

Competition in Ministry

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**Taken from Sharon's book:
*Building an Effective Women's Ministry***

It was a phone call that took me completely off guard. A friend had read an article about a home-based business in the newsletter of a ministry I was a part of.

"I can't believe you would print an article in your newsletter by and about that woman who has the same business I have," the caller complained. "You know good and well she's my competition! We do the same type of training and now you've given her free advertising by publishing her article."

"Claire," I responded, "Our ministry is not about competing or promoting one person over another. I have written a book on parenting and marriage, but we still offer other authors' books on both. We aren't about competition. We're helping women develop an intimate relationship with the Jesus Christ and building strong families."

"Well, I can't believe you would print something by my competition. I'm withdrawing all financial support to your ministry. I think I need to give my money elsewhere."

Click.

My husband, sitting within earshot in the next room called out, “What was that all about?”

“You don’t even want to know,” I sighed.

It was not my first brush with anger and frustration competition can bring out in people, and as long as God continues to use imperfect people to be His hands and feet, it would not be my last.

Competition is older than the Garden of Eden. Satan’s very downfall was ignited by his burning passion to surpass and capture God’s position. The prophet Isaiah described, “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn? You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven...I will make myself like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12-14). But instead of becoming like the Most High, he lost his position as “anointed cherub” and was “thrown out of heaven.” Then he proceeded to sow seeds of competition and jealousy into the hearts and minds of men and women throughout the earth.

Satan started with Eve in the garden by tempting her to compete with God’s wisdom. “When you eat of it (the forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Then he moved on to her son, Cain. God saw the rivalry Cain felt toward his brother Abel and warned Cain about the seed of jealousy that was taking root in his heart. He cautioned Cain, “Sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” Cain didn’t master it, but it mastered him. His jealousy and competitive spirit led him to kill his brother, Able, and leave him dead in a field.

Competition among Christians in ministry is much like the lion crouching at the door. We have a choice to let it in and allow it to master us, or we can grab the whip and tame it into submission. Jesus also dealt with competition among his disciples. One day He

walked in while they were arguing about who was the greatest. When Jesus asked what they were discussing, they hung their heads and quieted their quarrel. He met their silent reply with, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, the servant of all” (Mark 9:33). Later, Jesus showed them a portrait of servant leadership as He placed a towel around his waist, filled a basin with water, and knelt to wash and dry their dusty feet (John 13:1-5).

Paul addressed competition in the early church with strong words.

Brother, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? What, after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:1-7 emphasis added).

In contrast to the phone call I mentioned earlier, I received an e-mail that showed the power of various ministries working in tandem. Sylvia wrote to thank me for one of my books her husband had picked up at a Promise Keepers event. In the book, I recommended the late Larry Burkett’s Crown Financial Ministry to those seeking to change their spending habits and develop a budget. Sylvia wrote to say that she and her husband had contacted Crown, implemented their principles, cut living expenses, and established a lifestyle that allowed them to fulfill one of their hearts’ desires – spend more time with their children. What a joy to see how three ministries dovetailed to affect

one family. One planted; one watered; and God gave the increase. So where does competition fit in the Body of Christ? I think when unhealthy competition is staring at us in the mirror; we need to ask a few tough questions.

Why are we in ministry? Whom are we competing against? What do we hope to gain by competing? Is God limited in His blessings that He can only bless a few?

Whether you are plowing the field, scattering the seed, or holding the watering can, Paul leaves us with some wonderful advice. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23:24).