

“The Influence of Jezebel on the Church!”

By Lanny K. Cook ©

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Revelation 2:18-29 NASB

As I shared in the first part of this Jezebel series, there usually aren’t too many Sunday morning messages in the church focusing on Jezebel. Her story is contained in the Old Testament books of I & II Kings. It’s not a favorable tale, neither for Jezebel nor her husband King Ahab, who was the king of Northern Israel. Jezebel is also mentioned in the Book of Revelation chapter 2 where Jesus shares an extremely strong message to the church. Once again, this reference to Jezebel is not favorable. I believe there is a valid lesson to be learned from the story of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. It’s a message which relates to all of us in this modern day. This lesson is applicable, not only individually, but also collectively, as a church. If you missed part one of this series which deals with the influence of Jezebel on individuals, you should go back to that introductory lesson in order to gain a better understanding of the Jezebel spirit in general. There is a strong connection between the story of this wicked queen and modern America. In fact, I believe Jezebel’s influence is greater today than it has been during any other time in the history of humanity. Breaking the spell of Jezebel can only occur by obtaining the knowledge necessary to understand the serious nature of this influence. I am convinced, there can be deliverance and hope from the influence of this rebellious spirit through awareness and prayerful consideration.

Breaking the chains of this bondage has to happen in the lives of individuals before it can be addressed within the corporate church. It's not an either or option. It's not one or the other. Sometimes this happens to the individual first, and then the church, but it can also happen simultaneously as the Lord moves through both the individual and then collectively through the congregation to break the influence of Jezebel.

Jezebel's influence cuts across all demographics of human culture. Her desire to kill, steal and destroy all that is good in your life and the life of the church knows no bounds. Remember what Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Ephesus?

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Ephesians 6:12 NIV

The spirit of Jezebel is one of the powers of this dark world and she is an evil, spiritual force intent on doing the bidding of her master, Lucifer. There are a multitude of issues you need to be aware of in order to better grasp the true complexity of her influence within all of today's society. It's evident in the lives of chauvinists, feminists, politicians, bosses, co-workers, friendships and families. Yes this influence is even found within the confines of the local church. This reality in itself is something most people either don't understand, or worse yet, they're not willing to recognize.

Collectively, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are considered the Church. This is the big "C" church or Universal Church. This includes believers who have left this world through death, as well as, today's Christians, along with those who are yet to become believers in future years. So, first and foremost the Church includes all believers who have ever lived from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection from the grave over 2,000 years ago. It also includes all those who will come into this world before His promised return. However, there is a corporate aspect of the church, (the little "c" church) which in all intents and purposes provides secular oversight of the organizational and business dealings required in this modern Age of Grace. It is often referred to as the local church. Sadly, since the local church includes sinners of all sorts, even within the ranks of leadership, this is a fallible institution which will never perfectly fulfill its calling or purpose. Even though as Christians we are forgiven, this doesn't mean we are immune to the outside influence of Jezebel. Since Christians aren't immune to her influence, it becomes obvious that she

can infiltrate the ranks of the local church, at various times and through various means. This is what Jesus is declaring in the second chapter of John's book of Revelation.

Just like every organization or business, there are a myriad of outside influences and considerations necessary for the corporate church to function. Some of these influences are positive, but unfortunately, there are also those that are extremely negative. Of course, as humans all of us experience outside influence affecting our decisions, choices and our well-being – emotionally, physically and spiritually. The church is no different. The caveat of the church however, is that nearly everyone seems to expect perfection from its leadership and its operational mission. Sorry folks, but in this not-so-perfect world this is never going to happen because of the fact that we currently live in a fallen state of influence through the present sinful nature of humanity. Although we can take measures to limit the influence of these evil forces within the organizational and operational structure of the local church, this influence is always lurking nearby. At times it seems like it's a perpetual state of chaos. From a Catholic viewpoint, I guess you could call it "Mass Chaos!" Well, so much for my attempt at religious humor. Although I always loved the joke regarding the process used by priests to make holy water. Do you know how? They boil the hell out of it! Okay, time to move on. Too bad we can't just boil the hell out of our lives, as well as, the local church leadership.

Challenges within the church structure are infinitely more daunting than those facing any other business or industry. Why? Because the church has to juggle its true purpose of sharing the gospel within the confines of a corporate organizational structure. In other words, not only does it have to consider its mission from a business perspective, but it also has to be sensitive to the guidance from the Holy Spirit while maintaining a biblical perspective on all organizational considerations. The multi-faceted purpose of the church provides an infinite amount of strategic planning and special considerations since the bottom line of the business has nothing to do with the almighty dollar or the profits associated with a financial goal. But those are still a necessary consideration for all churches. However, finances can't be the tail that wags the dog within the church since its focus must be placed on sharing the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, the main goal of any church should be the redemption of the lost and the equipping of the saints to better follow and serve Jesus. Even still, the corporate aspect of many local ministries often runs contrary to the true calling of the Church as Jesus issued this commandment to His Disciples moments before He ascended into heaven.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20 NIV.

