

7 Demons That Attack the Church

Find out how to recognize and defeat the seven demons that attack the church.

When we begin to look at the seven churches described in the Book of Revelation, we discover specific demonic strongholds that can be found at church. Let's take a look at these spirits.

Spirit of Religion (Revelation 2:4–5, 7)

The church at Ephesus had “left their first love” (Rev. 2:4). They were doctrinally sound and had everything in order but they had lost their passion for God. When you turn to Acts 19 to look at “first works” and “first love” you discover an astounding truth.

At the birth of the Ephesian church they were baptizing in water, laying hands on the people for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, magnifying God in tongues, casting out demons, healing with prayer cloths, and being evicted from the old order.

The church at Ephesus had every element of church life in order and they were a hard working congregation. Yet the fire, the passion, the love had gone out of it. We see now that religion had taken over with its dull duty and tired traditionalism. The power of God was missing; demons were no longer leaving, tongues were absent, miracles were simply a memory. A loveless routine of religious works had replaced the power and passion of the Holy Spirit.

Who can deny the present reality of this deadening demon of religion? Many churches like Samson have been shorn of their power by the Delilah's of religion! Now blind to spiritual things, we grind out our religious activities and traditions with no transforming power. This demon must be exposed and expelled.

Spirit of Intimidation (Revelation 2:10–11)

The church at Smyrna endured persecution, and many members suffered martyrdom. With this threat, Satan tries to strike fear in the hearts of believers by sending intimidation to frighten us away from faithfulness to God and His Word. Remember Simon Peter warming himself by the enemy's fire on the night of Jesus' arrest? This faithful disciple was intimidated by his surroundings and the questioning voice of a little servant girl. Today the church is silent and cowed down before the world and its governments. This demon must be cast down!

Spirit of Compromise (Revelation 2:12, 14–17)

Pergamos was the capital city of the province of Asia mentioned in Revelation as one of the seven churches of Asia. It was a celebrated city of Mysia in the Caicus valley, 15 miles from the Aegean Sea about 60 miles north of Smyrna. The river Selinus flowed through it and the river Caicus ran just south of it. This city was rich in historical and literary heritage with a library which boasted well over 200,000 volumes, topped only by the library in Alexandria.

The city had a "pet" god in Asklepion, an idol symbolized by a snake who called himself a savior. They believed that their god incarnated into the area snakes, so serpents were allowed to slither freely around the temple. Those who desired healing spent the night in the darkness of the temple, hoping a snake would crawl over them. The city was an outpost to Greek civilization and was home to the temples of many other

deities.

Can you see the parallels of the secular plight in America and its churches? Most churches operate in a community or environment that is controlled by Satan rather than God. What can a church do when ministry becomes difficult? Can we allow the snakes of secular humanism to slither through our congregations? Compromise is not the answer. We cannot become comfortable with the sin around us!

The church of Jesus must take active steps to stand strong in our lost and dying world!

We must recognize the conflict. Jesus pointed out that the city was the church's dwelling place or permanent residence. To flee was not an option. Instead, He advised them to settle into service and draw the battle lines. Paul recognized the need for battle-readiness when he penned Ephesians 6. The armor of God is needed in the middle of war. Most of all, the church must go forward under the name and banner of Jesus, never operating in their own strength, for in the flesh the enemy could find weakness.

We must repent of compromise. The church at Pergamos had some weaknesses to be dealt with. There were doctrinal problems along with problems with some of their deacons and leadership. One in particular is mentioned, Nicholas, who began teaching heresy, and leading others into sin. How sad when a leader goes bad and quits truly serving the Lord! Often times they lead others astray and take others with them. Yet another conflict in the Pergamos church was a discipline problem. They tolerated the mess they were in by overlooking the sin in their own camp. Jesus called them to repentance. Another problem that arose was the spirit of Balaam. To give you some history of this, Balak, the pagan king, literally bought the prophet Balaam's ministry. Balak eventually sent women to seduce the men of Israel, thus bringing judgment upon them. It was Balaam that sold out the people of God. In keeping the

spirit of Balaam, too often today, money has become the goal and prize of many in the church. Popular preaching has replaced prophetic preaching. Image has replaced anointing and the church is reduced to no more than a place where pop psychology tickles the ears of its parishioners on Sundays. The image-makers and the politically correct have dulled the sword of the churches and its men of God.

