

Critical Issues Commentary

A monthly commentary on Biblical concerns that impact you

The Anointing and the Christian

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“Come and hear the most anointed prophet and preacher in the world today,” reads the brochure for the latest seminar. This preacher or that evangelist is touted as the latest “anointed one” who stands beyond his peers because of a special endowment from God. Has God placed favored son status on certain individuals? In the New Testament, who is the “anointed one”? Are there true Christians who are not “anointed”? The Biblical answers to these questions may surprise you.

Anointing in the Old

The idea of God anointing someone, as with many other important truths, has its roots in the Old Testament. The Theological Dictionary of The New Testament states:

Anointing that is meant to restore or to enhance physical well-being is to be distinguished from anointing as a legal action. According to the witness of the Old Testament the latter involves pouring oil over the head of the one concerned. An act of anointing is thus linked with the cleansing purpose. The aim is to give to the one anointed power, strength, or majesty.¹

The following Old Testament quotes show this:

1Samuel 10:1 “Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?’”

1Kings 1:39 “Zadok the priest then took the horn of oil from the tent and

anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’”

Exodus 40:15 “And you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father, that they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing shall qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.”

1Samuel 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

Exodus 30:30 “And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me.”

Oil was poured over the heads of certain individuals (priests and kings) to consecrate them for the office for which God had chosen them. This symbolic act however, also included a real enablement from God to carry out the appointed duty. Only **1Kings 19:16** mentions a prophet being anointed, “And Jehu the son of Nemshi you shall anoint King over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place.”

It is also clear that the Old Testament anointing was not for everyone in the congregation. After **Exodus 30:30** (previously quoted), God said to Moses, “And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on anyone’s body, nor shall you make any like it, in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever shall mix any like it, or whoever puts any of it on a layman, shall be cut off from his people.’” (**Exodus 30:31-33**). When the Old Testament

refers to “God’s anointed,” it is mostly referring to kings or priests chosen by God and set apart for their particular purposes.

A couple of Old Testament passages refer to the patriarchs as “anointed ones” & “prophets.” The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states, “Prophets (1K. 19:16), priests (Ex. 28:41), and kings (1S. 10:1, etc.) were anointed for office in Israel. It is only once explicitly mentioned that a prophet should be anointed (1K. 19:16), but the patriarchs (esp. Abraham) are referred to as ‘my anointed ones’ and ‘my prophets’ (Ps. 105:15; 1Ch. 16:22; cf. Gen. 20:7).”² These “anointed ones” were chosen by God and warnings are given to those who would maliciously attack them (**Psalms 105:15**). The context of this verse (see **verses 9-14**) shows that it is a reference to Israel: “Then He confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion of your inheritance,’ When they were only a few men in number, very few, and strangers in it. And they wandered about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people. He permitted no man to oppress them, and He reproved kings for their sakes: ‘Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.’” (**Psalms 105:10-15**). Here and in **Exodus 19:6** are indications of God’s plan which would find its fulfillment in the New Testament. God would have a people, all of who would be “anointed ones,” priests unto God.

Psalms 105:15 is often quoted in recent times. Parts of Psalm 105 are nearly identical with parts of 1Chronicles 16. The warning about touching “God’s anointed ones” refers directly to the patriarchs and their descendants, the Jews, who wandered among the nations. God told other kings, “Do not touch my anointed ones.” Does this legitimately apply as a warning not to criticize TV evangelists as it is so frequently used today? The New Testament’s understanding of the anointing of God will help us answer that ques-

tion.

There are several Old Testament passages considered Messianic by the New Testament containing the idea of God's anointed one. The following verses fit that category:

Psalms 2:2 "The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the Lord and against His Anointed:" (quoted in **Acts 4:26**).

Psalms 45:7 "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee With the oil of joy above Thy fellows." (Quoted in **Hebrews 1:9**)

In summary, the Old Testament understands the anointing as the physical act of pouring oil over someone's head that indicated God's choice of them for a very special function or office in Israel. It was usually kings and priests who were thus anointed. With the physical and ceremonial act of anointing, done according to God's will and upon only those chosen by God, went the special endowment of the Spirit or divine enablement to carry out the functions of the office for which they were being anointed. The Old Testament also predicted a special anointed One, who would come and bring salvation and deliverance to Israel.

Anointing in the New

In the New Testament, the Greek words "chrisma" (ointment), "Christos" (Christ) and "chrio" (to anoint) are used concerning anointing. By far the most often used and most important form of the word is "Christ," the Anointed One. The Jews understood that a promised One was coming who would be the anointed Messiah. The New Testament claims that Jesus of Nazareth was that person. God Incarnate came in fulfillment of prophecy. The Greek word "Christos" is translated "Christ" over 500 times in the New American Standard Bible. Most references concern the person of Jesus Christ. Otherwise it means "Messiah"

as a person and an office. It is used a couple of times of false "Christ's." Peter called Jesus "ὁ χριστὸς" (from the Greek text) in his famous confession of **Matthew 16:17**. Peter was calling Jesus literally "the anointed one" which was "the Messiah."

