

CONFRONTING “GOD’S ANOINTED”

Dr. Richard A. Seymour

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BIBLE STUDY

There is one major principle to apply in studying the Bible. It is *context! context! context!* Without a careful study of the context you might get whatever meaning from a verse or passage you desire. Using verses apart from their surrounding contexts is how cults and sects usually arrive at their twisted interpretations of the Bible.

It is not uncommon for some Christian leaders to resort to isolating verses for the purpose of bolstering a view that would be difficult to support otherwise. This is particularly true when an awkward or wrong interpretation of Scripture provides desired comfort and/or protection to a leader. Such is the case when a pastor, evangelist, Bible teacher, missionary, author, or teacher of God's Word uses the statement “*touch not God's anointed*” to mean no one should question or force accountability upon them because they are specially anointed ones.

They see themselves as being above the kind of accountability they demand from others. Instead, they want exclusive control with unlimited power. They habitually over-emphasize their own importance and their authority. Such men or organizations usually claim the *right* to insist upon total loyalty and agreement from their followers because their “*authority*” is often portrayed as of divine origin. They may promote themselves as “*God's Man,*” or “*God's Church.*”

SHOULD BELIEVERS EVER QUESTION OR CONFRONT THEIR SPIRITUAL LEADERS?

Let's see what Scripture reveals.

Galatians 2:11–14

In this context Paul was the newcomer. His apostleship had not been fully accepted throughout the church body. Peter, on the other hand, was a major recognized leader in the early church. But at one point Peter's behavior was so hypocritical that it brought the gospel into question (v. 14). Paul, seeing this, “*withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed*” (v. 11). In the thinking of some, Peter would have been *the anointed* and Paul would have had no right to question him. Such, however, is not what Scripture records. Whenever anyone presumes to speak for God twists, subverts, or misrepresents God's Word — either by words or by action — that one should be confronted, exposed, and corrected, always in love; at times in firm, bold love.

Notice what John, the apostle of love, recorded:

3 John 9–10 *I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

Who was Diotrephes? Apparently he was the pastor of the local church. In this instance, as with Paul and Peter, it is a case of one leader (anointed one?) confronting another, and rightly so.

There is no reason for any Christian leader to behave in the way that it appears was typical of Diotrephes. Such a leader is obviously so insecure in his dealings with others that domination is the only safe means of maintaining a following. Such an approach to leadership, though, is strictly forbidden by the Lord. Jesus told His own apostles:

Mark 10:42–45 *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

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THE PROPHET NATHAN CONFRONTED THE ANOINTED KING DAVID BECAUSE OF HIS SIN.

Here is part of Nathan's accusation against David:

2 Samuel 12:7 *And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;*

2 Samuel 12:9-10 *Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.*

Acts 7

This chapter records the message that Stephen preached to the high priest (v. 1) and other Jewish “brothers” and “fathers” or leaders (vv. 1–2). Who was this Stephen? He was only a servant in this new movement known as The Way. In the eyes of nearly everyone, the Jewish leaders to whom he was speaking were God's anointed ones, and Stephen was a radical. Yet Stephen, led by God's Spirit, confronted these undisputed leaders of Israel with these words: *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye* (Acts 7:51). Their reaction: *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth* (Acts 7:54), and they killed him (Acts 7:58–60).

Next we consider a number of passages urging ALL believers to judge, discern, confront, and contend with others over important truths and issues.

1 John 4:1 *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

Romans 16:17-18 *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

1 Timothy 5:19–21 *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. 21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.*

In other words, do not show preferential treatment to one because he or she is in a position of Christian leadership. If we would hold the average believer accountable for his behavior or doctrine, we should do the same when facing a leader; even more so in view of **James 3:1**: *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

The Meaning of “Touch not God's Anointed”

To understand the meaning of this phrase there are three areas to consider: God's anointed in the Old Testament, the anointed ones today, and a warped interpretation.