We must rely on Christ. The Pergamos church needed to rely on their Savior, who provided the weapon of the sword of the Spirit, His own word. This is the weapon we claim as Christians. The popular “Star Wars” phenomenon has had two generations of children captured in imaginative play with light sabers, defending the galaxy as Jedi Knights! The movies show the young Jedi apprentice was carefully taught to use his weapon, to guard it, to perfect its use. In the same way, we must cling to the Word of God as our weapon—it has a power that is supernatural and effective against the onslaughts of Satan. Our weapons are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4) but mighty in God, and Satan can be defeated by the power of the Word.

Overcomers are promised gifts. Jesus promised this church that those who didn’t succumb to the sins around them—not eating things offered to idols and partaking in sin—these faithful would eat hidden manna, the blessing of Jesus Himself. They are promised the presence of Jesus in the barren wasteland of the world’s wilderness. He also promised this church that He would set a white stone, promising acquittal, acceptance, and acclaim. The new name upon this stone was Jesus!

Spirit of Jezebel (Control) (Revelation 2:18-20, 26)

A war goes on in today’s church, and the battle lines are drawn. One of the most powerful spirits at work in this ongoing battle is the spirit of Jezebel or control. First Kings tells the story of the woman for whom this spirit is named.

Known as the wife of King Ahab and a follower of the false god Baal, the scriptures regarded Ahab's marriage to this woman as a horrible sin: "He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him" (1 Kings 16:31, niv).

Jezebel ordered a "hit" on the innocent man Naboth so that she could obtain his prize vineyard. Not only was this murder, but it broke God's land covenant with His people. In addition to her disrespect for ordinary people and their property, she hated the prophets of God. Scripture says, "While Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water." (1 Kings 18:4, NIV)

Later, Jezebel pursued the prophet Elijah following the great contest where God sent fire from heaven and defeated the prophets of Baal. Her relentless pursuit drove the prophet into depression and suicidal thoughts.

Jezebel's character was wicked, controlling, sexually immoral, murderous, and demonic! It is astounding that the same strong spirit was still operating in Revelation 2:20 and still operates in today's church. In every congregation we find those who want to control, manipulate, and subvert the men and women of God.

Recognizing the spirit

This spirit is basically the spirit of domination or an unwillingness to cohabit peacefully. This is not about women or liberation, for this spirit can attach itself to a man or a woman. Many may think that this spirit is identified with sexuality, believing that a woman who looks a certain way is a "Jezebel" in her character. But this is not so. A wolf can easily hide in sheep's clothing.

When you find a spirit of Jezebel operating, you will also

find an “Ahab” nearby, or someone in leadership who is allowing the spirit access and control.

The strategy of Jezebel

The tool this spirit uses is manipulation. In 1 Kings 21, we learn that King Ahab would pout when he did not get his own way. He had seen a vineyard that he greatly desired, but the owner would not give up his precious property, even to the king. As King Ahab lay on his bed sulking, Jezebel assured him she would get him what he wanted. This powerful woman had introduced pagan worship into her kingdom, and now she was not below killing to obtain the things she needed to gain more power.

The seat of Jezebel

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.

—Revelation 2:20

When the spirit of Jezebel begins to manifest in the church, it seeks a high seat in the church or a place of dominance. Usually it will manifest in someone who wants to teach or lead, usually leading them astray! To find that place of leadership, Jezebel must look and act in a spiritual manner.

One of these spirits operated in Moses and Aaron’s day. Numbers 16 tells us, “Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation

is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?'” (Num. 16:1–3).