The following verses in which "christos" is translated "Christ" provide clear evidence that, as understood by the Jews of the first century, "christos" was a reference to the promised Messiah.

Luke 23:35 "And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.'"

John 1:41 "He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Christ)."

John 10:24 "The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.'"

John 20:31 "But these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Greek lexicons confirm this. Thayer says of the Greek word "christos," "... of the coming king whom the Jews expected to be the saviour of their nation and the author of their highest felicity... of the Messiah, viewed in his generic aspects."³ Since the New Testament clearly declares that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Jewish Messiah, the word "Christ" is used with the name "Jesus" to denote Jesus the Messiah. Christos then functions as both name and title. He is called Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, Christ, and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Thayer says, "It is added, as an appellation ('Messiah,' 'anointed'), to the proper name 'Ἰησοῦς.'"⁴

Clearly, if Jesus is indeed the "anointed one," as the Bible declares, then the term "Christ" should be uniquely His. Thus the Bible warns of

other "Christs" who are impostors. Consider the following verses:

Matthew 24:5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many."

Matthew 24:23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him."

1John 2:22 "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son."

There is only one "Anointed One" who is anointed above his peers (see **Hebrews 1:9**), Jesus Christ. There are many "antichrists" gone out into the world (**1John 2:18**) who claim to be the anointed ones, but they are liars and impostors. They will perform signs to prove their claims to be the "anointed ones" from God, but John warns believers not to follow them.

Anointing and the Christian

1John also contains two of the three New Testament verses where believers are said to be "anointed" or have an "anointing." Christians have the anointing of the Holy Spirit so should not be misled by false christs and spiritual teachers offering secrets that can only be learned from those elite teachers. All Christians are anointed with the same Holy Spirit so they are not lacking access to any truth which has been revealed by God. The following are the only three verses where "anointed" is used of Christians:

2Corinthians 1:21 "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God."

1John 2:20 "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know."

1John 2:27 "And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in

Him.”

According to each of these verses, all Christians are “anointed.” John uses this fact as a reason that the false teachers and antichrists can be refused. By definition, a supposed “christ” is claiming to have a special anointing that sets him apart from everyone else. Since all Christians have “an anointing” that they received as a gift from “the Anointed One” (Jesus Christ), the false teachers have nothing legitimate to offer them. Thus John can say “you have no need for anyone to teach you.”

There are people called by God to be teachers in the New Testament, but they have the same anointing as other Christians and are not privy to secrets or special revelations. They are merely more learned in Scripture and can help others in their study and encouragement in the Word of God. John himself was teaching as he wrote his epistle. The teaching of Scripture is not being forbidden here in 1John, but the claiming of an exclusive anointing that causes certain special teachers to have unique revelations unavailable to the rest of the congregation.

The Priesthood of Believers

By comparing the Old and New Testaments, we can see a change, which is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. During the Old Testament era, priests and kings were anointed. Aaron and his sons were anointed to be a perpetual priesthood before God (**Exodus 40:15 & Numbers 25:13**). As we saw however, the mass of Israel was not so anointed. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the “Anointed One.” No one else will ever legitimately be so designated, since He alone possesses the divine attributes of Messiah and He alone was chosen and sent by the Father as the promised One.

Our High Priest has chosen us and anointed us to be priests unto God. Peter says “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of dark-

ness into His marvelous light” (**1Peter 2:9**). When God poured out His Spirit upon the disciples as recorded in Acts 2, Peter interpreted the event as the fulfillment of Joel's Old Testament prophecy:

Acts 2:16-18,21 - But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “And it shall be in the last days,” God says, “That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

No longer is the anointing of the Spirit going to be only for priests, prophets or kings. All categories of people will receive this gift if they “call upon the name of the Lord.” (See **Romans 10:13**). Men, women, young, old, slaves, yes even Gentiles (as Peter discovered in Acts 10) are called and anointed by God. A kingdom of priests has been established by the sovereign action of God in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Each believer receives the Holy Spirit (**Romans 8:9**) and equally has access to God through the one mediator between man and God, Jesus Christ. This fulfillment of prophecy is a tremendous and consequential truth upon which the church is built. Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and he has chosen us and poured out the anointing of the Spirit upon us that we may be a part of God's royal priesthood.

Yet there has been throughout the history of the church attempts by many to establish illegitimate priesthoods of persons claiming special prerogatives and special access to the mind of Christ. Sadly they often succeed in finding numerous followers. Many religious groups (some carrying the designation “Christian”) have convinced their followers that they have priesthoods, prophets, or other leaders of various titles who have special mediatorial prerogatives, anointing, and authority to speak for Christ beyond the teachings of the Bible.

