



STATEMENT DP-065

VIEWPOINT

The Untouchables: Are 'God's Anointed' Beyond Criticism?

by Hank Hanegraaff

During His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ exhorted His followers not to judge self-righteously or hypocritically. Is this necessarily what Christians do when they question the teachings of God's "anointed" preachers and evangelists? Many teachers who claim such anointing would say so, and many more of their followers commonly reply to all manner of criticism: "Touch not God's anointed."

Some of these teachers add that such actions carry literally grave consequences. Prominent "faith" teacher Kenneth Copeland affirmed in his taped message, "Why All Are Not Healed": "There are people attempting to sit in judgment right today over the ministry that I'm responsible for, and the ministry that Kenneth E. Hagin is responsible for....Several people that I know had criticized and called that faith bunch out of Tulsa a cult. And some of 'em are dead right today in an early grave because of it, and there's more than one of them got cancer."

In addition to certain "word-faith" teachers, such sentiments may be found among various groups involved with *shepherding* and other forms of authoritarian rule (from diverse "five-fold" ministries to a host of large and small "fringe churches"). The leaders of these groups are commonly regarded as having a unique gift and calling that entitles them to unconditional authority. To dispute any of their words or deeds is not distinguished from questioning God Himself.

Advocates of such authority assume that Scripture supports their view. Their key biblical proof text is Psalm 105:15: "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm" (KJV). But a close examination of this passage reveals that it has nothing to do with challenging the teachings of church leaders.

It first needs to be noted that the Old Testament phrase "the Lord's anointed" is typically used to refer to the *kings of Israel* (1 Sam. 12:3, 5; 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19:21; Ps. 20:6; Lam. 4:20), at times specifically to the royal line descended from David (Pss. 2:2; 18:50; 89:38, 51), and not to prophets and teachers. While the text does also mention prophets, in the context of Psalm 105 the reference is undoubtedly to the *patriarchs* in general (vv. 8-15; cf. 1 Chron. 16:15-22), and to Abraham (whom God called a prophet) in particular (Gen. 20:7). It is therefore debatable whether this passage can be applied to select leaders within the body of Christ.

Even if the text *can* be applied to certain church leaders today, in the context of this passage the words "touch" and "do harm" have to do with inflicting *physical* harm upon someone. Psalm 105:15 is therefore wholly irrelevant to the issue of *questioning* the teachings of any of God's "anointed."

Moreover, even if we accepted this misinterpretation of Psalm 105:15, how are we to know who not to "touch"; that is, who God's anointed and prophets are? *Because they and their followers say they are?* On such a basis we would have to accept the claims of Sun Myung Moon, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, and virtually all cult leaders to be prophets. *Because they reputedly perform miracles?* The Antichrist and False Prophet themselves will possess that credential (Rev. 13:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:9)! No, God's representatives are known above all by their purity of character *and* doctrine (Tit. 1:7-9; 2:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:2; cf. 1 Tim. 6:3-4). If a would-be spokesperson for God cannot pass the biblical tests of character and doctrine, we have no *basis* for accepting his or her claim, and no *reason* to fear that in criticizing his or her teaching we might also be rejecting God.

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Finally, if any individual Christian is to be considered anointed, then so every Christian must be as well. For this is the only sense in which the term is used (apart from Christ) in the New Testament: "You [referring to *all* believers] have an anointing from the Holy One" (1 John 2:20, NIV). Thus, no believer can justifiably claim any special status as God's "untouchable anointed" over other believers.

Nobody's teachings or practices are beyond biblical judgment — especially influential leaders. Biblically, authority and accountability go hand in hand (e.g., Luke 12:48). The greater the responsibility one holds, the greater the accountability one has before God and His people.

Teachers should be extremely careful not to mislead any believer, for their calling carries with it a strict judgment (James 3:1). *They should therefore be grateful* when sincere Christians take the time to correct whatever erroneous doctrine they may be preaching to the masses. And should the criticisms be unfounded they should respond in the manner prescribed by Scripture: to correct misguided doctrinal opposition with gentle instruction (2 Tim. 2:25).

There is of course another side to this issue: criticism often can be sinful, leading to rebellion and unnecessary division. Christians should respect the leaders that God has given them (Heb. 13:17). Theirs is the task of assisting the church in its spiritual growth and doctrinal understanding (Eph. 4:11-16). At the same time believers should be aware that false teachers will arise among the Christian fold (Acts 20:28; 2 Pet. 2:1). This makes it imperative for us to test *all* things by Scripture, as the Bereans were commended for doing when they examined the words of the apostle Paul (Acts 17:11).

The Bible is useful not only for preaching, teaching, and encouragement, but for correcting and rebuking (2 Tim. 4:2). In fact, Christians are held accountable for proclaiming the whole will of God and warning others of false teachings and teachers (Acts 20:26-28; cf. Ezek. 33:7-9; 34:1-10).

We would do well to heed Scripture's repeated warnings to be on guard for false teachings (e.g., Rom. 16:17-18; cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:16; 2 Tim. 1:13-14; Tit. 1:9; 2:1), and to point them out to believers (2 Tim. 4:6). With so much scriptural support, such actions can hardly be considered unbiblical.