Korah was operating in the spirit of Jezebel, with Dathan and Abiram operating as his power core, and 250 other princes as a structure under them. Moses took immediate action—he fell on his face before God and prayed. Following his prayer, he confronted the spirit, saying, “Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?” (Num. 16:9–10).

Judgment came to this Jezebel spirit—an earthquake came and took the three evil leaders and fire consumed all the rest.

Jezebel's targets

The controlling spirit wiggles into the church, bent on destroying and undermining the very things that we hold dear as believers. Through manipulation, domination, and control, the spirit begins its battle against the body of Christ.

First, this spirit hates the prophets, the true leaders of God. She cannot control them, and when she tries to win their approval and fails, she will stop at nothing to try and kill them.

In addition, the spirit of Jezebel hates the preaching of the Word. She can't cope with its message. She will try to either reduce the messenger or the message.

The controlling spirit also hates the praise of the church. During times of true, powerful worship, her carnality is exposed. In 1 Kings when the prophet Elijah prayed fire down from heaven against the prophets of Baal and Jezebel's

schemes, praise broke out (1 Kings 18:39). Jezebel had lost, and the praises of God filled the air.

A Jezebel spirit also hates the preeminence of Christ. There is no way to compete against it. The first time “preeminence” is mentioned is in Colossians 1:18: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (kjb). However, the second time we find the word, a Jezebel spirit is attempting to control a body of believers. “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not” (3 John 1:9, kjb).

Banish the spirit

If you sense this spirit is at work in your church, it is important to see the enemy as spiritual, not fleshly. Don't hate the person being controlled by the spirit of Jezebel, recognize that it is a spiritual power—one that God must fight. Let your prayer be, “O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12).

Spirit of Traditionalism (Revelation 3:1–6)

For centuries the church has been the victim of rumors, hostility, and, what we call in this day and age, negative press. Churches often have to survive this hostile environment; however, outward hostility is not the greatest threat to a local church! Very often the greatest danger comes from within!

The Sardis church lived in a favorable environment with a great reputation. However, in Christ's letter to this church, He ignored their human reputation and told this church they were listed in the obituary!

Environment of death

The city of Sardis was a city of wealth. History tells us that in 550 b.c., King Croesus found gold in the city's river and issued the first gold coins in history! Even in New Testament times, gold could be found all along its rivers.

In addition to its wealth, the city was known for its paganism. The favored idol was Cybele, and worshippers of this pagan god participated in wild, frenzied worship that included sexual immorality.

Remarkably, the community was at peace, for the inhabitants were comfortable in their self-sufficiency. This peaceful self-sufficiency had also invaded the church in Sardis; it became the peace of death. A peaceful coexistence with the city and its wickedness had settled into the church and all they had left was their reputation.

Evidence of a church's death

Viewers of our television broadcast often write and ask, "How can I find a good church in my area? How can I tell if a church is alive and healthy?" A dead church has some basic characteristics that are spotted easily.

Ignores the Holy Spirit. When the complete work of God's Spirit isn't embraced in a church, that body is already headed for the grave. Jesus told the church at Sardis that they had a spirit of religion and didn't have the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit will not be managed or controlled by religious tradition or preferences! John 3:8 says, "The wind blows where it wills...so is every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Lack of godly leadership. The "seven stars" mentioned in Revelation 3 stands for the messengers or pastors of the seven churches addressed in the letters. What the church in Sardis needed was a leader who was called by God and served Him whole-heartedly. Too many churches today fail to get God's man. Several times a month our church offices receive requests

from pastor-less churches that have been searching for a replacement. If these churches choose a pastor by his reputation, resume, physical appearance, or even recommendation, they may find later that they've made a big mistake. As important as background information is, the fruit issued in a pastor's life and his walk with the Spirit of God is what should be investigated. The superficial doesn't matter as much as the supernatural. Hiring solely on superficial facts may result in a short-tenured, flash in the pan, or morally bankrupt leader.