This is the Great Commission of the Church. However, sometimes the church leadership loses sight of the true purpose of their commission as they battle to stay afloat in this secular society. There’s a reason for that. There’s an influence that often blurs the vision of the corporate church. It is a vision of *self*, a desire for more, all for *self*. It’s a dream of bigger and better focused on growth and the desire to attract a larger audience – to do more, be more and grow more. It’s an insatiable desire based on continually increasing attendance, along with a focus on more money from larger crowds in order to continue to provide the glitz and the glamour of a secularly, religious attraction or event. All of which, are blurred through the influence of a spirit referred to as Jezebel. It is frequently evident within many of the mega-church movements in this country. The need to share the Gospel in bigger buildings with brighter lights; complete with concert like entertainment; glitzy surroundings with the most brilliant speaking pastors that money can buy; are all indicators that the presentation has become more important than the message itself. So many times in these situations the mortgage on a mega-building becomes the driving force behind the glamour and glitz. As the Bible states In Matthew 6:24 KJV, *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* If we want to better understand this scripture, you need to fully comprehend the definition of mammon. According to the Oxford Dictionary, *mammon is wealth regarded as an evil influence or false object of worship and devotion. It was taken by medieval writers as the name of the devil of covetousness...*ⁱ

Of all the history, figures, lessons and parables contained in the Bible, there is one that seems to be more ignored and seldom discussed like no other. It is the story of Jezebel. Seriously, I don’t ever remember hearing a Sunday morning message which even dared mention Jezebel, let alone shared an entire message about this scandalous woman of the Bible. Of course, I remember in Sunday school on only a few occasions hearing the story of Jezebel and Ahab simply because of their association with the prophet Elijah. Who by the way had to turn tail and run for his life after hearing about Jezebel’s threats to kill this powerful prophet of God. Talk about instilling fear into the heart of a man who obviously had the Lord standing in his corner.

So what is it about this reference to Jezebel that deters even the most prolific preachers from sharing a message detailing the influence associated within the very essence of this most evil of individuals? Maybe the secret lies in the interpretation which considers her influence to only be associated with sexual misconduct. If so, it is a touchy topic to even begin to delve into, let alone share a message regarding such a personal, promiscuous, embarrassing aspect of life within this sinful world. Maybe the answer lies in the essence of fear that Jezebel commands toward anyone who opposes her. Remember how Elijah turned tail and ran for his life from her threats to seek him out to kill him? Or possibly, the answer could lie in the hidden reality that too many of the leaders and preachers of the modern church have a few too many similarities to this not-so-pleasant personality. In fact, maybe the reality of what she represents hits too close to home for many of those proclaiming the “Truth of the Gospel.” Of course, I’m not suggesting that *all* pastors, preachers or evangelists have a few too many of Jezebel’s more audacious character flaws influencing their lives. However, there are some out there who battle with her influence on a regular basis and it’s not a topic to be openly discussed or addressed.

Jezebel is embodied within the premise of self. Self-indulgence, self-promotion, self-absorption, self-gain, self-preservation, selfish control and selfish tendencies are all attributes of her immorality. Remember, I mentioned earlier in this study that most of the people who seem to embrace any form of narcissistic personality disorder are never diagnosed by a professional? Narcissism, in many cases seems to be a common attribute of most leadership styles in the modern world. The tendency to be overtly narcissistic is a profound attribute for the requirements associated with being in charge. Honestly, I’m convinced that at the very heart of narcissistic tendencies you’ll find the proverbial Jezebel Spirit at work. And sadly, I think it’s safe to also say that even in the most righteous aspect of our human capacity, at least a smidgen of this spirit is diligently working behind the scenes to influence our lives. Within the frailty of our individual humanity every person has the capacity to be swayed by self-indulgent pursuits. This is why I must say, according to the scripture as recorded in John’s book of Revelation, this spirit of Jezebel is one requiring extreme caution within the confines of our lives, hearts and especially, our souls. However, beyond the individual caution to be aware of this influence, there is a dire warning proclaimed to the collective assembly known as the church. This warning involves the leadership of each local church or specific ministry. Let’s take a moment to once again review this scripture found in the Book of Revelation.

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’ To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 2:18-29 NIV

“He who has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches!” Wow! If that doesn’t get your attention and send goosebumps down your spine, I don’t know what would. Especially as a pastor or an elder. If you are, have been, or even want to be a church leader in any capacity, you better be perking up your ears and paying extra close attention at this point in our study. When you refer back to the original story of Jezebel and Ahab (a king of Northern Israel) in the Old Testament books of 1 & 2 Kings the true depravity of her nature takes on a nerve rattling, mind-boggling significance. Hear what the Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, published by Thomas Nelson, 1897 has to say about little Ms. Jezebel in order to help put her deviant behavior into a sort of, biblical perspective.

