

Even 'God's Anointed' Leaders Can Abuse the Flock

"It doesn't really matter what you say I have done. God has called me here, and you can't stand in His way."

According to a friend of mine, these were the words a leader of a congregation used as he responded to a congregant, who sought to challenge him on issues of deep concern—issues of sin.

It reminded me of something that happened while I was in Bible school. I had been attending a church on Long Island led by a dynamic preacher. Everyone loved his fiery teachings. He was truly anointed. However, I became concerned when, during a service, he physically attacked an usher. The usher had laid his hand on someone, and the wife of the **pastor** removed his hand, as he was there to usher, not to pray. The usher reacted angrily to the pastor's wife, and both he and the pastor had to be physically restrained.

I stopped going to this congregation. A few weeks later, some of my college buddies came back to the campus with glowing reports of Pastor Phil's (not his real name) latest message. "You've got to hear it, Ron!" they crowed.

I popped the cassette into my Walkman (it was 1986!) and listened as Pastor Phil screamed at the people and blamed them for this and that. I did not sense **anointing** but human anger.

A few weeks later, I was told that Pastor Phil **prophesied** over a young lady in the church, just after he returned from a four-day prayer retreat, in which it was discovered he brought the very same young lady with him. Someone saw them return together, and Pastor Phil was confronted regarding his **adulterous affair**.

When the elders sat down with Phil and his wife for this confrontation, the very first words out of his wife's mouth were, "He is still anointed."

Most women would have hit him, yelled at him and called him a cheating #\$\$^—yes, even believing women. But this wife's greater concern was for her husband's authority in the congregation—that it would not be forfeited. While this was an elder-led team, she had much freedom as the senior pastor's wife and loved being in that position.

In her mind, Phil was God's anointed, even if that anointing did not help him with his zipper! It was like she was saying, "David committed adultery, and he was still king. Who are these elders to remove us from power? We are God's anointed!"

The theory that leaders can only be removed by God comes from 1 Samuel 26:9-11, where David warns his trusted friend Abishai not to kill King Saul:

“‘Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives,’ he said, ‘the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed’” (NIV).

A Dangerous Doctrine

From this text, some leaders have derived a very dangerous doctrine regarding a senior leader and **accountability**. According to this doctrine, the senior leader is understood as having a position like the ancient kings of Israel. He is "God's anointed"; therefore, he is not to be removed by any process of men—no matter what he does. He is beyond congregational discipline. While he may have elders or a board, they are advisers only, and all decisions are his to make. Within his sphere, he is the **final authority** (or, as I call it, **dictator**).

If he **abuses people** or they do not like his decisions, they have two choices. They can either submit to his leadership and entrust the situation to God, or they can quietly leave the community. In any case, they are to make no waves or protest in their leaving. Those who do are labeled rebellious troublemakers and often become the target of malicious rumors and gossip.

In these circles, the authority of the **senior leader** is taught in very absolute terms. We are told, "Touch not God's anointed." I believe it is a destructive and devilish doctrine, and people should separate from those who teach it.

To be clear, we should **honor** and **respect** those who have embraced the yoke of leadership, but leaders should be held to an even higher standard than those in their congregations:

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

The Leader Is Not a King

In the New Testament, congregations are not led by kings. Yes, I know in many circles the pastor and his wife are treated like **royalty**. Some even refer to the pastor's wife as *first lady*.

Just this morning, a pastor friend was telling me of a young elder who said, "Now that I am an elder, people will respect me."

My friend told him that it was quite the opposite: "Now that you are an elder, you give up your rights in order to serve."

In Hebrew, the word for **minister** (*mesharet*) is the same word for *servant*. A leader is called to serve, not to be crowned. Yeshua said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

New Testament congregations should be governed by teams of **elders** under the direction of a senior leader who is accountable to the team. Both Titus and Timothy, who were senior leaders, were encouraged to appoint elders (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). And elders govern the congregation:

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17, emphasis added).

David Had a Conflict of Interest

One of the reasons why David did not take Saul's life is because he knew with Saul out of the way, he would be the new king. Therefore, in killing Saul, he would have been taking his destiny into his own hands. He wanted God to make him king—not to take the kingdom by the strength of his sword.

Saul did not declare himself **God's anointed**.

In most cases today, it is the senior leader who declares himself to be God's anointed and therefore untouchable by man. In the case of David and Saul, it is Saul's enemy, David, who calls Saul God's anointed. It is a dangerous thing for a man to declare himself God's anointed.

In Bible school, I had the opportunity to meet the great English Bible teacher David Pawson. After one of his messages (he was teaching all week), I was deeply moved. I felt like I had heard from a prophet. I walked up to Mr. Pawson and asked, "Are you a **prophet**?"

He wisely said with his beautiful British accent, "That is not for me to say, but you." And he walked away.

I was blown away. He was right. You don't become a prophet or God's anointed because you post it on your Facebook page or business card. You can't declare yourself an apostle, as did the drunk and abusive character that Robert Duvall played in

The Apostle. No, others affirm the gift of God in your life.

So let us be done with this **wicked doctrine**. It is inspired from below. May God raise up strong leaders who are secure enough to be accountable to their elders. If you find yourself in a situation where a senior leader refuses to be accountable because he is “God’s anointed,” my advice is to *run!* Find a congregation that has clear **standards of morality** for its leaders.

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