

Please Stop Calling Women 'Jezebels'

Just when you thought America couldn't be any more divided, two Southern Baptist pastors in Texas recently poured salt in our national wounds by publicly referring to Vice President Kamala Harris as "Jezebel." The comments, one made on Twitter and the other in a recorded sermon, made conservative Christians look hateful and stirred the already boiling pot of political outrage.

In a sermon preached on Jan. 3, Steve Swofford of First Baptist Church of Rockwall, Texas, chided President Joe Biden for a lack of cognitive ability. Then, referring to Harris, he said: "Jezebel Harris, isn't that her name?" Swofford's comments quickly hit the fan.

A few weeks later Pastor Tom Buck of First Baptist Church of Tyler, Texas, called Harris a "Jezebel" on Twitter. When he was questioned about it, he tweeted again: "For those torn up over my tweet, I stand by it 100%. My problem is her godless character. ... Pray for her, but don't praise her!"

Perhaps these two pastors didn't realize that everything we write, broadcast or preach from a pulpit is being watched carefully. News spreads fast in the digital age, and within days a firestorm was ignited among Southern Baptists. Pastor Dwight McKissic, a prominent black leader in the SBC, denounced Buck's tweet, saying: "To refer to the Madam Vice President in any context as 'Jezebel' is simply unwarranted and disrespectful and extremely harmful to the image of Southern Baptists, when this label emanates from the heart and mouth of an SBC pastor."

Some people consider the term "Jezebel" a racist term, because it has been used in the African American community to refer to

an evil black woman. But I know hundreds of white, Hispanic and Asian women who also have been called Jezebels simply because they were gifted to either lead or preach. For centuries religious traditionalists used the Jezebel label to denigrate strong women, especially if they held senior positions.

I don't agree with most of Kamala Harris' politics. In fact, I'm on opposite sides of the aisle from her on many moral issues. But whether I agree with her about national policy is irrelevant. She is a public official, and she deserves to be treated with respect. Period. Christians are called to honor and pray for those in authority.

Since I became a Christian, I have prayed for presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush 1, Clinton, Bush 2, Obama and Trump. I will pray for Biden and Harris as well.

As a Christian man, I wish I could apologize to Kamala Harris on behalf of all the rude Christians who missed their chance to show Christ's love in this situation. I'm embarrassed that Christian leaders have used their pulpits to throw daggers at politicians. It's offensive, mean-spirited, carnal and immature. Hateful rhetoric also slams the door on the possibility of civil conversations with the people we attack.

To go farther, I'll take this moment to apologize to all women everywhere who have been labeled "Jezebel" by another Christian. Please forgive us for our chauvinism and lack of godly character. Real men aren't intimidated by strong women; in fact, we celebrate them and empower them.

Once during a conference I attended in Colorado, a popular female Bible teacher was introduced as the morning speaker. I was eager to take notes on her message. Then I overheard two male leaders who were sitting in front of me. They turned to each other and prayed: "We bind the power of Jezebel in the name of Jesus." These men viewed this godly woman as a witch

because they had no room in their theology for a female minister.

Pinning the Jezebel label on a woman of God is a blatant attempt at character assassination. After all, Jezebel was the personification of evil. We read in 1 Kings 18-19 that she wielded tyrannical power over Israel through her allegiance to the cult of Baal. Through her manipulation and demonic power she was responsible for killing many of Israel's prophets.

It's offensive to suggest that a woman who loves Christ bears any similarity to this pagan priestess. Women I know who are preachers, missionaries and senior leaders have had to endure all kinds of rejection and criticism; they don't need more bullying from Christians.

Harris is not a preacher, but she does claim to have religious faith. (She says she grew up Baptist; her husband, Doug Emhoff, is the first Jew to be married to an American president or vice president.) If you don't agree with Harris' politics, you have the right to disagree with her and vote against her. But as a Christian, you also have the responsibility to show her human dignity and God's love.

The apostle Peter wrote: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution ... Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13,17). Pray for Harris. Ask God to change her heart on the issues that are important to God.

But if you throw nasty comments at her, especially in a public forum, you are not only revealing your own immaturity—you are making the entire Christian community look hateful. Please stop it. {eoa}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.