GOD'S ANOINTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In all the following passages we will clearly see the issue was whether to *kill* God's anointed— not whether to *confront* God's anointed. Consider them with me.

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The most familiar passages dealing with this are found in 1 Samuel 24:1–7 and 26:5–11. Both chapters record David having golden opportunities to kill King Saul yet refusing to do so even though he was urged to do it by his own men. In 1 Samuel 24:6 David told his men: *And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.*

Then verse seven of 1 Samuel 24 concludes with: *So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.*

David's servants were certain that finding Saul alone in the cave was God's timing for his destruction at their hands, but David would have no part of it.

In 1 Samuel 26:5–11, David and his servant Abishai went into the camp of Saul while he and his men were asleep. Abishai wanted to kill Saul saying [1 Samuel 26:8], *Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time.*

David's response was typical of the man. He told Abishai [1 Samuel 26:9], *And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?* David knew God would strike Saul dead, perhaps in battle [v. 10], which is how he died [recorded in chapter 31].

David added [1 Samuel 26:11], *The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go.*

The issue in both instances was whether to spare the life of God's king who was His anointed one or to kill him [see vv. 21–24]. Neither context supports the notion that King Saul should not have been questioned nor have been held accountable for his actions.

Then there are two virtually identical passages which call everyday people God's “anointed ones.”

1 Chronicles 16:8–35 and Psalm 105 are the two passages. Psalm 105:14, 15 and 1 Chronicles 16:21–22 both state: “He [God] permitted no one to do them [Israelites] wrong; Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, *Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.*”

In this setting “*the anointed ones*” are not leaders (like a king), but common everyday people of Israel. The ones to whom God spoke were the rulers of the various Gentile kingdoms (vv. 18–20). They were forbidden to touch any Israelites or harm God's prophets.

THE ANOINTED ONES TODAY

Turning to the New Testament we find that **ALL** of God's children in this age are *anointed* of God.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 *Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; 22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

1 John 2:20 *But ye [little children v. 1] have an unction [anointing] from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

1 John 2:27 *But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

A WARPED INTERPRETATION:

When a Christian leader wants absolute control of a situation or people, he or she will sometimes resort to strange behavior or methods to gain or to keep such control. One ploy is to use Scripture — sort of as a bully whip — to keep others in line; and one such use is to quote the phrase “*touch not God's anointed.*” By this they usually mean, “*I am God's anointed messenger. He speaks to me and through me. The rest of you have not been specially called or anointed as I have, so God has forbidden you to speak against me, God's anointed.*” **Of course, confronting an anointed leader was not the issue in any of the Bible passages; doing them bodily harm was the issue in each case.**

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Sadly, believers who are under such a legalistic influence may become conditioned into thinking that they have no right to question the doctrine, attitude, methods, or behavior of God's uniquely anointed servant. And if they ever do — and are found out — the verbal attacks upon them and the vengeful treatment of them will either drive them out from under the influence of such a leader, or will silence them from ever again questioning the leadership. In either case, the leader has won and will continue his or her tyrannical reign.

ONLY ONE LORD, ONE MASTER, ONE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

God never intended His Church to be ruled over by men or women who insisted on having the preeminence, or who would insist on being above criticism or accountability. Instead, God tells us that Christ "*is the head of the body, the church...that in all things He may have the preeminence*" (Colossians 1:18). The leaders, as we have previously observed, are to be the greatest *servants* of all. They are to lead by example. They are plainly told: **1 Peter 5:2-3** *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; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*

Just as clearly, there is to be stricter accountability accompanying higher levels of responsibility. Jesus gave a beautiful parable on this very topic, concluding with: "*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*" (see Luke 12:42-48)

Set your eyes upon Jesus, looking to Him as your Shepherd [see Hebrews 12:1-2]. He has placed His Word above all His name [see Psalm 138:2], so trust in it as His sufficient guide [2 Timothy 3:16-17].