Jezebel chaste, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Zidonians, and the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel (1 Kings 16:31). This was the "first time that a king of Israel had allied himself by marriage with a heathen princess; and the alliance was in this case of a peculiarly disastrous kind. Jezebel has stamped her name on history as the representative of all that is designing, crafty, malicious, revengeful, and cruel. She is the first great instigator of persecution against the saints of God. Guided by no principle, restrained by no fear of either God or man, passionate in her attachment to her heathen worship, she spared no pains to maintain idolatry around her in all its splendour. Four hundred and fifty prophets ministered under her care to Baal, besides four hundred prophets of the groves [RSV, 'prophets of the Asherah'], which ate at her table (1 Kings 18:19). The idolatry, too, was of the most debased and sensual kind." Her conduct was in many respects very disastrous to the kingdom both of Israel and Judah (21:1-29). At length she came to an untimely end. As Jehu rode into the gates of Jezreel, she looked out at the window of the palace, and said, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" He looked up and called to her chamberlains, who instantly threw her from the window, so that she was dashed in pieces on the street, and his

horses trod her under their feet. She was immediately consumed by the dogs of the street (2 Kings 9:7-37), according to the word of Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 21:19). Her name afterwards came to be used as the synonym for a wicked woman (Revelation 2: 20).ⁱⁱ

This is not one of the more pleasant stories contained within the scriptures. In fact, it paints a haunting picture of an incredibly wanton woman and the relationship she had with her husband, King Ahab. The story of Ahab and Jezebel is one which should cause grave concern to every married couple. It's the ultimate warning regarding relational domination and control, as well as, interpersonal passivity and apathy. This story has a direct correlation to a myriad of relational sins and relational issues, at least relatively speaking. It could serve as the posterchild of narcissistic inequality. So, the question we need to answer in this study is this: "how does the Jezebel spoken of in the scripture found in Revelation chapter two relate to the modern church? Let's refer back to the context of what Jesus said to the Church in Thyatira!

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

Revelation 2:18-22 NASB

The woman Jezebel is often misconstrued as someone of extreme sexual immorality. However, the "acts of immorality along with the reference to eating things sacrificed to idols holds an even deeper meaning in this passage. If you refer to the book of Kings to read more about Queen Jezebel, you get a better understanding of what Jesus is referring to in this passage. You see the Jezebel of Old Testament times was a woman of untold influence over the life of the king and over Israel. She convinced her husband to turn away from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in order to worship the gods Baal and Ashtoroth. Through Jezebel's influence, most of the Israelites in the northern kingdom, turned to the worship of these false gods. According to the prophet Elijah only 7,000 men in the entire nation were not swayed by her control. From this alone, we can infer that Jezebel's immorality included a multitude of sinful behaviors. Through the study of Jezebel's actions in the Old Testament we can deduce that not only were her intentions evil, but also, they were self-promoting. She sought complete control, power and influence over all of Israel, including her weakling of a husband, the king! In an article from albatrus.org regarding "Jezebel in Our Society" this is what is said about Jezebel:

The Spirit of Jezebel is basically a controlling spirit working through the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It has, in general, two aims:

- To gain identity, glory, recognition, power, and satisfy the need for the "praises of men." This is a consequence of the desire for love and self-worth focused on SELF.
- Secondly the Jezebel spirit is a men hater and seeks to emasculate all men, and divest them of their authority and power over others. It fosters a distrust and hatred of men in general.ⁱⁱⁱ

The first part of that observation is important to mention as it relates to the corporate church and many of the leaders within its ranks. "Glory, recognition, power and the praise of men" often saturate the very essence of the corporate church fiber. It is no secret that all of those attributes of the Jezebel spirit are addicting to a multitude of pastoral positions within the local church environment. Without constant reminders for a leader to embody humility, the natural affirmations associated with being the "top dog," the "main man," the "star player," or the "big attraction" become a hidden part of a pastor's ego and often times these traits are the main considerations for determining a pastor's compensation package. It is far too easy for all of these tendencies to distract any human from the true mission of the church, which is, to share the Gospel message to the world in order to save the broken and the lost! Throughout my years in volunteer ministry, along with a decade of serving in a paid position within several local churches I've seen this spirit take hold in nearly every ministry I've been involved with, at least to some degree. I first witnessed this phenomenon in a small community church where I was raised as a youngster. I've seen it in a small denominational church where I served in a volunteer capacity for decades. It was manifested big time in a large evangelical church where thousands of individuals attended. I witnessed it in a non-denominational church which I helped plant. Literally, there's not a local church in this world today who isn't a target for Jezebel to enter and gain a foothold in order to blur the focus of the Great Commission.

The "glory, power, recognition and praise of men" comes in a myriad of tempting forms and venues. The spirit of Jezebel can manifest itself through church attendance, donations, tithes (*I'll be sharing another study later on to shed light on what Jesus has to say in the New Testament regarding the topic of giving to the church*), personal desires, corporate goals, staff evaluation systems, and even at the back door of the church as a pastor greets the congregation on the way out! All it takes is a comment like, "Great message" or "You missed the mark on that one" to get into the head of a leader or play with the fragile psyche of a pastor. It turns the focus from sharing the Gospel toward the insecurities and hidden desires of an individual who holds profound influence over the church body. When any part of the ministry loses sight of the Great Commission and focuses inward for

self-gain, glory, power or recognition, the spirit of Jezebel is to blame. This can happen to pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, ushers and anyone who plops themselves down in a pew on any given service. In fact, many church leaders hide behind the fact that they are sharing the gospel on any given Sunday to ignore any sign of inward indulgence. This causes them to either fail to consider or recognize the influence of this evil within their church. Since they are sharing the gospel as part of their daily responsibilities, in their mind, there's no need to worry about any other attributes associated with the warning about Jezebel's influence. According to their perspective, the sharing of the gospel as their main mission or purpose becomes a battle flag, which provides immunity of any other little sin associated with the "glory, recognition, power or the praise of men." There are those leaders out there who hide under the guise of sharing the Gospel, which relinquishes them from any responsibility to the egregious rewards offered to them within their specific, glorified career status. In fact, many leaders justify their fame, power, glory, recognition and compensation package under the letter written by Paul to his friend Timothy.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward. I Timothy 5:17, 18 KJV

