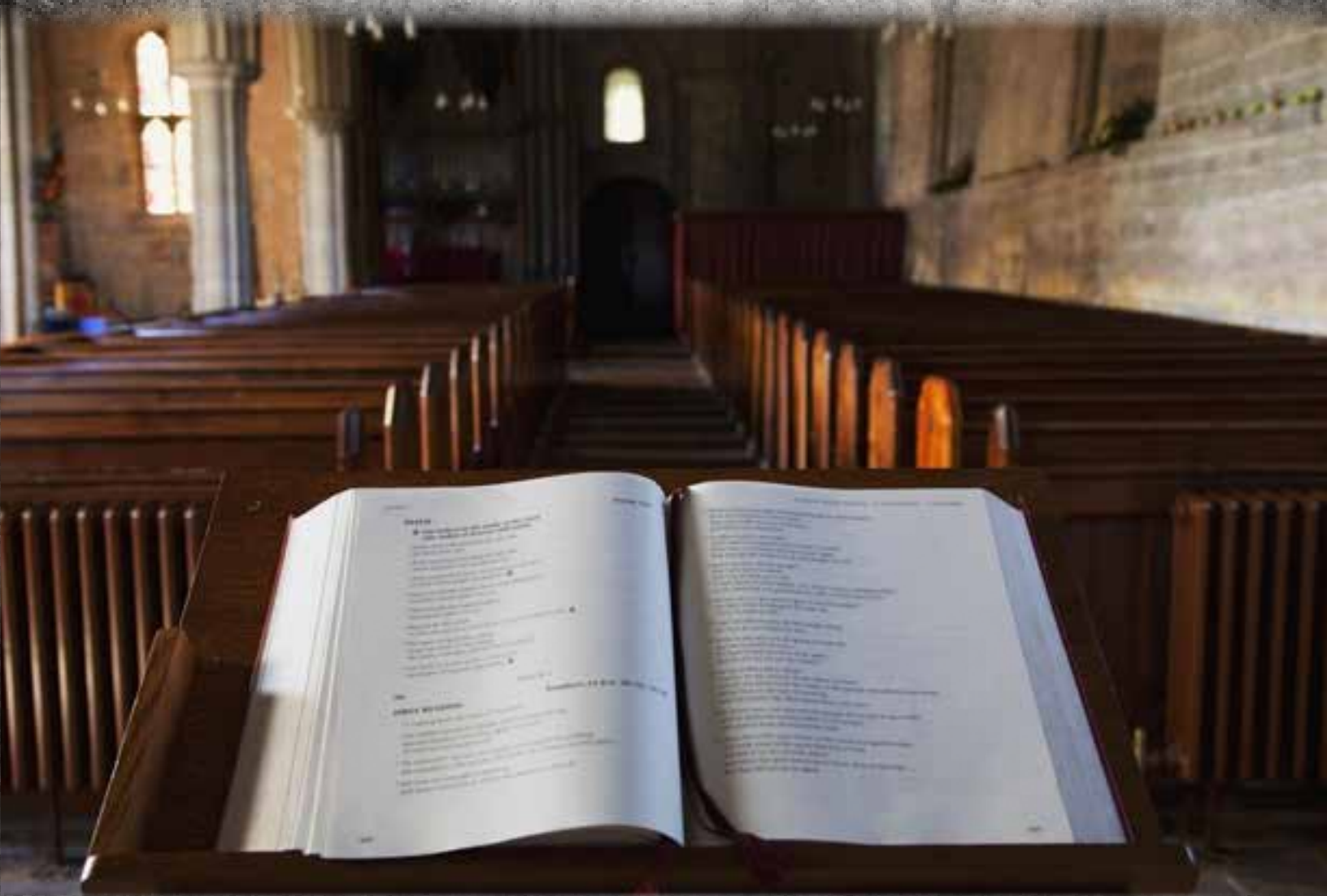


The Holy Spirit and the PREACHER



ROB VENTURA

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PREACHER

Contents

Who Is the Holy Spirit?	4
A Divine Person.....	4
A Vital Presence	5
What Is the Spirit's Ministry for the Preacher of God?	6
Illumination	6
Filling	9
Power	13
How Can Preachers Experience More of the Holy Spirit?	18
Do Not Grieve the Spirit	18
Do Not Quench the Spirit.....	19
Ask God for the Spirit.....	19
Conclusion	20

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THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PREACHER

PREACHERS of the Word of God who would be useful laborers for our Lord and His church need to prepare themselves for their calling to the Christian ministry. Typically, if they would be well-equipped ministers, they should have a good working knowledge of the original languages, both of Hebrew and Greek. Additionally, they should be well-versed in all of the various theological disciplines, such as exegetical theology, historical theology, systematic theology, biblical theology, and practical and pastoral theology. Along with these prerequisites, they should also be men who have acquired for themselves sufficient tools for the task of preaching, such as an adequate library and various Bible study helps.

