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EXPOSITOR

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PREACHING *in the* POWER *of the* HOLY SPIRIT

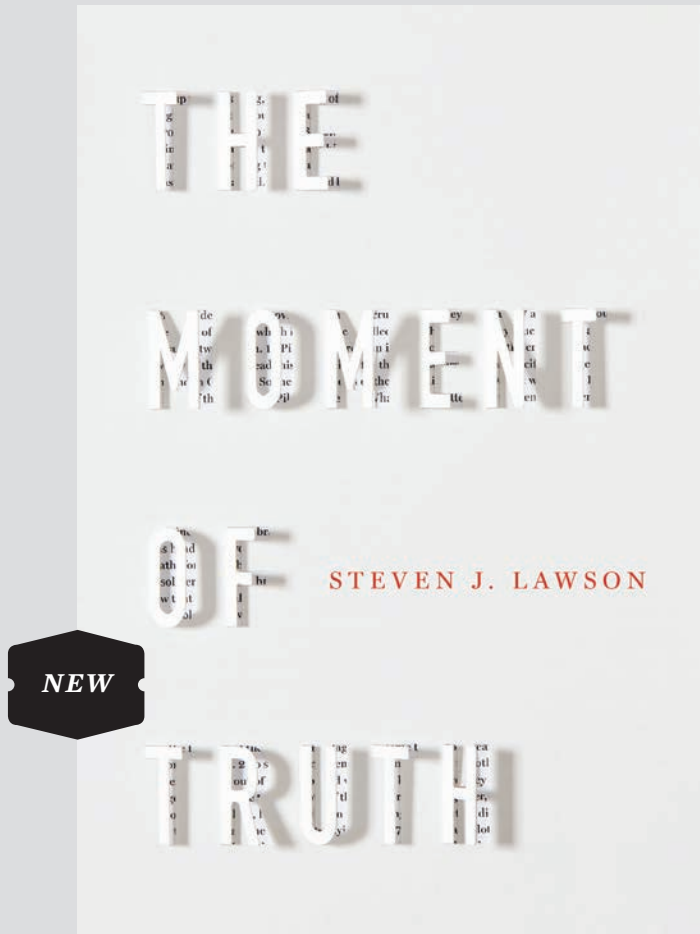
SPECIAL FEATURE

THE R. C. I KNEW

BY STEVEN J. LAWSON



PREACHING • TEACHING • TRAINING



WHAT IS TRUTH?

“What is truth?” Pilate turned to Jesus and asked a profound question. It is a question that continues to be debated in our day. But it is one that God has definitively answered in His written Word and ultimately revealed in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. It has been the duty and privilege of each successive generation of Christians to proclaim the truth of the gospel to a world that desperately needs to hear it. In this collection of sermons, Dr. Steven J. Lawson speaks into our cultural moment, helping Christians and skeptics alike to answer Pilate’s age-old question.

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THE PERSON AND POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

This issue of *Expositor* magazine is focused upon on preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a subject which each one of us needs to experience. Surely this is a reality in which you have felt your great need.

In my own preaching ministry, there have been times when I have been so confident in what I have prepared that my trust has been in myself and in what I have produced. In such cases, the outline seems to be perfect. The manuscript has come together seamlessly. The application and illustrations fit perfectly. The introduction and conclusion are spot on.

As I am getting ready to go to church, I can anticipate how great this sermon is going to be. I know that everything is going go well. But tragically, at times like this, I am not as dependent upon the Lord in prayer as I should be. I am, quite honestly, trusting in myself.

In these moments, even though I was confident beforehand, as I stand in the pulpit to preach, the sermon never seems to flow supernaturally. I stutter and stammer. I trip over my own words. The delivery never matches up to the preparation and study. It seems that I die a thousand deaths publicly.

At other times, though, I struggle to pull my notes together. The outline never seems to be quite sharp enough. The introduction feels a bit awkward. The message sounds disconnected to my ear. It is at times like this that I began to pray with a heightened sense of dependency.

I wake up early on Sunday morning and beg God to intervene and make the sermon what it needs to be. The whole drive to church, I am in a spirit of prayer in which I'm like a drowning man reaching for a rope. Throughout the singing of hymns, my mind is focused upon the help that I need from the Lord. As I stepped into the pulpit, I am consciously aware of my great reliance upon God.