Reputation over reality. Sardis was a busy, working church with a good name—but it had death upon it. They were an organization, but not a living organism. Sadly, they were so caught up in their reputation they didn't even realize that they had died. One winter night I noticed our house becoming colder and colder, even though I had turned our heat on full power. I called upon our faithful church grounds supervisor to take a look at the gas-heating unit, and he discovered the pilot light had gone out. The blower was blowing, but the fire was out. Going to church is good, if you meet God. Worship is good if it brings on God's presence. Giving is good if we have first given ourselves. Prayer is good, but "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us." Form without force is death to a church. It is like a store window containing lots of fluff and finery, but hiding an empty stockroom.

Growth in numbers without growth in people. The letter to Sardis indicated that even Christians who had life in the Sardis church were dying in the cold environment. Churches must offer ministry that encourages its members to grow in the Lord.

Ministry and work incomplete. Beginning a new program or outreach is easy; seeing it to completion is much more difficult! A dead church is a graveyard of partially fulfilled goals and half-baked programs. These skeletons are evidence

that they went “partway” with the Lord and then backed up and sat down. A church that goes backward is doomed to death.

Escape from death! To eliminate the spirit of religion from your church, the leadership should gather and repent of religious death. Together they should acknowledge that Jesus’ kingdom is coming, and there will be an accounting for what they accomplish in His name. In almost any dead church, there are a handful of believers who do live in triumph and desire to be alive in God. This team of people should be lifted up and encouraged. Stay with the winning crowd! Finally, rebuke the religious pride that strangles your church. Reject the love of religion and its rules and reputation, and fall in love with Jesus. Determine to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in all decision-making regarding the church, and let His Word edify, rule, and reign from the pulpit.

Spirit of Inferiority (Revelation 3:7–8, 12)

Many times a pastor will contact me about a speaking engagement at a church, and he will begin by saying almost apologetically, “We are just a small church...” His tone implied a sense of weakness or inability. But there is nothing “little” or “insignificant” in the kingdom of God!

At the other end of the spectrum is the church that thinks they have all the answers, who loves to proclaim their statistics and numbers but are satisfied with mediocre efforts as long as they bring the church notoriety and recognition.

God deals strongly with the church in Revelation 3: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the

New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name" (Rev. 3:10–12).

Too many churches and individuals use their supposed weakness as an excuse for failing to advance the cause of Christ. Such notions and statements are foreign to the New Testament portrait of the church. I am convinced that such an attitude is not only false and hurtful but also demonic in its origin. There is a stronghold of inferiority, self-pity, and weakness. The enemy deceives those manifesting this spirit by making them think their attitudes are actually meekness and humility. This counterfeit humility is debilitating to the kingdom of God, crippling the advance of the gospel, and it insults the Holy Spirit.

The church at Philadelphia was at risk to be overtaken by such a spirit. If they were ever to become a "pillar" in the kingdom, they would have to overcome the spirit.

The scripture sets forth the church as a victorious company. Matthew 16:18 declares, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In his great prayer for the church in Ephesians 3:14–21, Paul ends with this benediction, "Now to Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages" (Eph. 3:20–21).

It is "in the church" that Jesus looses His divine ability, energy, and glory. The answer to our inferiority is His superiority! It is not in trying harder, but in trusting wholly that His work is accomplished.

The church at Philadelphia had "a little strength" (Rev. 3:8). Greek culture, international commerce, and religious diversity dominated them. The pagan goddess Dionysus was worshiped. This ancient Greek god of wine was credited with inspiring ritual madness and ecstasy. Worship of Dionysus was thought to bring

an end to care and worry. The city was also a center of orthodox Jewish worship.

This small church could have surrendered to the pressures around them. Yet they did not! They received the wonderful encouragement in Revelation, and history tells us that for nearly 1400 years, this city stood as a Christian city in the face of Muslim pressure. It was only after centuries of courageous resistance that the city was overthrown by an unholy military alliance of Byzantine and Muslim forces.

How did this church overcome inferiority and have a ministry that would last for 1400 years? They came to know the Lord of Opportunity (Rev. 3:7–8). Obedience always leads to opportunity! God promised this church the “key of David.” With God’s favor and their dependence upon His superiority, nothing could stop this body of believers!

