Characteristics of Religion

In Revelation 2:4-5 Jesus speaks to the church at Ephesus and warns them that if they do not repent and turn to their first love He would remove their lampstand from its place. It is in these Scripture verses that we begin to see that God’s presence is a lampstand that gives light to believer’s lives. We also see that God can, and will, remove that lampstand if a certain condition is not met. The condition for keeping the lampstand in its place and burning bright is a continual love relationship with Jesus. The main point is that believers are responsible for continually feeding the flame of God’s presence in their lives by maintaining a growing and maturing love relationship with Jesus. If that love relationship with Jesus fades then the believer’s lampstand is at risk of being removed.

When believers do not keep the fires of God’s presence burning in their lives and Jesus does remove the lampstand from its place then when believers gather they will end up having nothing but religious services. The evidence for what religious services and religion itself looks like is the purpose of this document. It stands as a warning, like Revelation 2:4-5, to help believers understand when they or others around them are sliding into, or are already immersed in, religion.

It is important to note that religion is not a passive entity that can be easily ignored or dismissed. Religion has a demonic spirit behind it called the spirit of Pharaoh (Exodus 5:2, Isaiah 19:14; 30:2, 36:6, Ezekiel 29:2-3; 31:2; 32:2) that gives religion the power to enslave people. This spirit is the same spirit that enslaved the Hebrews in Egypt and continues to seek slaves to this day. Like the injunction against Babylon in Revelation 18:4 God is seriously calling believers to “Come out from her (organized religion, Egypt, Babylon, the spirit of Pharaoh (Jeremiah 46:24-26, Ezekiel 29:18-20)), my people, so that you may not share in her sins, neither participate in her plagues.”

The following is a brief summation of the major characteristics of religion and the spirit of Pharaoh behind it. Because religion comes from and is empowered by the spirit of Pharaoh the terms religion and the spirit of Pharaoh will be used interchangeably in this document.

1. Separation is the key
   a. Religion divides people into various groupings and labels them. If the outside group is not respected (and it rarely is) the name used for them will reflect a derogatory or pitying slant. The key here is the feeling of superiority, or pride, of one group over another (Genesis 43:32, John 4:9, Luke 18:9, Titus 1:12).
   b. The spirit of Pharaoh very much has, supports and propagates a separating mentality (Luke 18:11, John 9:28, Galatians 2:12). Whether there is a physically visible separation (i.e. pulpit vs. pew) or a verbal separation (i.e. clergy vs. laity, holy vs. infidel, saved vs. unsaved, islander vs. from away) religion always seeks to divide people.
   c. Theme: Us vs. them.

2. Focus on people (group) and not the person (individual)
   a. The spirit of Pharaoh excels in seeing the group, the corporate, over the individual and takes great pains to keep individuality out (John 12:19).
   b. In religious groups numbers are definitely more important than the person and the spirit of that person. The religious collective, or the community, is more important than the individual (John 11:49-50).

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c. Individuality is never encouraged or supported, unless it can be exploited and used by the religious collective. Typically this slavery by the spirit of Pharaoh will lead to burn out the individual as their life is sucked from them (Revelation 3:1).

d. If individuality is expressed and cannot be exploited he or she is often seen as a ‘problem’ that must be dealt with for the ‘good’ of the religious collective (Luke 22:2-6, John 18:14, Acts 19:24-29).