As I begin to speak, however, it is as though the wind of heaven is at my back—I am being propelled forward mysteriously by a supernatural power. This is, unmistakably, the inner working of the Holy Spirit within me. The sermon comes together far better than what my manuscript ever would have indicated. The truth I speak is stated emphatically.



Cross-references flow out of my mouth like a surging river.

When the sermon is over, I know exactly what the difference between the two experiences is. With the latter, there has been a greater clinging to the Lord. I have not been trusting in my own strength, but in the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

This is not to suggest that study in sermon preparation is optional or that preachers should actually aim to be unprepared. But it is to commend that our dependence upon the Holy Spirit is absolutely critical. The difference lies not with my ability, but my sense of need for the Lord.

As you read this issue, I pray that there will be a heightened sense of awareness within you of your great need for the power of the Holy Spirit in your preaching. Such might comes only as we completely rely upon the Lord, confessing our weakness and relying exclusively upon His strength.

My prayer is that you may know this power from the Spirit every time you step into the pulpit and stand before an open Bible. May it be so for all of us who proclaim God's Holy Word. ♦



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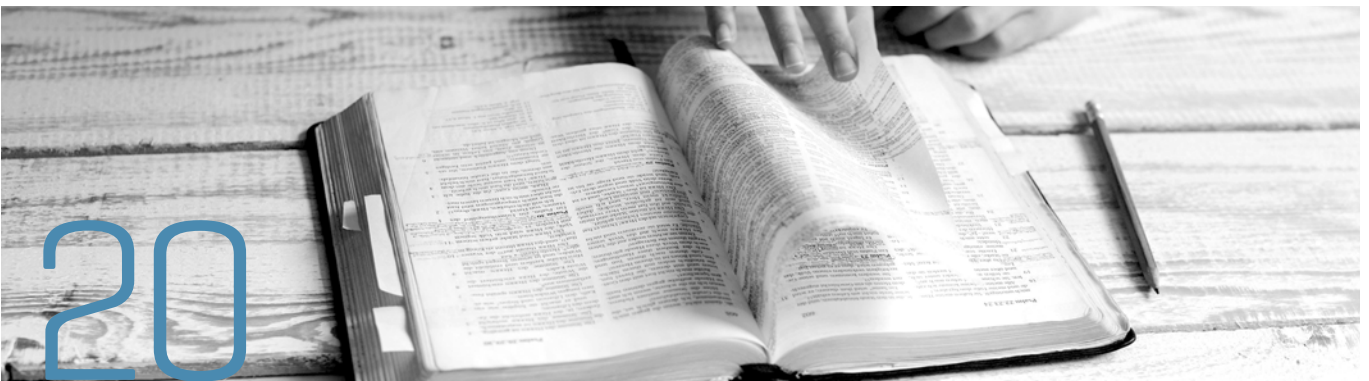
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PREACHING *in the* POWER *of the* HOLY SPIRIT

STEVEN J. LAWSON



Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the renowned Prince of Preachers in nineteenth-century London, understood more than most his constant need for spiritual power as he stepped into the pulpit. This Victorian Baptist was fully convinced that apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit, his spoken words would have no impact upon his listeners. He knew that to enter the pulpit without the power of the Spirit would be to embark upon a task that could not succeed.

When Spurgeon moved his congregation into the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861, it was the largest Protestant house of worship in the world, holding over 6,500 worshippers. As the Sunday morning service began, Spurgeon stood on the lower platform, where he led the congrega-

tion in singing and prayer. When it came time to preach, Spurgeon climbed a series of steps to reach an elevated platform. From this lofty ledge, his voice strong would be clearly heard by his many listeners.

A double spiral staircase led from the lower level to the higher plateau, each stairwell containing fifteen steps. As Spurgeon ascended the pulpit, he felt the heavy weight of his responsibility to God resting squarely upon his burly shoulders. He knew that his every word would be taken down by a stenographer and set to type. The transcript would be placed on his desk the next day for editing and sold by the thousands on the street corners of London as the *Penny Pulpit*. Large bundles of the sermon would be shipped throughout England, where copies would be purchased by fathers and read for family devotions. These sermons by Spurgeon would also be cabled across the ocean for publication abroad to a wider readership.