While certainly all of these are beneficial, *none of them compares to the preacher's great need of the Holy Spirit's ministry* resting upon him and all of his pulpit labors. This is a basic axiom—so basic that one might question the need for an entire booklet to be written on the subject. However, the longer I minister, the more I marvel at how often I must remind myself of it, and that so little is spoken about this subject in our day. Brothers, as we ascend our pulpits, I trust we all can say with C. H. Spurgeon, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” However, as we prepare sermons and preach them, I wonder how many of us feel the urgency to plead with the Lord, saying, “I *need* the Holy Ghost!”

How do we become *less independent* and *more dependent* on Him Who can do us and our people the spiritual good that we so desperately need? To help us along these lines, I believe that answering a few fundamental questions will aid us in this regard.

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is His ministry for the preacher of God? How can preachers know more of His ministry? These are the questions I will address

in this booklet with a view to convincing us of the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's ministry for all who would be preachers of the Word of God.¹

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

A Divine Person

In answering this question, we must turn to the Word of God itself. The Scriptures are abundantly plain regarding Who the Holy Spirit is.² Firstly, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is a *person*.³ Some distinct personal characteristics of the Holy Spirit are: His ability to teach (Neh 9:20; Luk 12:12; Joh 14:26; 1Jo 2:27), testify (Joh 15:26), convict (Joh 16:8), lead (Rom 8:14; Act 8:29; 13:2; 16:6-7; 2Pe 1:21), seal (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30), appoint (Act 13:2), equip (1Co 12:4-10; Rom 12:4-13), intercede (Rom 8:26-27), search (1Co 2:10-11), prohibit (Act 16:6), judge (Act 15:28), speak (Act 8:29; Rom 8:26-27; Rev 2:7), hear (Joh 16:13), will (Heb 2:4; 1Co 12:11), love (Rom 15:30), comfort (Joh 14:26), commune (2Co 13:14), give (1Co 12:8-11), and grieve (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30). Also, the Holy Spirit is able to be lied to and insulted (Act 5:3; Heb 10:29).

Secondly, the Scriptures tell us that the Holy Spirit is a *divine* person. The Holy Spirit is God (Act 5:3-4), in the same way as and equal to the Father and the Son (Mat 3:16-17; 28:19; 1Co 12:4-6; 2Co 13:14; Eph 4:4-6; 1Jo 5:7). Yet all three are distinct (Luk 1:35; 3:21-22; 12:10; Joh 16:7-15; 1Co 12:4-6; Rev 1:4-5), while being one God (Deu 6:4; 1Co 8:6). The Holy Spirit is called God (Act 5:4; 2Co 3:17), and divine attributes are ascribed to Him—such as omnipresence (Psa 139:7-10; 2Co 3:17), omniscience (Isa 40:13-14; Joh 14:26; 1Co 2:10-11), omnipotence (Luk 1:35; Rom 9:11; 15:19), eternity (Heb 9:14), and creativity (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; Psa 104:30).

Additionally in this regard, the works ascribed to the Spirit demonstrate that He is divine. He regenerates (Joh 3:5-6; 6:63; Ti 3:5), sanctifies (2Th 2:13), and glorifies (Joh 16:14; Rom 8:11). He inspired the Word of God (2Pe 1:20-21).

In commenting on the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit, John Owen says,

¹ I am glad that Reformation Heritage Books (www.HeritageBooks.org) has published Albert Martin's sermons on this subject in his new book entitled, *Preaching in the Holy Spirit*. This work will further aid the reader in this crucial topic.

² See *The Holy Spirit* by A. W. Pink, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ The Holy Spirit is not a vague, impersonal force. This is the teaching of the Jehovah's Witness organization. For a discussion of this subject, I refer to the book by James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 140.

