

Women in Ministry: Why Such a Controversial Topic?

Christian blogger Frank Viola interviewed *Charisma* news editor, Jennifer LeClaire, recently about the women's roles in the body of Christ.

Viola: Tell us a little about yourself, your ministry and your work with *Charisma*.

LeClaire: I'm a single mother of a teenage girl, which gives me plenty to pray about! I live in South Florida and direct the International House of Prayer in Fort Lauderdale. I'm frequently on radio and television discussing issues impacting the **church** and society, and, of course, many people know me from my books, like *The Spiritual Warrior's Guide to Defeating Jezebel* or *Faith Magnified*, which was featured on Sid Roth's *It's Supernatural* earlier this year.

Of course, my day-in-and-day-out ministry is with *Charisma* magazine. I'm the news editor and online managing editor there and I have a couple of columns: The Plumb Line and Watchman on the Wall. Writing those columns is my favorite part of the job, but I also curate our news and oversee the content on many of our other branded channels, from Health to Standing With Israel to Spirit Led Woman and beyond.

Working at *Charisma* is part of what God has called me to do. When I first got saved, I was a professional journalist. I remember scouring through Christian magazines looking for opportunities to use my gift to serve the Kingdom in some way. Within a couple of years I got my first freelance assignment with *Charisma*. I have since written Christian books, ghostwritten material, produced documentaries and other projects that bring me great satisfaction. God is good!

Viola: What are the main reasons why traditional religion is threatened by women in ministry?

LeClaire: That's a good question and although I don't have all the answers, I did tackle the topic in a column called "Why Traditional Religion Is Threatened by Women in Ministry." The article caused quite a stir when it originally ran on *Charisma* magazine. Although we see powerful examples of women in ministry, including Deborah and Anna the prophetess, some denominations in the body of Christ are dead set against allowing women to do anything more than take care of kids or clean the church. I don't believe that's scriptural and I attribute it to a traditional religious mindset that values men over women—and sometimes even works to oppress women.

Look at Aimee Semple McPherson. What about Kathryn Kuhlman? How about Marilyn Hickey and Joyce Meyer? All of these women have been a blessing to the body of Christ, and they have all faced persecution from traditional religion. Traditional religion, for example, often falsely labels strong women as "Jezebels." Jesus certainly didn't prevent women from entering ministry so I am unsure as to why there is so much resistance in some camps within the modern church—other than religion, and not the pure and undefiled type James talks about.

If God can use a donkey to minister to a prophet, can't he use a woman to minister to a man? I am not saying that women are equal in every aspect to men. Both sexes have strengths and weaknesses. There are Scriptures that suggest the man is the head but those Scriptures don't intend to cut the women out of the body or relegate females to the janitor's closet to clean up after the men and children. Traditional religion wants **power**—the religious Pharisees in Jesus' day wanted power and control—and oppressing women seems to be a means to satisfy that craving for power. I believe this gender bias grieves the Holy Spirit.

Viola: In your opinion, what unique contributions do women

offer to the Kingdom and the body of Christ that men do not?

LeClaire: Generally speaking, women clearly have a nurturing side and flow in compassion. Women think differently than men and can add new perspectives to challenges facing people, churches and ministries. Beyond that, I believe women are suited for nearly any ministry in the church—except tasks such as leading the men’s ministry because it’s all about the guys. I think male senior pastors are more natural from the perspective of God’s government, but that doesn’t mean God would never call a woman to start a church.

Women shouldn’t be relegated to the nursery or to prayer, although they are suited for these **ministries**. Women don’t come to church to mirror what they do on the home front any more than men come to church to mirror what they do on the job. The Holy Spirit should ultimately direct who is assigned to what ministry, just as He did in the Book of Acts. This comes through **prayer** and **fasting**.

Viola: In Charismatic circles, the term “Jezebel” is often used in a derogatory way. What does the word mean exactly when used in this negative context?

LeClaire: Again, although **Jezebel** wields weapons of control and manipulation, Jezebel is *not* the spirit of control. Jezebel is essentially the **spirit of seduction**. Jesus spoke clearly: “Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NIV). So while the church is working to shun assertive women and sew an imaginary scarlet letter on the blouses of women with overbearing personalities, we are allowing the real principality to have its way in the pulpit and the pews. We are tolerating that woman Jezebel. We are violating **Scripture**.

Again, Jezebel is not merely a woman (or even a man) in the

local church with an overbearing personality or immature character. Jezebel's influence runs much deeper than a desire to make someone a mouthpiece or puppet, or control the worship song list, or intimidate people who aren't in their inner circle in order to guard their position of leadership. Let's be real. Some people just need to read *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and they'd be fine. In other words, some saints just need good old-fashioned people skills.

Viola: What would you like both Christian men and women to know about the issue of women in ministry?

LeClaire: I would like to end the heated debate over women in ministry. There are plenty of examples in Scripture of women serving in **leadership** or other key roles for men to deny women a seat at the leadership table. That said, I'm not calling for affirmative action here. Church roles should be assigned by the Holy Spirit. That means leadership needs to pray and fast without preconceived notions—and without bias toward women—before they appoint people to positions.

Paul wrote, "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same[a] Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:7-11, NKJV).

Paul didn't say women can't operate in **spiritual gifts** and I don't believe Paul intended for women to be denied opportunities to serve in various ministries, even leadership positions, within the church. I think locking women out of ministry can actually work against God at times. God is the one who calls people into ministry—men and women. If we were

all obedient to the Holy Spirit in this matter, there would be much less strife and much more effectiveness in ministry for the glory of God.

Frank Viola *is a speaker, entrepreneur, author and writer of the blog, Beyond Evangelical.*