Spirit of Pride (Revelation 3:14–17, 21)

Revelation 3 also issues a charge to the church at Laodicea. This city was a wealthy and prosperous one. So vast was their wealth that when an earthquake destroyed the city, they required no outside help to recover! Tacitus, the Roman historian, recorded, “Laodicea arose from the ruins by the strength of its own resources.”

The city was famous for the dark, black wool they produced and was known as the center for fine wool in the ancient world. Laodicea also boasted a famous medical school, having produced two of the most popular medicines for treatment of eye and ear maladies. In short, this city was pompous and full of pride.

But here in Revelation 3, years have passed and now the church in Laodicea has fallen into a rut of mediocrity. The Lord Jesus Himself renders the verdict on this church. What was His appraisal? This lukewarm church was nauseating Him! What had happened to this church to make it slide into a state of mediocrity?

Lost fervency

Sadly, this church reflects the state of many American churches today. Not too cold...not too hot. Not too bad...not too good. Not too faithful...not too unfaithful. The Laodicea church was an ordinary church that had warmth but no fire. If asked about their work, they would say, "We are holding our own."

Jesus is sickened by the mediocre. He would rather a church be as cold as the Arctic or as hot as the Sahara. In God's work, there should be no place for "just getting by."

Elijah recognized this need for commitment when he challenged Israel at the contest of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. He shouted to the congregation, "If Baal be God, serve him, but if the Lord be God, serve Him!" Standing in the middle was not an option.

A complacent church is a disappointment to Jesus! Laodicea had lost the fire of love for Jesus and for lost souls. The altar fires of prayer were in need of rekindling. It was business as usual week after week. They needed to pray!

The great hymn by Gene Bartlett should be the earnest prayer of the church needing a fresh fervency:

O for a passion for souls, dear Lord!

O for a pity that yearns!

O for a love that loves unto death!

O for a fire that burns!

Lost faith

The Laodicean church had tried to become self-sufficient. They boasted of wealth, increase of goods, and that they needed

nothing, not even the Lord. They were cursed by their wealth.

When the great Thomas Aquinas visited the Vatican, the Pope escorted him through the vast corridors and vaults adorned with jewels and gold. The Pope commented, "No longer do we say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Aquinas replied, "Neither do you say, 'In the name of Jesus, Rise and walk!'"

A church's reach must exceed its grasp. An ever-enlarging vision must be forged. The challenges we take should be beyond our resources, so that our reliance and faith remains upon God. Our dreams and our plans should be God-sized.

When God blesses financially, the church should give more to missions, build a needed building, add another staff member, and have the faith to stretch those resources to their limit.

Unfortunately, the Laodicean church did not really see their true condition. God said they were "wretched, poor, blind, naked"—they were pitiful in the sight of God. They were without riches and spiritually blind in God's eyes. He looked at them and saw them as they really were: spiritually bankrupt.

Lost fear

This church no longer trembled in the presence of a righteous God. There was no remorse recorded for their failures. Jesus warns them by giving three motives to repent: His love, His rebuke, and His chastening rod. These three things could provide the motivation to set this church on the right track.

Lost fellowship

Jesus was standing and knocking outside the door of this church. At one point, He had been shut out; He was no longer the center of things. The church had no basis for fellowship with other churches because Jesus Christ was the only common ground among the fellowship of churches. Without Him, a church

can have a “get together” without really being together in unity! “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

The presence of Jesus Christ is the ground of all true fellowship, but too many churches have shut Him out.

God’s Promise and Plea

Jesus keeps on knocking, hoping that someone in the church will open the door. When that happens, it sets the stage for revival and fellowship can be restored. A seat at the Lord’s table is promised when we welcome Him at ours. We can share in His glorious reign! So, let us blaze and burn for Him until He comes in the blaze of His glory.

Ron Phillips *is pastor of Abba’s House in Hixson, Tenn., and author of Everyone’s Guide to Demons and Spiritual Warfare.*