To suppose now that this Holy Ghost is not a divine person is for men to dream whilst they seem to be awake. I suppose by all these testimonies we have fully confirmed what was designed to be proven by them, namely, that the Holy Spirit is not a quality, as some speak, residing in the divine nature; not a mere emanation of virtue and power from God; not the acting of the power of God in and unto our sanctification—but a holy intelligent subsistent or person. And in our passage many instances have been given, whence it is undeniably evident that He is a *divine, self-sufficient, self-subsisting person*, together with the Father and the Son equally participant of the divine nature.⁴

In a similar way, in commenting on the deity of the Holy Spirit, James White says,

It can be well argued that once the personality of the Spirit is established, the argument about His deity is over. The “Spirit of God”—Who is said to be omnipresent (Psa 139:7), omniscient (1Co 2:10-11), and active in the very creation itself (Gen 1:2; Psa 104:30)—hardly fits the description of some kind of lesser being. But the fact that this Spirit shares the one divine name with the Father and the Son (Mat 28:19) makes His deity indisputable.⁵

A Vital Presence

Having seen then, in the first place, the scriptural witness to the personality and being of the Holy Spirit, is it not clear that because of Who He is, He is absolutely vital to those who would preach God’s Holy Word? Dare any of us think that we can preach the very Word of God without the help of God Himself? Let us not be shortsighted at this point. Just as we can do nothing without the aid of God the Father and the Son, the same is true of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, we can do nothing. Without Him, even our best efforts will prove unprofitable, for as Jesus said, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth [gives life]; the flesh profiteth nothing” (Joh 6:63). As we build a case for the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit’s ministry, may this foundational fact concerning Who He is be the first step in helping us to recognize how greatly we need Him and His ministry to be upon us.

⁴ John Owen, “The Holy Spirit,” in vol. 3 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 89. Owen (1616-1683) was a respected Congregational theologian who was called the “Prince of the Puritans.”

⁵ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 147. White is an American theologian and director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, a Christian apologetics organization based in Phoenix, Arizona.

What Is the Spirit's Ministry for the Preacher of God?

Having established Who the Holy Spirit is, we must now consider what His ministry is, and how that ministry applies to those who preach His Word. In this section, the focus of attention will be on three specific aspects of the Spirit's ministry, namely, illumination, filling, and power.

Illumination

The Work of Illumination

Illumination may be defined as the opening of the heart and mind to receive and apprehend divinely revealed scriptural truth. Specifically, illumination relates to the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He helps the child of God to understand the truths of God as contained within the Bible. For the preacher, I believe that this can happen both in the study and in the act of preaching itself. This, of course, is not the receiving of new divine truth; but rather, as John Owen rightly says, it is,

the especial work of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, communicating spiritual wisdom, light, and understanding unto them, necessary unto their discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in His Word, and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein.⁶

In speaking about this illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, John MacArthur remarks,

It is impossible to properly understand God's objective revelation in Scripture apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. Illumination is not equated with either revelation or inspiration. It communicates no new truth, but rather enables us to comprehend God's truth in the final and complete revelation of it in Scripture. No clear understanding of Scripture leading to powerful preaching is possible without the Spirit's work of illumination.⁷

The Apostle Paul wrote about the Spirit's work of illumination in his letter to the church at Corinth; he says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given

⁶ John Owen, "The Reason of Faith," in vol. 4 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 124.

⁷ John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, Inc. 1992), 102. MacArthur is an American pastor and author known for his internationally syndicated Christian teaching radio program *Grace to You*. He has pastored Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969.

to us of God” (1Co 2:12). Similarly, when praying for the Christians in Ephesus, Paul could say,

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power (Eph 1:15-19).⁸

Clearly, Paul saw the need for the inward illuminating work of the Holy Spirit revealing God’s truth to His people, and so he prayed in this manner. In a similar way, the psalmist prayed and said, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psa 119:18), and “Give me understanding according to thy word” (119:169).

The Church has long believed in this illuminating aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther⁹ speaks of the need for it when he says,

Nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot¹⁰ of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they can discuss and quote all that is in Scripture, they do not understand or really know any of it...The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture.¹¹

John Calvin¹² also speaks of this matter when he says,

The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to His own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit...For though [Scripture] in its own majesty has enough to command reverence, nev-

⁸ I am aware of some who suggest that the word *spirit* spoken of in these verses refers to the “human spirit”; however, I am of the opinion based upon the context that Paul is speaking about the Holy Spirit. For a full-length discussion of this issue, I point the reader to Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 256-258.

⁹ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German theologian and university professor, whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

¹⁰ **jot** – smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet (Mat 5:18); therefore, minute detail.

¹¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1992), 109.

