

# How Leaders With Hidden Sin Can Fake It Until Revealed

Caution: Being spiritually gifted can be hazardous to your spiritual health. Why? Because your success might lead you to conclude you have God's approval.

The last thing you or I want is to become yesterday's man or woman. No one wants to be a has-been. No one needs to be that.

There are two kinds of yesterday's man or woman. The first is when the leader is openly put to one side and made to forfeit a ministry; this is when they have been found out and live with disgrace and embarrassment.

The second is when the leader is disapproved of by God but nevertheless continues in ministry. Often, the leader's followers do not have a clue the leader has lost the conscious approval of God, so they continue on as if nothing happened.

If the Holy Spirit were completely withdrawn from the church today, speaking generally, 90 percent of the work of the church would continue as if nothing happened. This can apply to an individual as well.

## Yesterday's Man

King Saul was rejected by God but remained king of Israel for another 20 years. Only the prophet Samuel knew Saul lost God's approval.

"The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him from ruling over Israel?'" (1 Sam. 16:1a).

The anointing in this case may be defined as experiencing the conscious approval of God. That is what Saul once had but lost. And yet Saul remained king and in that sense was always

regarded as God's "anointed" (1 Sam. 24:6).

As I show in my book *The Anointing*, "anointing" is a tricky term and can be used in different ways.

Being yesterday's man or woman has nothing to do with age, being made redundant or retirement. You can be young and be yesterday's man; Saul was only 40. You can be old and be tomorrow's man; God did not use Moses until he was 80.

The scary thing about being spiritually gifted is that the gifts and calling of God are "without repentance" (b, KJV)—that is, "irrevocable" (ESV).

Strange as this may seem, it means that godliness will not earn God's gifting, nor lack of godliness forfeit it.

The gifts are bestowed by God's will; indeed by the Holy Spirit "to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). And yet because one's giftedness or success may flourish, such a person might assume he or she still has God's approval.

One might easily conclude, "God must be pleased with me or He would not bless me as He has."

You may have heard this expression: "You can always tell a successful man, but you can't tell him much."

I once cautioned a spiritual leader about something that worried me. He replied, "Why should I listen to you, when you only reach hundreds in Westminster Chapel, but I reach thousands?"

That is why some people misunderstand God's ways. They assume success to be proof of God's blessing and approval.

I had two major shocks when I was young in ministry; both pertained to spiritual heroes that I almost worshipped. The first was a very powerful evangelist who came to my old church in Ashland, Kentucky, every year. I was enthralled by him. I

never witnessed such anointing, persuasiveness and sense of the fear of God as would fall on our congregation when he preached. It was extraordinary.

I learned later that the whole time he was at our church he lived a double life—namely, of adultery. A woman who was not his wife followed him wherever he went and was staying in the same hotel while he preached with such success. He was later found out and lost his credentials.

The other shock came when I had a vision of Jesus looking at my district superintendent who came to preach for me at my first pastorate in Palmer, Tennessee.

Months before, my baptism of the Holy Spirit was accompanied by a vision of Jesus. For several months afterward, a vision of the Lord's face looking at someone would appear, and I could tell the spiritual state of that person by the way the Lord looked at them. To my utter astonishment, the Lord looked at my district superintendent with intense anger and disapproval.

I was puzzled. How could this be? I regarded this man as one of the godliest men alive. I told no one about this. But 12 years later, I learned that this man was having an affair at that very time. He was later found out, lost his credentials and died in shame.

Here is what sometimes happens with those who fall but continue on in ministry. First, they give into temptation—usually regarding sex, money or truthfulness. With men, it is often connected to pornography.

They initially fear they will lose their power. But they notice that their anointing to preach, make money, heal or prophesy remains. They then say to themselves, "God must be pleased with me—making me an exception—or He would not continue to bless my gifting."

They take success as a sign that character is not what matters; it is the gift that matters. They therefore feel no conviction of sin or guilt for their double life. A compromising lifestyle becomes the norm.

Some get caught, some don't—that is, for a while. Numbers 32:23b (MEV) says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." It is only a matter of time until this haunting warning comes to pass.

Jesus goes a step further in Luke 12:2-3: "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you have whispered in the ear in private rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops."

After being rejected by God, Saul found out that he still had the gift of prophesying. This probably convinced him he could disregard Samuel's pronouncement.

Samuel told him that God rejected him (1 Sam. 13:13-14). But Saul was unteachable and unreachable. And yet the extraordinary gift to prophesy continued to flourish (1 Sam. 10:9-12).