“I Believe in the Holy Spirit”

Realizing the far-reaching impact of this sermon, Spurgeon reaffirmed his complete trust in God as he mounted the pulpit. As the heavy weight of his stout body came down upon each step, he silently repeated to himself this confession of faith: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Fifteen times he reinforced this personal reliance upon the person and power of the Spirit. Spurgeon knew that apart from this God-given strength, the sermon could not prevail with his listeners.

In an argument from the greater to the lesser, if Spurgeon, who was arguably the most gifted preacher since the apostle Paul, was utterly dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit as he stepped into the pulpit, how much more must everyone else who preaches be dependent upon His divine enablement! No man can effectively preach the Word in his own strength and expect to see spiritual results. Every expositor must be supernaturally empowered to expound the Scripture, or his labor will be, largely, in vain. This is a necessary lesson that every preacher must learn.

Simply put, all preachers are finite, and we must rely upon the infinite power of God in our pulpit ministries. Men of limited strength must rest in the unlimited strength of Jesus Christ. If biblical preaching is to triumph in the hearts of men and women, it must always be in demonstration of the power of the Spirit.

“True Preaching Is God Acting”

Recognizing this need, Martyn Lloyd-Jones has succinctly asserted, “If there is no power, there is no preaching.” That is to say, powerless preaching is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Apart from the empowering of the Spirit, every preacher is merely going through the empty motions of a public presentation of material. Lloyd-Jones explained, “True preaching, after all, is God acting. It is not just a man uttering words; it is God using him. He is being used of God. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.” In other words, true preaching involves God being mightily at work in the delivery of the preacher. True preaching is the Spirit releasing His power in the man who stands in the pulpit. Consequently, if there is no power from God, there is no true preaching.

Moreover, Lloyd-Jones asserted,

It is the Holy Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner. It is an access of power. It is God giving power, and enabling, through the Spirit, to 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



STEVEN J. LAWSON is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master’s Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, and author of over twenty books, including *The Moment of Truth*.

a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works.

That is, if there is no power from God, the man in the pulpit is merely talking. If there is no spiritual power, he is only reciting his notes. If there is no divine power, he is simply parroting what he has studied. If there is no power, his words just lay flat on the surface of his listeners’ ears. This is the sad plight of anyone attempting to preach without supernatural power. Plain and simple, if a preacher’s ministry is to succeed, God must grant him His power.

The Promise of Spiritual Power

Throughout the pages of Scripture, it becomes clear that what Spurgeon confessed and Lloyd-Jones affirmed is true. The Holy Spirit *must* empower the one who declares His Word. The prophets of old certainly understood this. Isaiah said, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners” (Isa 61:1). This promise of the Spirit’s power was initially realized in Isaiah for his prophetic office and was ultimately true of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Luke 4:17–21). Likewise, Ezekiel heard God say to him, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!’ As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me” (Ezekiel 2:1–2). Ezekiel was empowered to prophesy by the energizing work of the Spirit.

On another occasion, an angel appeared to Zerubbabel and spoke these words, “Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6). By this announcement, this angel was declaring the non-negotiable truth that no man can carry out God’s work in his own human strength. Instead, God’s work must be done in God’s strength if it is to know God’s success. Only the power of the Holy Spirit can enable His servants to carry out their ministry assignment effectively. Preaching is no exception to this unbreakable rule.

“The Spirit of God Descending”

This was certainly true in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He entered into this public phase of His life, Jesus stood with John the Baptist in the Jordan River in order to be baptized. It was at that moment that “the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him” (Matt 3:16). This was the Spirit anointing Jesus with power to preach the gospel and carry out His public ministry.

From this moment, “Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt 4:17). Subsequently, “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). He then preached the greatest sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Throughout the remainder of His days upon the earth, Jesus continued to preach the truths of the kingdom of God. It was by the Holy Spirit, who empowered His sinless humanity, that Jesus preached so dynamically. Even Jesus Christ Himself needed to be anointed by the Spirit to preach.

“Clothed with Power from On High”

At the end of His life upon the earth, Jesus charged His disciples to preach the gospel in all the world: “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (Luke 24:46). This global assignment would be an impossible task if they relied on their own limited abilities, especially given the hostile nature of the unbelieving world which, only weeks before, had crucified Jesus. How could this worldwide mission of preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins possibly succeed?