¹² **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – influential Reformer; known as the father of Presbyterian theology. Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week during his 25 years serving in Geneva. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.

ertheless, it then begins truly to touch us when it is sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.¹³

In addition, the framers of the great confessions of faith understood this aspect of the Spirit's ministry when they say,

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.¹⁴

Application

The application of this for those who preach God's Word is plain. Since it is the Spirit of God Who opens up the Word of God so that we can comprehend and perceive its sacred truth, it makes sense that preachers above all others should be most eager for this aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry to be their daily portion. We who preach and teach God's Word should be earnest in our prayers that, as we diligently study the Scriptures, God by the Spirit would come and do this very thing for us, giving us clear understanding and insight into the truths of the Bible, as we labor to feed our people richly each Lord's Day. Here is how our labors will accomplish this end. And here is how the people of God will be fed with the finest wheat of His Word.

Perhaps some think that those who regularly traffic in the Word of God are easily able to perceive its truth. This would be nice; however, it is not always the case. Very often ministers find themselves with a great sense of dullness and spiritual lethargy¹⁵ as they come to the study of the Bible. Therefore, as they study and prepare sermons, they must not neglect to ask that God, by His Spirit, would come and break open the bread of life to them so that they can meaningfully minister to Jesus' sheep.

Human abilities and good resource material, though helpful, will never compare to the depth that God the Holy Spirit alone can give. If the blessed third Person of the Holy Trinity does not come and reveal the truths of God's Word to us, we who labor in the "word and doctrine" are of all men most to be pitied. The

¹³ MacArthur, Jr., 110.

¹⁴ 1689 *London Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1.6, entitled "Of the Holy Scriptures," available from CHAPEL LIBRARY. See also *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

¹⁵ **lethargy** – sluggishness; drowsiness.

Scriptures will be as a dead letter to us—so let us especially plead the Spirit’s mercies in this regard. Dr. W. R. Downing said it right when he wrote,

Academic attainment is no substitute for spiritual discernment, as witnessed by those critical biblical commentaries, some of which have been written by unregenerate rationalistic scholars. They may have mastered the linguistics, history, and the culture of biblical times, but remain strangers to the heart and the message of Scripture, and therefore misrepresent or undermine them (1Co 2:9-14). The Holy Spirit is the Divine Author of the Bible, and unless He opens our understanding, it must largely remain a closed book. The evangelical pastor Bishop J. C. Ryle¹⁶ put it succinctly, “...read the Bible with earnest prayer for the teaching and the help of the Holy Spirit. Here is the rock on which many make shipwreck at the very outset. They do not ask for wisdom and instruction, and so they find the Bible a dark book, and carry nothing away from it. You should pray for the Spirit to guide you into all truth. You should beg the Lord Jesus Christ to ‘open your understanding,’ as He did that of His disciples” (Luk 24:45).¹⁷

Filling

What This Filling Is

The Bible teaches that not only is the Holy Spirit given to the believer at conversion once, but also that He is further supplied in varying measures throughout the Christian’s life. To be filled with the Spirit may be defined as “His temporary control or possession of the faculties and powers of a person’s being in order to enable that person to accomplish some specific task or service for God.”¹⁸

Being filled with the Spirit is a biblical command. The Spirit’s filling should be distinguished from certain other ministries of the Spirit’s work in the life of the child of God, such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13), the indwelling of the Spirit (Joh 14:16; 1Co 6:19-20), and the sealing of the Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30), all which happen at the moment of conversion.

¹⁶ **J. C. Ryle** (1816-1900) – Bishop of the Anglican Church known for his direct, easily understood preaching. Born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

¹⁷ **W. R. Downing**, *How to Study the Bible* (Morgan Hill: PIRS Publications, 2001), 15-16.

Downing has been a gospel minister for more than 45 years and currently is pastor of Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Silicon Valley. He also leads Pacific Institute for Religious Studies in Morgan Hill, California (www.sgbcsv.org).

¹⁸ I came across this helpful definition in Pastor John Reuther’s, “The Filling and Fullness of the Spirit” (manuscript from unpublished notes on *The Gift of the Holy Spirit* quoting Robert J. Dunzweiler), 170.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is quite different: it is not a once-for-all experience. In Ephesians 5:18, for example, the command to “be filled with the Spirit,” reads in the original “be being filled [present imperative passive] with the Spirit,” or more plainly, “let the Spirit continually fill you,” thus showing that this is to be an ongoing, repeated action.

Then, at this point, the question that should be asked is, “Why should those who preach the Word of God be concerned with this aspect of the Spirit’s ministry?” While many answers could be given, perhaps the best one in connection with the topic at hand is that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit’s ministry of filling is often connected to that of the preacher having boldness when he speaks. By boldness, I am not referring to brashness, but rather, speaking freely and plainly, as every minister should desire for themselves. Arturo Azurdia III, in commenting on the New Testament use of the word *boldness*, says, “It means, ‘outspokenness, frankness...that conceals nothing and passes over nothing...confidence...fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank.’”¹⁹

Peter and John

Three clear examples of the Spirit’s filling and boldness are seen in Scripture. Consider first the example of the apostles. In Acts 4:1-4, Peter and John, after healing a lame man, preached Jesus to the people. After this, they were arrested and imprisoned until the following day to be questioned by the Sanhedrin. In verse seven we read, “And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” In response to their question we read,

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

¹⁹ Arturo Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Geanies House, Fern, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 125.