Jesus taught us “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ, or There He is,’ do not believe him.” (**Matthew 24:23**). As we have seen, “Christ” (“Christos” from the Greek) means “anointed one.” In the New Testament there is only **one** who is anointed above his companions, Christ. If there were others, then there would be other “christs” (anointed ones).

The truths of the uniqueness of Christ, the authority of Scripture and the priesthood of every believer are revealed and given to the body of Christ for our protection and our spiritual benefit. They protect us from false teachers and false “anointed ones” (christs). They reveal our blessed access to the throne of grace through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. We do not have to be subject to the whims, fickleness or possible abuse of fallen, human mediators.

Consider the Lord's prophecy recorded in **Matthew 24:5**: “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.” False “Christs” will come in His name. Invoking the name of Christ indicates two persons: the one making the claim and Christ whose authority is called upon. Some have claimed to be reincarnations of the “Christ Spirit” who supposedly appears as different persons in different ages (with Jesus of the Bible being one of them). Others have claimed that Christ has given them a unique privilege to be the “anointed one” for their age or people. In either case, Jesus Christ is referenced to lend credibility to the claims of the later day “anointed ones.”

“Messiah” is someone sent and empowered by God to bring His people into the things promised them, including eternal salvation. The Bible claims that He is Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and raised from the dead, who now sits at the right hand of the Father in all glory and majesty. When He comes again we will meet Him in the air (**1Thessalonians 4:17**).

All three of the New Testament verses (**2Corinthians 1:21; 1John 2:20 & 27**) that use the terms “anointed” or “have an anointing” concerning others than Christ Himself are

referring to **all believers**. All New Testament verses that speak of one who is especially anointed by God refer to Christ. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament make it clear that we should refuse to listen to anyone claiming a special anointing that sets himself apart from the rest of us.

Conclusion

Hebrews 1:5,8,9 - For to which of the angels did He ever say, "Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee" And again, "I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me." But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions."

The Hebrew Christians were being sorely tempted to commit apostasy and leave Christ to go back to the Old Covenant. Some were excessively enamored with angels. Some wanted an earthly high priest who would be anointed as Aaron and his descendants who would minister in an earthly temple and make sacrifices for the people. Some left Jesus as the unique One, Messiah, who is a heavenly High Priest to whom we have access for someone earthly to hear from God, intercede between them and God, and to claim revelations and visits from angels. The writer of Hebrews eloquently and passionately pleads with them and warns them to "consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." (**Hebrews 3:1**). The section from Hebrews 1 quoted above (also **Hebrews 1:10-13**) references the Old Testament to prove that Jesus is God Incarnate, Messiah. He is unique.

The horrible tragedy is that those who should know this leave Him for some earthly priest. The warnings given in the book of Hebrews are the most awesome and sobering in the New Testament. Nothing less than our very salvation is a stake and "a certain terrifying expectation of judgment" (**Hebrews 10:27**) awaits those who do not heed the heavenly warning. The book

of Hebrews aptly elaborates on many ramifications of the Biblical teaching about Jesus as the "Anointed One" and us as partakers of a heavenly calling. The Old covenant predicts, anticipates, and typifies the New; but to receive the New Covenant means that we cannot go back to the Old.

Many modern Christians seem not to understand or study the teachings found in Hebrews. Some evidently feel that these teachings apply only to Jews who were tempted to go back to the Mosaic Covenant and neglect Christ. They are just as applicable to contemporary Christians who are tempted to have an earthly priesthood of special "anointed ones" who claim to lead them to an earthly promised land. There is only one Christ - Anointed One. He anoints all whom He calls to Himself and who respond and call upon Him in faith.

1Corinthians 3:11 - "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

1Corinthians 12:12,13 - "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

1Timothy 2:5 - "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

As 1Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4 teach, there are different giftings and callings. Yet it is the same Spirit who empowers every believer. The anointing of the Spirit produces various gifts, callings and manifestations in different members; but no member can boast of a "special anointing." It is the same Spirit who anoints all the ministers of the gospel, all the workers in the local congregation, and all the members of the body of Christ whatever description, gifting or calling they may have. "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not

have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." (Romans 8:9).

Christians may be particularly gifted in certain areas or called to ministries that others are not; but each of them is anointed by the same Spirit for the work of the ministry. The message of the New Testament is: different gifts, different callings, but one Spirit and one anointing. All Christians have the Holy Spirit, are anointed, and are a part of God's royal priesthood.

"If anyone says to you 'Look, here is the anointed one, or here' do not believe him." - Jesus (**Matthew 24:23** literal translation from the Greek).

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End Notes

1. Theological Dictionary of New Testament; Editors: G. Kittel & G. Friedrich; Eerdmans, 1974, V. IX, pages 496,497.
2. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia; Eerdmans, Revised edition, 1979; page 129.
3. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament; Joseph H. Thayer, Baker, 1977.
4. *ibid.*

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