Jesus gave us the answer when He explained, “And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (v. 48). By these words, Jesus declared that He would send the power of the Spirit that the Father

promised. This divine enablement would be absolutely necessary if they were to reach the world with the gospel. After His ascension to heaven and enthronement on high, Jesus promised that He would send the power of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. By this outpouring, His servants will be supernaturally endowed with power to proclaim the good news of salvation to the unbelieving nations. Such a daunting task would necessitate this dynamic power.

“You will receive Power”

In this same commission, Jesus commanded His small band of preachers, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). By these authoritative words, Jesus again promised the power of the Spirit to His disciples. They would definitely need this spiritual empowering if they were to speak His truth with great effect. The fulfillment of these words began on the day of Pentecost, as the apostle Peter was filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4) and preached a sermon that won three thousand souls to Jesus Christ (vv. 14–41). Far beyond his own abilities, Peter was emboldened by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel as never before.

The dynamic power with which Peter preached proved to be overwhelming to the thousands who heard him that day. The sheer force of his proclamation of the truth penetrated through the hardness of their unbelief. How different he was than when he had previously denied the Lord a short time earlier (John 18:15–18, 25–27). As Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, everything was now different. His recall of Scripture was lightning quick. His citing of the Word cut deeply into the hearts of those resistant. The strength of his argument, that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, conquered their proud hearts. He announced that the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament had come.

Throughout the book of Acts, the preaching of the apostles and others remained primary. One out of every four verses in Acts is either a summary of a sermon or a direct witness they gave that had the force of a sermon. The Spirit endowed these early disciples with abundant power to preach the divine person and saving work of Jesus Christ. Though the title of the book most often reads “The Acts of the Apostles,” the book could be best described as “The Preaching of the Apostles,” carried in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every time Acts states that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, it specifies that they immediately spoke the gospel with boldness (Acts 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 7:55; 8:17; 9:17; 11:15; 13:9, 52). The inevitable result of being under the

GOD SUPPLIES IN ABUNDANT MEASURE THE ENABLING GRACE THAT PREACHERS NEED TO PROCLAIM THE WORD.

control of the Spirit was openly proclaiming the Word. Whenever the Spirit gripped them, their mouths were opened to declare the message of salvation. This cause-and-effect relationship is certain to occur. Whenever they were filled by the Holy Spirit, they received power to bear witness of Jesus Christ. This is the inseparable relationship between the Holy Spirit and spiritual power being given to His preachers. God supplies in abundant measure the enabling grace that preachers need to proclaim the Word.

The Need for Spiritual Power

Why is this spiritual power so greatly needed in the ministry of the preacher? Is not the power of the Scripture itself sufficient to carry out the assignment to preach? Has not the sovereign Spirit come into the world to convict, call, and regenerate the lost souls of the elect? What more could be needed?

God Works through Means

Lest we fall into the deep abyss of fatalism, let us remember that not only has God appointed the end of all things, but He has also appointed the means by which these ends will be accomplished. The truth is, God has chosen to principally work through human instrumentality. Among these various means, it pleases God to work through weak messengers who know their own powerlessness to preach the Word. Those who rely upon Him, He empowers to preach His Word. God has purposed to carry out His sovereign will by using weak vessels who are divinely enabled to proclaim the truth. By this means, He receives all the glory.

In the Upper Room, Jesus maintained this very truth to His disciples. He instructed them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these will he do; because I go to the Father” (John 14:12). By this, Jesus did not mean that these men would perform greater works in *quality* than He

had accomplished during His earthly ministry. Those who heard Jesus rightly concluded that never did a man speak as Jesus did (John 7:46). Instead, they would perform greater works in *extent*. That is to say, they would preach the gospel in far more places with far greater results. As we have already noted, this was seen on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached and three thousand souls were saved. Jesus never preached a sermon with such results. Under the apostles’ preaching, thousands more would be converted.

There were specific means by which God chose to perform these greater works through the apostles He had chosen. The first means of grace was through their prayer (John 14:13–14), and the second was through their obedience to love one another (John 14:15). The third means of grace was through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be on you” (John 14:16–17). The Spirit would be their Helper, who would enable them to carry out the ministry of preaching that was entrusted to them.