This doesn't mean that the oxen can gorge themselves to the point where they can no longer tread out the corn. It also doesn't mean that they are to eat all of the corn themselves so that there is nothing left to share with the rest of the world who hungers and thirsts for righteousness' sake. Sadly, when it comes to appropriate compensation packages for clergy, there are no real guidelines found within the pages of the Bible. Now, I'm not saying pastors shouldn't receive living wages for the services they provide. But I am saying that often times this financial aspect of the corporate church can easily be influenced by not-so-righteous motives involving personal gain or personal promotion. All of which are attributable to the influence of Jezebel.

I've seen preachers get up and beat the drum like Buddy Rich or Ringo Starr in an effort to garnish the congregation's financial support. Then these same preacher-folks turn around and become bad-stewards of God's tithes, never using those donations to be used outside of the church walls in order to further the kingdom of God in ways that are divinely accountable. Or they use the church coffers as their own personal expense account, taking others out to eat while also paying for their own meals because it's "church business." I've seen the church credit card used to pay for golf outings for some of the more substantial church supporters so that the preacher can

schmooze them through questionable means for questionable motives. I've seen pastors turn the church into a personal enterprise where their only real concern seemed to be making sure they were well compensated for their efforts. The whole time preaching about the need for everyone else to volunteer their time to support the church and to give at least 10% of their gross income to the mission of their church. In fact, I was actively involved in one particular church for several years that was nothing more than a family enterprise. During the week the church served as a daycare facility with the Pastor's wife in charge of that side of the operation. On Sundays, it offered a morning service with the pastor manning the guns. The reality of this particular family business was that even though multiple families supported the church financially and even erected the building through their own volunteer labor, everything belonged to the pastor and his wife. When the time for the pastor and his wife came to retire, they sold off the building and the daycare business at an amazing profit, which was all pocketed as part of their retirement plan. Through decades of people giving their time, energy, money and service to this church, in the end, all of those proceeds ended up in the pastoral coffer. That's quite the retirement plan, don't you think?

Through the years I also witnessed a mega-church deteriorate from a senior pastor's desire to use it as a family business, hiring nearly every family member who came along. Son-in-laws would be hired and ordained with a wave of the wand regardless of their background or experience just because the senior pastor "felt" the newly acquired in-law had been called by God to serve in his church. The whole time the church was being used as a means to financially support an entire family. The biblical justification used to perpetuate this family dynasty by the senior pastor, who just also happened to be the president of this non-profit business, evolved around the concept that the tribe of Levi were the family of priests within the Jewish traditions. This provided the divine approval for his family to carry on that age old Jewish tradition in this particular church.

I've been in multiple churches where pastor's wives were paid for just showing up or overseeing a small component of the ministry even though everyone else was expected to serve in a volunteer capacity. Some leaders would surround themselves with "yes" people in order to always show support, never question a decision, or to never rock their ministerial boat. I've witnessed church leaders become financial hoarders, stockpiling finances for no other purpose than to ensure a financial security blanket in order to always have a paycheck coming in at the end of each month. I was a part of a church where there was over half-a-million dollars stashed away with no intention to use it for Kingdom purposes. There was no intention to ever seek God's purpose

for an exorbitant savings account that was just sitting there collecting interest for the pastor's future whims. I've seen churches become so consumed with an outside ministry that they lose sight for the true calling of sharing the gospel. There are churches out there so intent on catering to social trends they refuse to ever take a stand on any controversial topic even when the scriptures are blatantly clear regarding the depravity of the matter. I've been a part of a church where the pastor was the only one who knew the giving records of every congregant. He convinced the church leadership that this insight would allow him to be a better pastor. By knowing a person's financial giving trends, he would be able to gage that individual's spiritual well-being and maturity. Talk about a pastor intent on using the system for his own selfish means. This also allowed him the opportunity to know who to schmooze and who to devote the majority of his attention. These are all signs of being under the influence of Jezebel.

