

The Authority of the Worship Leader

By Don Potter

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I have been asked by praise leaders and musicians from various churches how they might obtain more freedom in their congregational praise times. "More freedom" usually means playing music longer, playing what they feel should be played, prophesying with song, or playing instrumentally when led by the Spirit, etc. This is a good question because we are told in II Corinthians that, "*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (3:17 NAS).

If we want the Holy Spirit to be in our worship services, there must be liberty, but all true liberty has boundaries and is gained by our becoming mature and responsible enough to use it rightly. I want to address this issue by telling a story. When I first came to a MorningStar prophetic conference, Leonard Jones, one of the worship leaders, asked me to lead worship at a session. I had just met Leonard and this was only the third time I had been with Rick Joyner. Just before the session started, Rick came to the band and said firmly, "Worship is 30 minutes, not 31." It grew really quiet for a few minutes as some of the musicians hung their heads, embarrassed and wondering what I was thinking as a newcomer. I was a little relieved at first because I knew the band had only rehearsed two of my songs. However, something began to rise up in me, and I was familiar with the feeling. It was pride. It would take many pages to explain how the Lord had been dealing with me concerning authority and submission.

As a professional musician, I had risen to the position where I had free rein to play whatever I wanted, as long as it made money. I was also receiving a fair amount of accolades for it. Even in my home church where I led praise and worship, I was encouraged by the pastor to follow the Spirit as best as I could. After all those "atta-boys," I was now faced with someone who was not impressed with my past. I bit my tongue and didn't say the prideful things I was thinking. I didn't realize that the Lord was testing me once more, and I was about to fail again if I couldn't get my heart right.

From Rick's experiences with worship bands, he knew musicians would sometimes play with the greatest of intention and the highest desire to walk in the Spirit, but the lowest level of sensitivity. They would often exhaust the congregation, frequently with less than average musicianship. He felt that the teaching of the Word was the most important thing at this specific conference, which was devoted to teaching those who came to know the Lord's voice. At the time, I had come to believe that real music was not for the church anyway, so I agreed to the 30 minutes.

As we started, I was hoping in my heart that the Holy Spirit would come in a powerful way. My reasoning behind that was to prove Rick wrong about musicians not being

aware of overusing the congregation. This could be called "manipulating the Holy Spirit to do your own will." The Spirit did move in a strong way in that session, but I stopped, out of spite, right at 30 minutes. Some of the guest speakers that were there later said they were just about to get a word from the Lord when we stopped. Another said he was getting a great vision and was about to say something when the music stopped, along with the vision. Quenching the Spirit was not my intention, and it was not Rick's, but I was being tested to see if I would obey the authorities over me, even when the Spirit was moving.

In this case, however, obeying the authority was really an act of rebellion on my part. Later, the Lord showed me that I was working for myself and not for the ultimate purposes of God. Proving I was right became the idol and not the will of God. The best case would have been for me to agree to the 30 minutes and earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to complete His work in that time frame. The Spirit is not as easily quenched as we think He is, and He certainly won't leave us when there is honest zeal to follow Him. To believe that a God-placed authority was unable to hear from the Spirit as well as I revealed my arrogance, unbelief and rebellion.

Pride

I found that the root cause of the struggle between preachers and musicians is pride which leads to selfish ambition and self promotion. That pride is not only on the side of the musician. If it is not addressed and repented of, there will be little unity in the leadership of that church. Self-promotion makes self an idol. God dealt with this idol when it got into the Levites who ministered before Him (see Ezekiel 44:10-14). When praise leaders are in front of people, they can often believe that they have something to do with the anointing that is flowing, not realizing that the Spirit is not limited by our weakness any more than He is enhanced by our strength. Faith and an earnest desire to praise are what the anointing moves on. There are times when we cannot see clearly in the Spirit from the stage. There can sometimes be a vast difference between what the Spirit feels like from the stage compared to what the pastor is feeling from the congregational perspective.

I have known times when I felt nothing was happening in the Spirit during praise, and the pastor would say it was the best time they had experienced in worship. I have also known times when, in my opinion, the anointing was great, but discovered afterward that the leadership felt as though we were "cheerleading" and not praise leading at all. Pride is the only thing that will keep a worship leader from receiving that kind of input. Pastors are not necessarily known for making good musical decisions, but we must try to hear what they are really saying when they have some criticisms. Most of the time, they will be accurate concerning the spirit of the matter.