Verses thirteen and fourteen say, “Now when they saw the *boldness* of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.”²⁰

Shortly after this, Peter and John were let go, and “they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (v. 23). After hearing about how the Holy Spirit had filled the apostles with such boldness, and how great the result, is it any wonder that we see the whole church praying in verse twenty-nine, “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants *that with all boldness they may speak thy word*” (emphasis mine). The result of their prayer is set forth in verse thirty-one: “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and *they spake the word of God with boldness*” (emphasis mine).

Stephen

Consider secondly the example of Stephen. The Bible describes him as a man who was “full of the Holy Ghost” (Act 6:3). We read in Acts 6:10 that some men came to dispute with him, and that “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” After being falsely accused by these men and brought before the council to answer for the charges that were made against him, Stephen stood to give his defense by preaching perhaps one of the longest recorded sermons in all of the Word of God.

In this message, Stephen brought the people all the way back to the time of Abraham, then to the Patriarchs, and then to the time of Moses, showing that this Jesus Whom he had preached was indeed the long-awaited, promised One Who would come to the Jewish people. Stephen ended his sermon with a bold word of rebuke regarding the impenitence of the people in rejecting Christ their Messiah, by saying, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (7:51).

After this, we read that the people “were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (v. 54). Then, of Stephen it says, “But he, being full of the

²⁰ It is interesting to note that the text tells us that the people who heard the boldness of Peter and John attributed it to the fact that “they had been with Jesus,” indicating the kind of preacher our Lord was.

Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (v. 55-56).

It should be asked, From where did Stephen get such boldness to speak to these men, realizing that his own life was in great danger? The answer to this question lies in the description of the kind of man that Stephen was. Stephen, according to the Bible, was a man of God who *was filled with the Spirit* of God.

Paul

Consider thirdly the example of the Apostle Paul. In Acts chapter thirteen, Paul begins his first missionary journey. We read of him and his traveling companions, that they, “being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (vv. 4-5a). In verse seven, we are told of a man named Sergius Paulus, who “called for Barnabus and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.”

Right in the midst of this news, the apostle encounters a distraction bound up in a certain sorcerer named Elymas, who according to verse eight, was “seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” Realizing the seriousness of the situation, we read in verse nine, “Then Saul, (who is called Paul,) *filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him* [looked intently] and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief [fraud], thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (emphasis mine).

No doubt, these are very bold words. It should be asked again, Where did such fearless speech come from? Our passage tells us plainly that it was when Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit that he was enabled to speak in such a way.

The connection between the filling of the Spirit and boldness in speech is evident in these passages. The two go together. In commenting on this dynamic of the Spirit’s work for the preacher of God, Sinclair Ferguson says,

The hallmark of the preaching which the Spirit effects is “boldness”...As in the Old Testament, when the Spirit fills the servant of God he “clothes himself” with that person, and aspects of the Spirit’s authority are illustrated in the courageous declaration of the Word of God. This boldness appears to involve exactly what it denotes: there is freedom of speech. We catch occasional glimpses of this in the Acts of the Apostles. What was said of the early New England preach-

er Thomas Hooker²¹ becomes a visible reality: when he preached, those who heard him felt that he could pick up a king and put him in his pocket!²²

One is reminded of the prayer request of the Apostle Paul to the church at Ephesus. Of all of the things for which he could have asked prayer for, he asked the Ephesian church to pray for him, “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein *I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak*” (Eph 6:19-20) (emphasis mine).

May this be our prayer as well!

Power

What This Power Is

One final yet crucial aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry, which must be considered in relationship to the preacher of God, is that of power. Lloyd-Jones, in his book entitled *Preaching and Preachers*, defines this power or unction²³ as that which God gives the preacher, “in order that he may do this work in a manner that lifts it up beyond the efforts and endeavors of man to a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works.”²⁴

The concepts of “Spirit” and “power” regularly go together in Scripture. Several passages bear this out:

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, *the spirit of counsel and might*, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isa 11:2)

But truly *I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD*, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin. (Mic 3:8)

Jesus returned *in the power of the Spirit* into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. (Luk 4:14)

²¹ **Thomas Hooker** (1586-1647) – English Puritan preacher who fled persecution to Holland, then sailed to America and founded Hartford, Connecticut.

²² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 238. Ferguson is a Scottish Reformed theologian known for his teaching and writing.

²³ The term *unction* or *anointing* is often used to refer to the power of the Spirit. For an example of this and for an excellent treatment of the topic at hand I refer the reader to Ben Awbrey’s book entitled, *How Effective Sermons Begin*, 150-168.

²⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 305. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was a respected Welsh expository preacher and minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-1968.

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with *the Holy Ghost and with power*: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. (Act 10:38)

[Jesus was] declared to be the Son of God *with power, according to the spirit of holiness*, by the resurrection from the dead. (Rom 1:4)

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, *through the power of the Holy Ghost*. (Rom 15:13)

Through mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Rom 15:19)

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened *with might by his Spirit* in the inner man. (Eph 3:16)

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; *but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*. (2Ti 1:7)²⁵

Power for Works of Service

In addition, the Holy Spirit is said to empower his people for works of service. Several examples in Scripture illustrate this:

The Spirit of the LORD came upon him [Othniel], and he judged Israel. (Jdg 3:10)

But *the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon*, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him. (Jdg 6:34)

Then *the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah*, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. (Jdg 11:29)

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and *the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward*. (1Sa 16:13)

Luke 24:49

In regards to this aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry for the preacher of God, we see in Luke 24:49 that our Lord Jesus Christ is preparing His disciples for the great task of worldwide evangelism. He tells them this is a crucial aspect of their

²⁵ I am aware of the debate regarding the word "spirit" in this passage. At present, I believe that the word has reference to the Holy Spirit. For further support of this view, please see William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 228-229.

lives for the success of the gospel: “Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, *until ye be endued with power from on high*” (emphasis mine).

The promise mentioned in the passage is the promise of the Holy Spirit, which was to be given at Pentecost. These words find their fulfillment in Acts 1:4-8. After Jesus reviews this promise with the disciples in verses 1-5, they asked Him in verse six, thinking that the end of the age was upon them, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replies to their question by saying, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power [i.e., authority]” (v. 7). Then in verse eight, Jesus, in sharp contrast to their question about political power, says, “But ye shall receive power, *after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses* unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (emphasis mine).

By this response to His disciples Jesus strengthens and encourages them for the work at hand. This verse declares that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His people will give them the ability they need to be very useful witnesses for their Lord. Commenting on the use of this text for those who would preach God’s Word, Arturo Azurdia III remarks,

The implications of Luke 24 and Acts 1 are obvious. The evangelical emphasis is to govern the message of the apostles and their subsequent followers. Moreover, a particular method is to dictate the predominant communication of this message. All of this, however, will amount to nothing apart from the sovereign manifestation of the necessary means. If the aim of Christian preaching is more than intellectual enlightenment and moral reformation—but is, instead, the thorough-going transformation of people dead in trespasses and sins—then the Christian preachers must rest their dependence solely upon the Spirit of the living God. [This is] because such a transformation requires a power of an altogether supernatural kind. Stated simply, the power of the Holy Spirit is the *sine qua non*²⁶ of gospel preaching, the one thing without which nothing else matters.²⁷

²⁶ **sine qua non** – *Latin*: absolute prerequisite; essential condition.

²⁷ Arturo Azurdia III, *Spirit Empowered Preaching* (Geanies House, Fern, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 100. In my opinion, the author balances this statement a bit when he says on page 141, “Christian preachers must never assume that a mutually exclusive decision needs to be made between pain-staking exegesis and reliance on the Spirit. The issue for the preacher is not study *or* the Spirit, as though a wedge can be driven between the two. It is study *and* the Spirit. To be sure, study without the Spirit is atheism. It

1 Corinthians 2:4

Two other passages must be considered in this regard.

Consider first 1 Corinthians 2:4. The Apostle Paul, in contrasting his ministry to the popular philosophers and orators of his day, says, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

The apostle here uses the strong Greek adversative *alla* (“but”) to show exactly what his preaching was, and what it was not. Negatively, it was not “with persuasive words of human wisdom”; but positively, it was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” F. W. Grosheide rightly says, “This does not mean that Paul in his preaching displayed spirit and power, but rather that the Holy Spirit and the power of God manifested themselves in his preaching (1:18, 24).”²⁸

The Apostle Paul in this verse sets forth an important element of his effective ministry among these Corinthian believers. He says, in essence, the reason why you came to faith in Christ was not because of my cleverness of speech or any well-polished oratory skill that I had, but rather it was because when I preached, I did so having the Spirit’s power upon me. David E. Garland, commenting on this verse writes,

