

# Overcoming Resentment: Receiving Praise from God, not Others

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Soon after *Healing the Masculine Soul* helped pioneer the Christian men's movement, I was dismayed as other ministries arose exhorting men to a variety of unattainable performance standards. Painful personal experience had convinced me that most of us today have been crippled by shame from not being able to measure up as men. I knew that telling men what's right to do without facing the wounds that keep us from doing it would not only increase our shame, but ultimately discourage yet another generation of broken men from seeking His healing.

What I didn't know was the power of my own shame to hamstring my witness to that truth.

Wanting to counteract this performance-oriented religion in churches—even as I had suffered it as a boy--I tried to gain entrance to the growing circle of men's ministries. One of the largest invited me to keynote at their opening conference, and I spoke about the debilitating father-wound among men and how Jesus heals it. I was not invited back.

Stung, I became angry and tried harder to be heard and validated. Yet my second men's book, later titled *Sons of the Father*, was scorned by the largest circulating Evangelical magazine. "According to Gordon Dalbey," their book reviewer scoffed, "real men don't need the Ten Commandments." Soon, that book was out of print, and my third men's book *Fight like a Man*—widely regarded as my best--lasted only a year.

Booking fewer events, maxing out credit cards, and losing sleep, I became even more angry, and more determined to be heard. Grasping a stack of appreciative letters from men around the world, I fumed at the Father, "Why don't you get my books back into print and book me more conferences?"

The response was as simple as it was upending: "For your protection."

Humbled, I laid down my fan mail—along with my books and speaking events—at Jesus' feet. The Father was neither impotent nor stingy, but simply wise. Apparently, my ministry was significant enough to His purposes that the enemy had marshaled forces against it. For its effectiveness and my very survival, I would have to trust His timing to walk it out. I asked Him to forgive my pride, thanked Him for enlisting me in His healing work among men—however and whenever--and resolved to stay surrendered to Him in the future.

In order to prepare for that future, I begged Him to "search my heart and find out what wickedness there is within me," (Ps. 139:23,24). At last, I became frustrated not so much at the rejection from other ministries, but at my own compulsion to make them recognize and affirm me—and at my growing bitterness as they turned away from me.

Confused and spent, I went to a prayer partner desperate for revelation—and got it, big time.

"When you want something from somebody," he noted matter-of-factly, "you give that person power over you."

In that moment, I realized that seeking affirmation from other ministries was co-opting my focus and energy. The enemy was baiting me, insinuating that other men were taking power away from me—whereas in fact, I had been giving it away to them.

The pattern, I saw, was dismayingly familiar and rooted far more deeply than my present conflict. Even as I had sought validation from my father as a boy, I had been seeking it from other ministries. Father God, meanwhile, stood waiting for me to trust Him to give me everything I sought from others, and more. Not because I was more correct than them, but simply because I'm His son.

The Law, I realized, is about what we do. Ministry, on the other hand, is about whose we are. And this foundational validation comes only through revelation by Holy Spirit, as we give up on our own work and trust God's.

"Who is a real Jew?" as Paul asked—that is, What defines a real man of God? "A real Jew is not the man whose flesh has been circumcised," he declared. "Rather, a real Jew is a man whose heart has been circumcised, and this is the work of God's Spirit, not of the written Law. Such a man receives his praise from God, not from man" (Rom. 2:28-29).

I remember the day I went into my prayer closet determined to forgive the ministries and individuals who had rejected or ignored me. In prayer, I forgave them. I brought boyhood wounds of abandonment and shame to Jesus for His healing, cast from me related spirits such as unforgiveness, bitterness, immaturity, division, enmity—as well as abandonment and shame—and asked the Holy Spirit to re-occupy that territory in my heart. (see my book *No Small Snakes* for a fuller explanation of this deliverance ministry).

Congratulating myself, I ran triumphantly to tell my wife Mary.

"That's great that you've forgiven them," she smiled graciously. "Now you need to bless them."

Busted, I balked--and went back to my prayer closet to bless those ministries.

The more I began thereafter surrendering my ministry, asking the Father to judge and appropriately refine or bless it, the less I sought recognition from others. As I thereby allowed Holy Spirit to "circumcise" my heart, bitterness was pre-empted by a longing to reveal the Father's heart to lost and broken sons, and an increasing peace as I began trusting Him to do that in me.

Beyond my own fading agendas, I saw simply a generation of men—even myself—blackmailed by shame and longing know the grace of Jesus to live freely. In fact, I recognized that shame—even my own--as the fountainhead of the very performance-oriented religion I fought.

It's one level of faithfulness to recognize harmful teaching; another to respond out of the Father's heart—the only real hope to heal not only the wounded, but ultimately, the wounders as well. True, Christians must hold each other accountable—but only insofar as we balance truth with grace (see John 1:17). In fact, it's entirely possible to become religiously anti-religious. In one case, I had to call another author and apologize for attacking ungraciously his lack of grace!

"We teach best what we need to learn most," as another has said.

At 65, I now believe the Father will hold me accountable primarily not for whether my ministry was widely affirmed or whether I correctly rebuked a brother, but whether I surrendered to Him, listened for His truth, trusted His grace, and wrote/preached what He put on my heart—whether published and recognized or not. The ultimate letting go and trusting the Father here came as one praying brother offered, "Your ministry's greatest impact may come after you're gone."

Jesus, that is, bore our shame on the cross, so we could go to the Father cleansed and open, able to receive His heart and His Spirit to manifest it in this world. Efforts to fabricate righteousness by presuming to follow religious standards co-opt that saving work of Jesus. This short-circuits the Father's call—but what breaks His heart, is a son's or daughter's seeking human validation instead of trusting His.

Sure, you can't isolate yourself and say you're only going to receive approval from God and discount input from others. That's a slippery slope to arrogance and alienation, if not fanaticism and cult-ism. We need to be—and I am--accountable to other, trustworthy Christians and seek their discernment. But it's one thing to seek others' discernment in an effort to open your heart to God, and quite another to seek their approval in order to cover your shame—something Jesus has already done on the cross.

Are you angry and bitter toward others—parent or spouse, boss or colleagues? Do you resent that they don't recognize and affirm you in spite of your many efforts? If so, you want something from them --which they're very likely not capable of giving you. Something, in fact, which your Father God wants to give you Himself.

He may call you to speak a word of truth into your circumstances, but prepare yourself to do it with grace. Don't waste your valuable time and energy stewing as I did. Stop complaining that others don't acknowledge you—when you're giving them power yourself to define you. Instead, give up and grow up. Seek your identity not in others, but in Father God.

Bless the others—even “those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44)--and crucify your agenda. Ask the Father to forgive you for turning to others for the validation only He can give you, and turn back to Him to get it. Let Him heal and deliver you from the wounds and forces that would trap you in resentment and sabotage your destiny. Let Him show you what it means to “receive praise from God,” not from others.

Above all, remember that the Father “has created you for a life of good deeds, which He has already prepared for you to do” (Ephes. 2:8-10)—and go for it as He leads.

Your true Father awaits--and so does true freedom.