Obeying Authority

Hebrews 13:17 states, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy,

and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The word "obey" at the beginning of this verse means, "to be persuaded or confident, to be free from fear or doubt" (Strongs). When we obey those who have authority over us, it brings confidence and freedom from fear. If you are experiencing fear or doubt about how the leadership feels toward you, then you may be in disobedience about something. The confidence that obedience brings will calm both you and the leadership. This peace is what it will take to assure a pastor that he can encourage a praise leader to move in spiritual freedom.

Keep in mind that if the praise we are leading is truly anointed, the leadership will recognize it (even if it takes a long time) and do what they feel the Lord is telling them. If they don't realize our greatness right away, maybe we're not as great as we think, and even if it is a lack of sensitivity on their part, we must trust the Lord to build His church and discipline His leadership if they need it. Meanwhile, we must not miss our opportunity to grow in humility, for God gives His grace to the humble. If we are growing more humble, God will give us even more of His grace, and sooner or later, everyone will recognize that grace.

Leadership

I Peter 5:2-3 says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock". This verse says that leadership needs to feed the flock without constraining them for the purposes of sordid gain or shaming them into obedience. It also says for them to be an "example" which means to be a model of something, a style or resemblance of what you want someone else to be. In other words, a leader must be an example of what he is preaching. There can be no double message in leadership. If you are a leader and desire for yourself to be raised up in the church, you cannot expect the praise leader to act any differently. Remember, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness, while Satan led Him to the pinnacle of the church (Matthew 4:1, 5).

Control

Sometimes a praise leader will feel like it's a good idea to get the people to enter into the Spirit by a little nudge in the natural. This is called "cheerleading" in some circles. I like to call it "control". Controlling the reaction of others while ministering is a hard habit to break. Every time we get up in front of someone else, we are teaching, either by word or by example. The word teach means "to flow as water (i.e., to rain); transitively, to lay or throw (especially an arrow, i.e., to shoot); figuratively, to point out (as if by aiming the finger)". There is nothing in this definition that says we are to control how others receive what we are doing or saying.

We cannot control how someone receives what we are doing and still try to walk in the Spirit. Controlling others and following the Spirit are opposites. Again, the anointing will break the yoke that is holding the people back in the Spirit. If the congregation is consistently not moving in the Spirit then the anointing is not yet strong enough. The only

time I see control used in conjunction with authority in the Bible is in Matthew 20:20-21 and 24-25: *"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.*

The mother of Zebedee's children came to Jesus worshipping, but she had an ulterior motive. How many times have we done that? She wanted her children to have the kind of authority that the Romans had over Israel--controlling authority. She believed that authority was something won by force and when it was obtained, others could be controlled. That is man's way of gaining authority, not God's. Jesus has authority over me because He defeated my enemies of sin and death at the cross. My submission to that authority is a result of love and gratitude and complete acceptance of His Lordship. Jesus did not force me into salvation, but drew me to Himself. Any authority that uses control or fear to hold you, even in the church, is worldly, and not of God.

Spiritual Authority

You cannot assume a place of spiritual authority without God. If the Lord has given you spiritual authority, then it will be recognized. If He has not given it, then you may find yourself trying to act like you have it or just assuming the role of an authority as did the Pharisees. As stated in Luke 16:15: *And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."*

The word translated "justify" here mean "to render righteous, to show, such as he is and wishes himself to be considered". This verse says that they put on a show of being righteous before men. Do you find yourself putting on a show of worship when you get on the stage to lead or play in the band? Do you find yourself trying to meet an expectation of looking like you're filled with praises? This is a hard thing to face, and the conviction of it can only come from the Holy Spirit. Ask Him, and He will show you.

The words "highly esteemed" in this text mean "to set the mind on, to seek, high things (as honors and riches)". The position of leading worship, playing in the band, or singing in the group, is sometimes the most esteemed position in the church. Since the church has become a spectator sport for the most part, it stands to reason that the musicians would be esteemed when they are good. It is not against the Lord to be a good musician; it's against Him to seek esteem for ourselves. This will quench the Spiritual authority He has for us. Spiritual authority is given by God, for the purposes of God, so that those who receive it can do the will of God. There is no other way to reach the spiritual freedom in praise for which we are all praying.