Paul did not win them over as the perfect master of the art of oratory. Instead, they were confronted with divine proof, the “demonstration of the Spirit” and power. What is clear is that Paul attributes the Corinthians’ conversion to the powerful intervention of the Spirit...The proof of this power is not the audience’s round of applause for the preacher’s oratorical art, but their changed lives and the formation of a new community.²⁹

1 Thessalonians 1:5

Consider, secondly, 1 Thessalonians 1:5. In this verse, the Apostle Paul is setting forth the external proof of the Thessalonians’ election in Christ when he writes, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” In writing this verse, Paul says that there are two

is a denial of the need of the Spirit’s intervention for supernatural understanding. But prayer without study is presumption. It is the resting of confidence upon a hope never given by God.”

²⁸ F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1953), 61.

²⁹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 86-87.

things that were true of his preaching to these Thessalonian believers. First, his preaching came to them in human words. In other words, the gospel was not communicated to them by some means other than by a human being, namely Paul. Secondly, he wants the Thessalonians to know that his gospel did not come to them in human words only, “but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost.” Again, Paul uses the strong Greek adversative *alla* (“but”) to stress a point of sharp contrast. Yes, these believers should be assured of their election by God because of their reception of God’s Word; but right alongside this truth, they need to understand that the gospel message which they believed was not simply received because of the great speaking powers of a man. Rather, it was believed because when this man preached, he did so in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the blessing of God, so that it was received in “much assurance.”

Paul makes it very clear in this passage that the preaching of mere man unaccompanied by the Spirit’s power will prove ineffective in the lives of those who hear it. Commenting on this passage, D. Edmond Hiebert writes,

The objective fact is that the message came in “power,” with a spiritual dynamic that proved that divine power was operative. As they spoke, the preachers were keenly conscious of the presence of this supernatural power behind their words, which power produced spiritual persuasiveness and penetrating conviction.³⁰

Clearly, all of the aforementioned passages make it plain that if preachers are to expect anything good to result from their preaching, then they need the Holy Spirit’s assistance and power to rest upon them. If in fact our preaching is going to be accompanied by a felt sense that God is among us, ministering His Word to us, then this power of the Spirit must be our portion.

Essential for Preaching

Also, since in and of ourselves we are so feeble and utterly incapable of producing any real spiritual good and lasting change in the lives of those who hear us, perhaps nowhere is this need for the Holy Spirit’s power more keenly felt than if sinners are to be saved and saints sanctified. Spurgeon rightly says,

If there is to be a divine result from God’s Word, the Holy Ghost must go forth with it. As surely as God went before the children of Israel when He divided the Red Sea, as surely as He led them through the wilderness by the pillar of cloud

³⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Indiana: BMH Books, 1971), 57.

and fire, so surely must the Lord's powerful presence go with His Word if there is to be any blessing from it.³¹

John Piper concurs when he says,

How utterly dependent we are on the Holy Spirit in the work of preaching! All genuine preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation. You wake up Sunday morning and you can smell the smoke of hell on one side and feel the crisp breezes of heaven on the other. You go to your study and look down at your pitiful manuscript, and you kneel down and cry, "God, this is so weak! Who do I think I am? What audacity to think that in three hours my words will be the odor of death to death and the fragrance of life to life (2Co 2:16). My God, who is sufficient for these things?"³²

How Can Preachers Experience More of the Holy Spirit?

Having considered Who the Holy Spirit is and some key aspects of His work in relation to the preacher of God, the final question that needs to be asked is, How can preachers of God have more of His ministry in their lives? That we need Him is plain, but *how* we can know more of His work in our lives is not always so plain.³³ This brief survey outlines three key aspects.

Do Not Grieve the Spirit

Firstly, negatively, if we are to know more of the Holy Spirit's ministry resting upon us as preachers of God's Holy Word, then we must be sure that we are not grieving Him. Ephesians 4:30 says, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." That the Holy Spirit can be grieved proves again our initial assertion that He is a person. The word *grieve* here means to cause pain, sorrow, and mourning. The context of verses 25-29 and 31 bear out for us how we might grieve the Spirit, namely by lying, having unrighteous anger, stealing, speaking corrupt words, harboring bitterness, wrath, malice, etc. Addi-

³¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *An All Around Ministry* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1900), 339. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was an influential English Baptist minister who preached weekly to 6,000 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

³² John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 37. Piper is Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, author, and founder of Desiring God Ministries.