Lo and behold, on his way to kill young David, Saul prophesied. And lest you think this was something he worked up on his own, it is written that the Spirit of God actually lay behind his prophesying.

"The Spirit of God came upon him also. And he went on and he also prophesied ... Therefore they say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (1 Sam. 19:23b-24).

How does one explain this? I answer: First, the gifts are irrevocable, and second, God's ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9). There are things about God and His ways I have not been able to figure out. I have to accept what is written in His Word.

Giftng may come to us at two levels: common grace and the Holy Spirit.

First, our giftng may come by God's common grace—His special grace in nature. It is called "common" not because it is ordinary but because it is given commonly to all. It is a creation gift. It explains one's natural talent, charisma, I.Q.—the way God made us.

Keep in mind, this is apart from conversion or spirituality. Unsavd people have this. If such people are converted and later fall into sin, the Holy Spirit could be withdrawn from them and they would continue as though nothing happened. How is that possible? Because they are so gifted.

The second giftng is what God imparts by the Holy Spirit: one's supernatural anointng or gifts of the Spirit. They are irrevocable. But God puts us on our honor to honor Him by obedience, gratitude and holy living. Sadly some abuse this privilege and become yesterday's man or woman.

Some get caught sooner than later. Others—like Saul—are found out openly later than sooner.

### **Warning Signs**

How do we become yesterday's man or woman? Here are five ways:

*By not being accountable.* King Saul was supposedly accountable to Samuel. He owed everything to Samuel. But he foolishly thought he didn't need Samuel any longer, as if he had outgrown Samuel.

Here are the famous words of yesterday's man: "I'm accountable only to God."

I reply: No one is that spiritual. We *all* need to be accountable to those who know us well and are not afraid to warn us, ask us pointed questions, know where we are at any moment and lovingly but impartially warn us when we need it.

I warned a man who was supposed to be accountable to me. He stopped returning my phone calls and answering my letters. Once I eventually caught up with him, I told him, "You are going to become yesterday's man."

Like Saul, he was unteachable and unreachable. His gift flourished. That was several years ago. I'm sorry, but he clearly became yesterday's man.

*By taking ourselves too seriously.* People who take themselves very seriously are hard to reach. They are almost always self-centered, narcissistic, closed to criticism and convinced they are special to God: that God will let them off the hook should they err.

This was King Saul. In 1 Samuel 13:9b, he ordered, "Bring here to me the burnt offering." This was something only the priest should do (Num. 18), but Saul obviously reasoned, "I'm king, aren't I?"

He elevated himself to a level to which he was not called. People who take themselves too seriously reckon they can do anything and everything. Saul was king but not qualified to be a priest as well.

*By finding an excuse to cover our wrongdoing.* When caught offering the burnt offering, Samuel asked Saul: "What have you done?" (1 Sam. 13:11).

The king justified his mistake: "I saw that the people were scattered from me ... 'The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not yet appeased the face of the Lord'" (1 Sam. 13:11-12a). Saul sounded pious!

Some use a theological excuse to cover a moral failure. Some even develop a pious air and convince people of their sincerity.

*By blaming others for our own folly.* Saul blamed Samuel: "You

did not come to the appointed assembly days, and the Philistines are gathering themselves together at Mikmash" (1 Sam. 13:11b).

King Saul used this to excuse himself and blame Samuel. Not only that, but Saul claimed he didn't really want to do what he did: "So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering" (1 Sam. 13:12).

The NIV translates his excuse as "I felt compelled." Imagine this—being compelled to go against Scripture.

Beware of anyone who justifies their departure from Scripture by claiming to hear from God. The Holy Spirit—who wrote the Bible (2 Tim. 3:15, 2 Pet. 1:21)—will never lead anyone to go against what He has written.

*By going against Holy Scripture.* Here is how to get on the fast track to become yesterday's man or woman: underestimate God's Word and go against it.

What Saul did was to break the ceremonial Law. The Law is threefold: moral (the Ten Commandments), civil (the way the people of Israel should govern themselves) and ceremonial (how God wants to be worshipped). That bit of the ceremonial Law may seem insignificant.

But Jesus said, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one dot or one mark will pass from the law until all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

Lest you think Saul's sin was a one-off incident that should be overlooked, King Uzziah committed the same sin and was afflicted with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:18-21).

Psalms 138:2b says, "You have exalted your word above all your name." This shows how important God's word is to Himself!

No one likes the taste or smell of spoiled fruit. But that is what we are if we justify an unholy walk with God. He will

find us out.

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