And the real kicker here, and this is one that is going to tick off nearly every pastor or elder who reads this particular section of this study. (*Again, I need to note that I will be doing an entire study on this topic in the not-so-distant future, so stay tuned.*) I constantly hear preachers beat the pulpit declaring that the Bible demands you give 10% of your salary to the church coffers. Ten percent is what they refer to as the *tithe*. This is in reference to the Old Testament book of Malachi, which states:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:10 KJV

According to Wikipedia, “The Book of Malachi was written to correct the lax religious and social behaviour of the Israelites – particularly the priests – in post-exilic Jerusalem. Although the prophets urged the people of Judah and Israel to see their exile as punishment for failing to uphold their covenant with God, it was not long after they had been restored to the land and to Temple worship that the people's commitment to their God began, once again, to wane. It was in this context that the prophet commonly referred to as Malachi delivered his prophecy.”^{iv} Since this book from a Minor Prophet speaks directly to the nation of Israel, why do Pastors and Church leaders always use it to demand modern day Christian's fork over ten-percent of their income to the local church coffers? Is it a misguided practice that comes from the days of old? Possibly. From my years of experience in the church, it could probably be more accurately defined as a misguided form of manipulation. If this is true, then you would have to assume that the influence of Jezebel

is working behind the scenes. Do you know what the number one complaint people have against the church? The recurring murmur from a majority of former church attenders is this: “All they want from me is my money.” After spending years of serving in the church, and even though I am still faithfully attending church services at a great local church. I can honestly agree that in the majority of cases, or maybe I should say the majority of churches this is true. Why do I say that? Because I have witnessed first-hand the reaction to pastors when people aren’t giving to their cause, to their coffers, or to their 401K plan. I have come to this same conclusion through the years from my own personal experience with ministry leaders. As long as you are supporting the church financially, and also staying actively involved in the ministry, the leadership loves you and makes over you like you’re something special. The minute you choose to take a break or decide to go to another church, you become an enemy to their state. At least that’s been a common reaction from many of the church leaders I’ve been involved with through the decades. How can I dare make such an accusation? Because in this modern age of social media, it has become blatantly obvious. How many times has a church attender been unfriended by the church leaders if they move on to another church? It happens all the time. Again, this is an indicator of the influence of a spirit of self. If you’re not catering to the needs of the leader or supporting their cause, you’re not worthy of being one of their social media friends. Sorry for the tangent, let’s get back to the concept of the tithe.

The scripture from Malachi is an Old Testament commandment, not a New Testament perspective. This is a legalistic demand. Not a grace filled request. You see, when Jesus came to this world, died on the cross and rose from the grave He became the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament Laws and Commandments. You can’t pick and choose which Old Testament Laws you want to apply to the local church in this modern age. None of them apply to any of us today because they come from a legalistic standpoint, not through the grace of Jesus Christ. So, how can you ask your congregation to support the church financially without going back to the Old Covenant? By looking at what the New Covenant, or New Testament has to say about giving. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say you are required to give 10% to the church. Besides, a tithe back in the day was not a monetary amount, it was the first-fruits of your labor, of your harvests and of your livestock. What we need to realize today, is that, in Malachi, the commandment was to give your tithe to the Temple. The local church is not the Temple. The Temple was on Jewish ground. It was founded on a Covenant God made regarding the nation of Israel. The Church is the Body of Christ

as described in the New Covenant. The two are not interchangeable. Bottom line. Period. End of discussion.

The New Testament has this to say about giving to the local church as recorded in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth.

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”
2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NIV.

What can you infer by what you've just read? You can finally rest at ease knowing what you give to the church is a matter of the heart. It's between you and the Lord. If your preacher keeps demanding ten percent and the Lord tells you to give five percent, you can't feel guilty or ashamed. Give what you've decided in your heart to give. If the Lord places it upon your heart to give eighteen percent, then you are to joyfully give that amount. It's between you and the Lord. It's not between you and your pastor or anybody else for that matter. So how should the church define the tithe according to New Testament standards? A tithe is whatever God has placed on your heart to give. The only requirement or commandment God requires from that point on is that you give it cheerfully. If any church leaders demands ten percent of your income, stating that it's God's commandment because it's scriptural, then you need to realize that the leadership isn't interested in rightly dividing the Word of God. They are taking scripture out of context and they are also allowing the spirit of Jezebel to influence their church for selfish gain. It doesn't matter if it's a pastor or his church that's promoting anything for their own benefit, it all comes from the influence of Jezebel.

Speaking of Jezebel's influence. There are a multitude of pastors out there who honestly believe they were born into leadership and possess the inalienable right to always be right! After all, they are the appointed ears of God in the church. In their minds they are the only ones who hear God's voice! Only they know what God is saying! Sort of sounds a bit like the ole Catholic days where the priests were the only ones allowed to read the Bible. And then, of course, they also gave all the sermons in Latin, so very few could even understand what was being shared. That strategy ensured their status as the representation of God's voice, never to be questioned. This power grab resulted in a true lack of either professional or personal accountability for the leadership. Talk about the spirit of Jezebel run amuck! I remember one conversation I had with a

senior pastor when I was serving as an associate pastor in his church. He said, *“You need to remember, I’m the senior pastor and you’re not!”* In other words, he was the assigned interpreter of God’s voice in the church. My role was to simply tend to the flock as I took care of all daily necessities for the church to continue forward.