³³ Many people throughout the history of the Church have come to erroneous conclusions in attempting to answer this question. I would include such groups as the Montanists (2nd century), some Anabaptists (15th century), the Shakers (17th century), and the Wesleyan Methodists (18th century), who, for example, sought a "second blessing" experience from God.

tionally, He is also grieved when we do not acknowledge Who He is and how desperately we need Him in our lives. These sins and others—including pride, lust, dishonesty, and all uncleanness—must grieve Him as well. We must remember that the Spirit is the *Holy* Spirit, and that He will not be present where unconfessed and unrepentant sin is found. In short, any moral or ethical controversy which we have not resolved with God or men will cause a breach in our communion with the Holy Spirit, and will prevent His ministry from being powerfully at work in our lives and upon our labors.

Do Not Quench the Spirit

Secondly, if we are to know more of the Holy Spirit's ministry resting upon us as preachers of God's Holy Word, then we must be sure that we are not quenching Him. 1 Thessalonians 5:19 says, "Quench not the Spirit." The word *quench* here means, to "put out," as one puts out a fire.³⁴ Of course, we cannot "quench" the Spirit so as to completely "quench Him out," because He is God, as we have seen. Nonetheless, we can certainly quench Him in the sense of hindering or stifling His person and His ministry among us in the corporate gathering of God's people.

Perhaps the best way to get the sense of what the apostle is here commanding us not to do is to translate the verse as "do not pour water on the Holy Spirit's fire." As in the passage considered in Ephesians, no doubt, sin in our lives would surely be one way of quenching the Spirit's ministry among us. In addition, it might be said that the quenching of the Spirit occurs when we hinder His work among us by ignoring or not welcoming His person or presence when we come together as local churches. Perhaps, as various commentators have noted, we have here at Thessalonica an opposite problem from that of Corinth. In Corinth, the people were *overemphasizing* the Spirit; at Thessalonica, they were *underemphasizing* Him. In Corinth Paul had to restrain excesses; in Thessalonica he had to forbid repression.

Ask God for the Spirit

Thirdly then, positively, if we are to know more of the Holy Spirit's ministry resting upon us as preachers of God's Holy Word, we must be sure that we are asking God for the Holy Spirit Himself. Since the Holy Spirit is the One Who illumines the Word of God to us, fills us, and gives us power from on high, we must be sure that we are daily asking God for fresh measures of the Spirit. Luke 11:13

³⁴ Cleon L. Roger Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 481.

says, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Our Lord Jesus in this passage makes an argument from the lesser to the greater to prove a point. According to Jesus in the previous two verses, when a son asks his father for a piece of bread, a fish, or an egg, that father does not give his son a stone, serpent, or scorpion. Jesus argues, “how much more,” then, if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

The great incentive to ask for the Holy Spirit is imbedded in the center of our Lord’s words. He makes the comparison between us, who “are evil,” and God, Who is not, and then says, “ask,” and He will give the Holy Spirit. Based upon our Lord Jesus’ words, the continual giving and supply of the Holy Spirit is for those who *ask*; therefore this is what we must do. We must ask! We must continue to ask! We must never stop asking!

Conclusion

Preachers of the Word of God who would be useful for our Lord Jesus Christ and His church need to prepare themselves for their calling to the Christian ministry. This fact certainly is true. If they are going to be well-equipped preachers of God’s holy truth, then no doubt they must do everything they possible can, humanly speaking, to equip themselves to be men of God who need not “be ashamed” (2Ti 2:15). Nevertheless, as necessary and important as this may be, the minister of God must never forget that his most crucial need as a preacher is that of the Holy Spirit’s ministry resting upon him and all of his pulpit labors. If the preacher is convinced of this, he will be a man that lives uprightly all of his days, because he understands the vital connection between how he lives and the Holy Spirit’s blessings on him. If he is convinced of this, he will be a man who never opens his Bible to study it without first crying to the Lord for help saying, “Send the Spirit to me that I may know your Word aright.” And if he is convinced of this, whenever he goes to the pulpit he will frequently say with Calvin of old, “Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

Brothers, the preacher who does these things can be assured of God’s richest blessing upon all that he does. May God grant that we will be such men!

As we conclude this booklet, Robert L. Reymond said it best when he wrote,

We in the gospel ministry may have the highest academic and professional competence, but the work of our ministry cannot be sustained by an aggregate

of natural gifts, however splendid...No, my beloved yoke-fellows in the ministry of the gospel, God honors that ministry that blazes with the passion and fire of a Spirit-filled heart, and pours out his power upon that ministry.³⁵



³⁵ Robert L. Reymond, *The God Centered Preacher* (Geanies House, Fern, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 122-123.