

Who, Me? Anointed?

“Wow, that speaker is really an *anointed* preacher!” sometimes people say. We are supposed to think theologically, so this makes me wonder what such a statement means. Does that mean the preaching is *biblical*? Sadly, I think it often indicates an *interesting* or *passionate* sermon. Others mean that it never made them fall asleep.

Today I shared with a friend my need for pastoral succession at my church. As I look towards the future, I need to mentor my replacement now. His response? “But you are the one *anointed* to pastor that church, and that anointing cannot be passed to someone else.” It made me wonder if “the anointing” is the new term for being called to a particular ministry.

So what does “anointing” mean? Is it a special call to a ministry or power from God for Christian leaders? Who has the anointing and what is it?

The Old Testament anointing varied. God charged Moses to anoint with oil the tabernacle, furnishings, and priests (Exod 40:1-14). This set them apart for special service. God also anointed kings to serve him as in the case of Saul (1 Sam 10:1) and David (1 Sam 16:13). This is probably why Christians today use “anointing” in reference to ministry calling. After all, Jesus was also anointed (Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; Heb. 1:9).

But What About Us?

Is it proper to apply this usage to believers today? Even the anointing of Jesus came before the Spirit initiated the priesthood of believers in the Church.

Here is where the Apostle John can help. He notes in 1 John 2:20, 27 (NIV),

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth...
As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

Who is John addressing? Does he write to a specific Christian group of leaders? Yes, but those recipients of his letter comprise **all believers** since all of us are called to know the truth and to be taught by the Spirit. In that sense, we are all anointed leaders. We do not *need* others to teach us, though teachers can help—thus Singapore Bible College. But ultimately, all that truth comes from the Spirit, who has anointed us all to know and live out the truth.

So Now What?

Paul also applies the anointing to all Christians in 2 Corinthians 1:21 (NIV),

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

“Although Old Testament anointing was related more to service (as also was Christ’s anointing), New Testament believers’ anointing concerns a relationship that enables us to understand truth.”¹ Thus, **all believers** are anointed and all are permanently indwelt by the Spirit. This should make us sensitive to sin that would harm fellowship with the Spirit. After all, he is the “seal of ownership” guaranteeing our full and final salvation. Let’s live out these realities.

¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 412.