 30

²⁵ Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him." ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.

Jesus came to soften hearts hardened by ruthless religion, and to produce in us the righteousness of God through grace!

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

What is a Religious Spirit?

It is a mode of operation in which I hold externally to a form of godliness that is powerless to change me on the inside.

Upcoming weeks: Band-aid religion, Faith and Politics, Judging Others, Intellectualism and Faith, The Spirit Under Fire, Submitting to Authority, Pride and Humility.

What is the Holy Spirit, and what is it to be truly spiritual?

Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.