e. Theme: Follow the herd

3. Free will is trampled on, denied and subjugated on all fronts
   a. Like point 2 any expression of individual free will is discouraged if it threatens the cohesion of the religious collective. This can be from simple, but devastating, glances that signal disapproval to outright violence (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18; 8:3).
   b. Similar to point 1 authority figures in a religion often use demeaning terms to refer to the non-authority figures in the religious collective to enforce their belief that adult individuals are incapable of exercising their own individual will (John 7:47-49, Acts 4:17-18). (i.e. referring to adults as children, sheep, lay people). The useful term to help understand this is neoteny. Neoteny (or progressive ‘juvenilization’ of adult humans) is used by religious authority figures to keep people young so they will not challenge the authority structure and are thereby easier to control. This is no different than how whites would enforce subjugation of blacks in the United States after slavery was abolished by calling a black man ‘boy’.
   c. Common terms used by religious people to subjugate free will and to enforce compliance to the collective will are ‘need to’, ‘should’, ‘must’ and ‘have to’. These are code words often used by religious authority figures to dominate individual free will and enforce slavery to the collective.
   d. The religious collective will cannot be challenged or questioned without significant consequence to the questioner. This can be just be a simple rebuke or could escalate up to excommunication where the individual is barred from the religious collective (Acts 5:27-29). The spirit of Pharaoh will allow no dissent among those it considers its slaves and the use of force, emotional, verbal and physical, works to keep others in fearful obedience.
   e. Judgment, fear, guilt, threats, and emotional manipulation are quite frequently used by authority figures in the religious collective to enforce slavery and prevent individuals from questioning, or challenging the collective will or, worse yet, expressing their own individual will (John 9:22, Acts 7:9-14).
   f. The control, manipulation and dominance of the free will is known as witchcraft and is a major tool used by the spirit of Pharaoh. Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft as the religious collective seeks to rebel from God’s ways and drive others around them to do the same by violating individual free will (Isaiah 19:3; 30:1-3, 1 Samuel 15:23).
   g. The spirit of Pharaoh typically tries to establish the illusion of free will by having a religious collective will but any expression of individual free will often will be met with stiff opposition.
   h. Theme: If you aren’t free to say no, you aren’t free to say yes.
4. Focus on sweat and human effort to sustain the religious collective
   a. The spirit of Pharaoh builds the religious collective with the sweat of its slaves and it can only be maintained by that sweat (Exodus 5:4-19). The religious collective cannot be sustained unless those in the collective continually give of their resources to pay for the decisions made by those in authority. Frequently the individuals are not allowed to participate in those decisions because of points above (Matthew 23:13-14).
   b. Although most religious communities espouse democracy this ‘democracy’ is exercised by people that have been subjugated by guilt and emotional manipulation, as outlined in point 3, and kept in a place of spiritual ignorance by religious authority figures (Luke 11:52). This illusion of participation is a subtle trick the spirit of Pharaoh uses to control people because it has a sustained interest in keeping people immature and preventing their growth into mature spiritual adulthood. The spirit of Pharaoh does this so the slaves will continue to supply the religious collective with sweat without question (2 Timothy 3:6-7).
   c. Programs are instituted by the spirit of Pharaoh to expand the religious collective’s territory and to exploit the resources of individuals. These programs do not bring any spiritual value or significance to the members but reaffirms their place in the collective as a sweaty slaves (Matthew 23:4, Luke 11:46, Galatians 6:13).
   d. Theme: They want what you have, but they don’t want you.

5. Affiliation to any religious collective is based on mental assent to an established dogma
   a. The spirit of Pharaoh never establishes any territory beyond the soul (mind, emotions and will) because it is an enemy of the spirit of God. Once a position (standpoint, opinion, viewpoint, doctrine, philosophy) is agreed upon in the soul those that agree gather and religion is established. From that point forward any movement away from that territory must be challenged and the challenger must be destroyed. If the challenge comes from within that individual is treated as a traitor and treated accordingly (Luke 13:10-14). The spirit of Pharaoh cannot stand the freedom from slavery God gives to His people so it will often try to infiltrate the lives of believers to bring them again into slavery and bondage to religion (Galatians 2:4) and try to kill them (Matthew 23:34-35, Galatians 2:11-13).
   b. The established dogma (religious absolutes) that the spirit of Pharaoh loves so much requires strict adherence and may or may not be stated in the religious collective. When dogmatic statements are made the only method to determine whether they have a religious root is to challenge the statement. If the dogma can be released or explained without any degree of fleshy response then it is reasonable that the root is not religion. If, however, the response is greater than the challenge, it is clear that a religious dogma has been touched (Luke 6:6-11).
   c. Dogma cannot cover all the aspects of individuality that are expressed in humans and so it tends to take only certain points to bear as the flags for its territory (Matthew 12:1-2, John 5:16-18). The dogma is often then expressed in simplistic and formulaic terms (i.e. once saved, always saved or God helps those who help themselves) because religious authority figures see the non-authority figures as mindless and inept compared to the religious leaders great, infallible wisdom (Romans 1:21-22). As situations change and time passes the morally bankrupt religious collectives will shift positions and change their dogma to suit their present reality (Daniel 7:25). Note that this is not seen as conceding territory by members of the religious collective because they lack spiritual absolutes (Romans 2:23). Note that spiritual absolutes and religious absolutes are often seen as the
same by the members of the religious collective but they are fundamentally opposed. Spiritual absolutes are based on God’s truth (Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Hebrews 6:17-18) and religious absolutes are based on mankind’s pride fed by the spirit of Pharaoh. (Jeremiah 13:17).

d. **Theme:** Group think

6. **Religion has a hierarchical authority structure**
   
a. Within religion there is a very definite hierarchy with full accountability and infallibility given to the religious leaders by its members. This hierarchy may have just a single individual at the top or there may be a small group of individuals (Matthew 27:11, Mark 14:53, Luke 22:66).
   
b. The religious hierarchy will force accountability and obedience upon the people below it. Even though there may be a distant hierarchy over the collective most of the people in a religious collective will be under the direct control of a single leader or group of leaders which act as enforcers for the spirit of Pharaoh (Acts 4:5-6).
   
c. Obedience to the religious authority is expected and challenges are not tolerated. Often the ‘leader’ will do nothing and will let other members of the religious collective deal with any challenges to the authority structure or collective will (John 7:12-13; 18:12-14).
   