So, you might be sitting there wondering why I’ve shared all of this. I’m not sharing it as a means to blast the modern day church. I’m shedding light on these types of issues in hopes that individual churches will take a good look within their own sanctuaries to see if the Jezebel Spirit has even a miniscule amount of influence within the sanctity of their own leadership and organizational structure. What do all of the previous examples have in common? They are influenced by an evil that is diligently seeking to destroy all that is good and pleasing to the Lord within the confines of the local church and their leadership. Hopefully, all churches will self-impose higher standards of accountability to fully engage in the true calling and purpose assigned to it by Christ. It’s time every local church mobilizes its army in order to safe guard their ranks from the influence of Jezebel. The first step necessary to implement any safe guard is through understanding who and what they are facing. This understanding will require great humility. As James 4:10 NIV states, *“Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”*

The truth is, the spirit of Jezebel is all around us. Without humility, we’re not able to recognize the danger or take a stand against her. The arrogance and self-reliance associated with this spirit blinds us to its evil intent. Humility is the kryptonite to the super-powers of this evil source. This is not an evil relegated exclusively within the boundaries of sexual immorality. It is a spirit intent on perverting the very essence of our human relationship with God. It can turn anything and everything into a form of idolatry. It takes our focus off God and turns it inward towards self. It blurs our motivation, devotion and righteous intents for serving God by refocusing our attention toward selfish gain, through self-absorbed motives. It overshadows the reward of our service toward God with a self-induced cloud of deception based on what it does for us and what we get out of it. It’s cloaked in the pride of status, performance, accomplishment, fame and financial compensation. All of which, are an essential component of a functioning church. It’s a pride issue. It’s an issue of the heart. That’s what makes all of this so difficult to not only recognize, but also extremely challenging to address. Humility is the only means to finally recognize the challenge.

Remember the story of Achan in the book of Joshua? Israel was defeated in a battle against the men of Ai because of one man’s sin within the assembly of Israel. The desire to have more, or

to lust after a forbidden fruit is a temptation which has confronted humanity since the time of Adam and Eve. It's not the desire that is so destructive to our lives, but rather the action we take to obtain that desire for ourselves in spite of the forbidden status presented. Listen to what W. A. Criswell shares in a message entitled "Achan: The Sin We are Afraid to Confess,"

"This is a remarkable story. And it opens to view one of the tremendous weaknesses of all human life. The drive to be acquisitive – turned a certain way – covetousness, it is a universal drive. It is in all of us. Nor can we obviate it, or interdict it, or escape it. All of us know what it is to desire something, to want something, to pant after something. The desire to acquire and to have is universal. It is in all of us. It is a common denominator in the human soul.

Now, that is not evil in itself. It is not bad of itself. Sometimes that word "covetous" and "covetousness" is used in a good sense. For example, Paul will say, in the last verse in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians, "Covet earnestly the best gifts" [1 Corinthians 12:31]. And he will say at the close of chapter 14, "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy" [1 Corinthians 14:39] – that is to speak out for God, to be a great witness for the Lord. There is a sense in which that human drive to acquire, to reach after, to seize, to have, is good; when a man covets, when he desires something that is pleasing and magnifying the Lord.

But there is a side of covetousness that is also evil in the extreme. This is the sin of Achan. This is the sin of all of the tragedy that overwhelmed Israel when God said, "Touch it not. It is devoted to the Lord" [Joshua 6:18-19], and Achan hid it away for himself [Joshua 7:1, 21]. That human drive of acquisition can sometimes almost destroy the world, as it almost destroyed Israel [Joshua 7:7]."

Personally, it sounds like Achan was under the influence of the spirit of Jezebel. Remember what Jesus had to say about the Church in Thyatira, as recorded in Revelation chapter 2?

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

This is the greatest challenge facing every church as they strive to move forward in responding to the Great Commission. How do you ensure that the entire staff, every single pastor or elder on board, and even those who volunteer are not under the influence of the one devoted to the cause of immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols? It's a daunting task. But it begins through an awareness of who the enemy is and how they operate. Probably one of the biggest indicators that someone is under the influence of Jezebel has to do with how they relate to others. Simply stated, if any individual always turns the conversation back to self, guess what? You better beware of who you're really dealing with. Jezebel is evident through self-promotion, self-indulgence, self-gain and over-inflated self-perception, value or ego. If you ever encounter anybody within your church ministry that consistently turns all attention back to themselves, you

are in trouble. These indicators of being under the influence of Jezebel always perpetuate and expose themselves through relational means.

The true mission of any church should be to bring others into relationship with Christ. This of course, is expedited through the concept of building relationship with one another in order to share the Good News of the Gospel. Church is not about religion. It's all about relationship. First and foremost is a personal relationship with Jesus, followed by relationship with and fellowship with other believers. Also, relationship is not exclusive to the ranks of Christian fellowship. Relationship with sinners is a necessity in order to share the message of God's love through Jesus Christ. The greatest example we have of the need to share relationally with sinners came with Emmanuel, which is translated "God with us." When Jesus took on the flesh of humanity, He became as one of us. God incarnate in order that we could relate to the Almighty in a personal way in order to find salvation and forgiveness. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody who makes a living within the realm of the local church. Again, it's good to remember that while we are to be living in this world, we are not to *conform to this world*, (*Romans 12:2*). There is a huge difference between these two states of being. The influence of the Jezebel spirit can lead even the most zealot ministry leader toward the desire to seek after the rewards which are *of this world*. This is the greatest threat out there within every aspect of church leadership. As a reminder, what are those threats? "Glory, recognition, power and the praise of men." Of course, you also need to add to that list of threats, honor, fame, excessive monetary reward, inflated egos, excessive personal gain and lustful desires of an earthly nature that distract in even the most miniscule way to the true mission of the sharing the Gospel.