d. A religious hierarchy mentality may be present and expressed in individuals as well. Once religion is established, individuals with the spirit of Pharaoh within them will maintain their ‘position’ with people. This may manifest itself as the individual seeks to be subjugated under religious authority (i.e. lack of confidence, continual immaturity) or the individual may seek to exercise religious authority over others (i.e. lording it over others). This is mostly done using witchcraft techniques that dominate, manipulate and control individual free will (Acts 13:6-12).
   
e. **Theme:** Old boys club

7. **The focus of religion is on outward acts and not inward faith**
   
a. Once religious territory has been established by a collective a point system is established. This system, usually not articulated, allows for individuals to express their participation in the religious collective with clothing, possessions, speech or actions and thereby gain points within the collective. All of these things and actions are outwardly observable or known so that others will see that the individual’s identification is tied up with a particular religious collective (Matthew 23:5-7, Luke 11:39-43; 20:46, Galatians 4:17-18).
   
b. Non-compliance to the outward acts will often bring derision (i.e. comments or ridicule by other members of the religious organization) in order to bring the wayward member back into compliance (Colossians 2:18). If enough non-compliance takes place the religious collective will excommunicate the member. This excommunication can be physically violent (Matthew 23:29-35, Luke 4:28-29), verbally vitriolic or non-verbal, but observed through the actions and speech of collective members that deny any individual the chance to participate in the religious collective. This excommunication is designed to be brutal so it will create fear in others and they will be afraid to stand up and leave for themselves (John 9:22)
   
c. Religion is very hypocritical and even though religious authority figures espouse certain beliefs as an expression of participation in a collective those beliefs typically do not bring about change in the spirit of the individual and therefore character change (Colossians 2:20-23). Change of this order and magnitude is an inherent threat to the spirit of Pharaoh and will be discouraged and destroyed in any way possible (Matthew 23:13).
Frequently members of a religious collective will take it upon themselves to preemptively strike against the agent that would bring about real character change in an individual’s life. Since the Holy Spirit is the agent of change the frequent target of religious attacks is the Holy Spirit and those that are led by Him.

d. **Theme: Why be you when you can be me**

8. **Proselytizing is the only avenue of perceived growth in a religious organization**
   a. Since the spirit of Pharaoh devalues (minimize, belittle, cheapen, debase) character growth in the individual the only avenue of growth in religion that is apparent externally is growth in numbers. Increase equals success, decrease equals failure (*Matthew 23:15, Acts 20:30*).
   b. To gain new converts to the religious collective all members are encouraged to find people that will agree to their dogma. Converting people to the accepted dogma is frequently done in a manipulative way (i.e. through witchcraft) and often the nature of what the individual may be agreeing to is not explained in any detail. This violation of free will is excused by the collective with the belief that the individual is immature and not yet capable of fully understanding the religious collective’s dogma (*Galatians 4:17*).
   c. Once a new proselyte is accepted into the religious collective they are expected to adhere to the collective’s outward acts, unspoken rules and beliefs and to not challenge the religious authority. In other words they are expected to acclimatize to slavery quickly. Some grace will be given to the new proselyte at the beginning but this will quickly wear off. Many members will adapt well to the collective and simply accept what is given to them as truth, never challenging a thing, thereby becoming unquestioning slaves.
   d. Because some proselytes will leave the collective new converts are required. Often this means that the religious collective will go on a proselytizing campaign (i.e. recruitment drives disguised as evangelistic campaigns) to bring in new slaves so that the collective can be seen as a success. Typically less than 10% of the religious collective will actively support the organization through their resources so new blood is required.
   e. **Theme: Numbers are everything.**

The spirit of Pharaoh in all situations and at all times, desires to be an end in itself and it denies and destroys relationship because it is an enemy of God and relationship with Him (*Isaiah 19:1-16*). In the points above you can see how the spirit of Pharaoh, through very subtle to outrageously obvious actions and speech, will always find ways to focus on itself and keep people immature and unable to grow into proper, healthy relationships with God and others.

The slavery the spirit of Pharaoh promotes actively seeks to keep people so busy that they become numb to the drawing of the Holy Spirit. When a person is being drawn by God you will often see that person targeted again and again to get them involved in committees, programs, groups and other activities so that the Holy Spirit cannot take root in or lead them. Religious people will often guilt those being drawn by God with words like, “we need you or we can’t do it without you.” (*Song of Songs 1:6*) It is critical that the believer recognize these tactics if they are involved in a religious organization so they can combat it. Believers who focus on maturing in their love relationship with Jesus, however, will soon discover Him to be an effective antidote against religion and the spirit of Pharaoh. The maturing love relationship with Jesus will fan the flames of God’s presence in their life and produce spiritual growth.

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