The Jezebel Spirit's intent is to inhibit the churches ability, as well as, an individual's ability to enter into relational bliss. This spirit runs contrary to relationships. It's focused on self-absorption and there is no relationship within the narcissism of self. It's a spirit of false idols, of self-gain, self-indulgence, self-worship and self-promotion. Which is why it's so harmful within the confines of any church setting. Of course, all of us know someone who has been hurt within the context of attending a church. Maybe they were insulted by the words of someone at the church. Possibly the pastor didn't seem friendly enough, or insulted them through one of the messages. Maybe one of the ushers was rude or there was too much emphasis placed on tithing to the church. Maybe they had gone to a pastor for help with a personal problem and they were either pushed away, or given bad, unbiblical counsel. It could be they went through a divorce, resulting in the

leadership choosing to ask them to leave the congregation. And, then there's always the possibility they were confronted for some questionable behavior or they experienced some sort of conviction by the Holy Spirit which resulted in an uneasiness to continue attending a service. There's a myriad of reasons people find fault with the church or refuse to get involved in a local congregation. I've known numerous individuals who have sworn off ever attending church for the rest of their life. They won't even consider attending a service at Easter or Christmas because of something that happened, was said, or done to them earlier on in their life.

These are all reactions expounded upon through the influence of the Jezebel Spirit. They apply to both the church and individual church-goers. Jezebel attacks relationships through the pretense of looking exclusively after yourself, from your own personal biased views. It happens individually. It happens collectively. As a side note here, I need to say that even though I have "lost custody" of numerous churches either through divorce or personal differences with a pastor or a church's doctrine, I have never stopped attending church services. I might take a sabbatical for a few months, or even possibly years, but I understand the necessity of being a part of a collective group of believers so that I don't have to make it in this world all alone. Have I had times of rejection, betrayal and bad feelings? Yes! On numerous occasions. However, that doesn't deter the fact I need to be an *active part* of a collective church body in order to continue to serve and share the Gospel of Christ. It also doesn't mean that I can't continue to serve and share the Good News of the Gospel outside of the church environment. Neither option is exclusive of the other. In fact, the Great Commission from Christ, is to share the Good News of the Gospel both in and out of a church building. We are called to share God's amazing grace and mercy in every aspect of our lives, not just on a Sunday morning or weekday church gathering.

Within the frailty of our human capacity, we are corrupted with faults, insecurities, and weakness. It is through these character flaws that the Jezebel spirit's influence can take root. It is also through these flaws that this evil spirit perpetuates its cause and destroys relationships, both individually and collectively in a church. They are the cause of most relational issues. Our personal imperfections only perpetuate the tendency to not get along or understand the motives of the other individuals involved. It's important to understand, it's not the churches function to judge, condemn, convict or decide who is worthy of grace or who is in need of punishment. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!* (Romans 3:23). However, this is not the stance of the

majority of church bodies in the world today and this comes from the influence of the Jezebel spirit.

Don't confuse that last statement with the reality the church shouldn't be maintaining, or encouraging appropriate behaviors and beliefs within the body. If an individual is engulfed in some sort of sin or destructive behavior and they find themselves walking through the doors of the church, how should they be treated? With love and grace? Or, with judgment and condemnation? The answer to every sinful situation is not found by kicking the guilty party out of the church as a punishment? Wouldn't it be more appropriate in most situations to gently and gracefully provide guidance and support? What influence can a church have on an individual if they have been banished? Besides, it's not the church's position or the pastor's responsibility to convict an individual of sinful behavior. That is the exclusive role of the Holy Spirit. Many pastors today have tried to take on divine roles through self-appointment. That my friend, is neither biblical nor wise! Actually, it's a form of blasphemy, born out of the influence of the Jezebel spirit.

Too many pastors think they are the sole representative of the Holy Spirit and have been directed to perform all the duties delegated to that particular office of the Trinity. As a pastor, you can guide, direct, and point people in the right direction by rightly dividing the Word of God and openly sharing it with any individual. But you can't provide conviction of detrimental behaviors. That's not conviction, but rather shaming. Shaming another individual is as much of a sin as lying, cheating, adultery or murder. In fact, shaming is a form of murder. It's an attempt to destroy the very essence of a person's spirit through ridicule, humiliation and guilt. It's literally the antithesis of God's grace. It is a tactic of the enemy. In fact, it could probably be considered one of those narcissistic tendencies where the abuser attempts to put their superiority on display as they lord over another person's bad behaviors, choices, or lifestyle. I have known several pastors (and their wives) through the years who used the gauntlet of shame to humiliate sinners into submission. Unfortunately, people who use shame as a tool to change another person's behavior never considered the phrase, "*There but for the grace of God go I!*" Sadly, this has been the response to many a sinner through the application of a local church's form of "*selective grace.*" Shaming is also a favorite tool of the Jezebel Spirit.

The reality of God's grace is that it is unconditional. It has no limits and it has no boundaries! It also doesn't have an expiration date. Too many Christians place limits on the concept of grace. They rationalize degrees of sin, or depths of depravity. They determine according

to their own personal set of standards what is deserving of grace and what is worthy of punishment. This isn't an example of Christian love, it's an example of worldly judgment. It is difficult for any of us to move beyond the legality of the Old Testament laws, by completely embracing the concept of sinners saved exclusively by grace. The point I'm really trying to make here is that many times, many Christians, which often includes church leaders, such as pastors and elders, have a difficult time not only interpreting the scriptures detailing grace, but also, they have an even greater difficulty in applying them to everyday situations within the church membership. In the process, they have a tendency to defer back to their Old Covenant way of thinking. One based on the law which is engulfed with extreme legalism. Legalism is a tool used by Jezebel in order to inhibit our ability to enter into any sort of nurturing relationship with either man or God.

For many modern church leaders, the influence of legalism turns grace into a tiered form of judgement. The legalist believes there are varying levels of grace depending on the severity of the sin. Those who see grace through this limited lens are misinformed. True grace is a foreign concept within the confines of their self-absorbed perspective. Often these folks have never been the recipient of any extended amount of grace for what they consider to be grave sin in their lives. They forget that when Christ Jesus became the fulfillment of the Law – Grace became the embodiment of God's mercy! In the minds of many Christians, and portrayed throughout their lives, the true depth of God's grace has never been fully established, defined or realized. Why? Because deep down in the darkest recesses of the human heart, it can be difficult to comprehend the true reality that *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*. Jezebel continues to whisper in every human ear how each of us are superior and more righteous when compared to the rest of the world. In our own eyes, we aren't really all that bad.

For many individuals, their legalistic views of God's grace limits their ability to extend unconditional grace to others. They can do so in certain situations and with limited application, but they can't let go of the influence of judgement and superiority of their own self-righteousness. What I have witnessed throughout my days in ministry is that the corporate aspect of the church is seldom an agent of true grace. However, for the leadership of any church who has endured an added dose of hardship or struggle in life, their capacity to extend empathy and grace to those in need has been exponentially increased. I believe that those who are reluctant to extend grace to others are operating through the influence of the spirit of Jezebel. Sadly, it's the corporate side of the organizational structure of a local church that seems to be most adversely impacted through

Jezebel's influence. However, it's naïve to think that the spiritual component of a ministry isn't impacted by the evil of this twisted influence.

The local church is called to be the relational epicenter for extending God's love and grace to the world. At least, it should be.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.
John 13:34-35 NASB

As with all relationships, there are bound to be issues on a regular basis and to varying degrees within the confines of every local church body. All of us often let judgement and legality serve as the catalyst for dealing with most relational situations. This is a tactic straight out of the tool belt of Jezebel. "The influence of the Jezebel spirit is the antonym to God's grace. True grace can only come through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ! When that happens, you will no longer be conformed to this world, through the influence of Jezebel. Instead, you will be *transformed by the renewing of your mind* through Christ. Then and only then will you be able to *prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*. This is the promise afforded to every individual Christian. This also needs to be the focus of every local church professing the truth of the Gospel of Christ. If the spirit of Jezebel has any sort of influence in either an individual or the leadership of the corporate church, this transformation will never find full completion. In other words, "*God's perfect and acceptable will*" can never be secured if Jezebel has any influence within any given ministry. It's time for the local church to take measures to ensure that both its corporate practices and spiritual mission align with the Great Commission of God's mercy and saving grace. As a church leader, if you found anything in this study to be offensive, I suggest you take a good long look into your own heart and into the organizational practices within your church. Maybe the offensive part of your reaction stems from the Holy Spirit's conviction for your own personal situation or circumstance.

David was a man after God's own heart. Even still, David was a man who succumbed to numerous ungodly influences and temptations. Just like the rest of us, his sins were many. Yet, God's grace was limitless and unconditional. I think it's appropriate to share the ending to one of his Psalms as a necessary first step in avoiding any influence from the ultimate temptress.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Psalm 139:23-24 ESV

This simple, humble scripture needs to be the heart-psalm of every Christian. It needs to be the guiding prayer of every local church in order to break the evil chains of influence from the unwanted spirit of self.

ⁱ Oxford Dictionaries, Mammon, <https://www.bing.com/search?q=what+does+mammon+mean&FORM=QSRE5>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/jezebel/> Dictionaries - Easton's Bible Dictionary - Jezebel
Dictionary topics are from M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, published by Thomas Nelson, 1897. Public Domain, copy freely.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jezebel, in our society, http://www.albatrus.org/english/church-order/women-matters/jezebel_in_our_society.htm

^{iv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Malachi

^v W. A. Criswell, Sermon Library, September 28, 1980, <https://wacriswell.com/sermons/1980/achan-the-sin-we-are-afraid-to-confess/>