“You Can Do Nothing”

The power of the Holy Spirit would be so necessary that without it, they could accomplish nothing of any lasting and eternal effect. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Apart from His sufficiency flowing into their lives by the indwelling Spirit, they could accomplish no genuine spiritual success. Only by the all-sufficient strength that the Spirit provides could they do anything in the lives of others.

In largest measure, the promised fruit that the apostles

will bear originates with their preaching ministry. In the same Upper Room discourse, Jesus explained, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain” (John 15:16). That is to say, there would be in their ministries a harvest of people who would be won to Christ by their gospel preaching. In other words, Jesus chose them in order that they would bear fruit that will remain throughout eternity. This was principally accomplished through their Spirit-empowered preaching.

The Nature of Spiritual Power

Specifically, what will the Holy Spirit do in the preacher as He carries out His sacred work in the pulpit? Below I will survey various aspects of the empowering work of the Spirit in the one who proclaims the Word of God. This list is not comprehensive, but only a small representation of what the Spirit does in the preacher whom He endues with power.

Increased Insight into Scripture

When Spirit-filled, the preacher is enabled to see his biblical text with understanding and with unusual clarity of thought. He is divinely empowered to grasp the truth he is preaching with an even greater focus and deeper comprehension. Under the influence of the Spirit, the truth of the passage becomes much clearer in his mind. In the preaching moment, he is enabled to see with an even greater penetrating vision the truth he is expounding.

This is the realization of for what the psalmist prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Ps 119:18). This author knew that God must give him a greater capacity to perceive with understanding the truths contained in the written Word. He asks for spiritual insight that exceeds his natural abilities to see. He asks for an eye-opening experience as he studies and stands to preach. This is a prayer that God delights to answer.

Again, the psalmist pleads, “Make me understand the way of Your precept” (Ps 119:27). The fulfillment of this request is what every expositor should pray for. We must be God-taught men before we can teach others. Again, the psalmist asks God, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes” (Psalm 119:33, cf. v. 12). This is a prayer for the increased apprehension of truth that only God can give. This certainly does not negate the preacher’s responsibility to study the Scripture. But it does underscore the reality that only the Author of sacred Scripture, the Holy Spirit, can be our primary Teacher.

Lloyd-Jones agrees when he maintains, “You will find that the Spirit who has helped you in your preparation may now help you, while you are speaking, in an entirely new way, and open things out to you which you had not seen while you were preparing your sermon.” That is, the truth never appears so obvious as when the Spirit-filled preacher is standing in the pulpit. His spiritual eyes are illumined, as an ever greater intensity of divine light is shining upon his open Bible. As he stands to preach, he sees the truth with increased perspicuity. This God-given enlightenment can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit, who grants the preacher penetrating vision into the truth. This is the direct result of the increased light that the Spirit is shining upon his text.

Immediate Recall of Scripture

Moreover, the Holy Spirit gives to the preacher an accelerated capacity to remember what he has previously studied. The Spirit brings to the forefront of his mind what he has read in preparation for this message and what he has written in his notes. As he stands in the pulpit, his mind is unusually stimulated to recall what he has discovered in his study and intended to deliver in this sermon. To be sure, the Spirit will not enable us to remember what we have not previously studied. This sudden recall is not a mystical, existential experience. The Spirit will only draw to our attention what we



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have already considered. The Holy Spirit does not remind us of what we do not know. This ministry of the Spirit is no substitute for the diligent study of the Word. But He loves to pull forward to our thinking what we have previously deposited.

This is much the reality of what Jesus promised His disciples, “You will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:18–20). This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in His preachers, enabling them to remember what has been taught to them.

In this manner, the Spirit also brings to the preacher’s remembrance what he has learned over an entire lifetime of study. Truths studied long ago are suddenly brought back to the forefront of his thinking. The Spirit will bring to mind what has been studied many months past. It is an amazing thing how the Holy Spirit refreshes the memory of the preacher to recall truths that were learned even several years or decades ago.

In so doing, the Holy Spirit gives the preacher an uncanny ability to remember and recite specific passages of Scripture. These texts flash into his mind and bolster what he is saying. In that moment, the Spirit will reinsert in the preacher’s thinking a biblical passage that establishes the point that he is making. It may be a particular biblical text that has not been read or studied for some time. But at precisely that instant, the supporting passage of Scripture is resurrected in the preacher’s mind and comes out of his mouth in an instant.

In my own preaching, I have experienced this unexpected recall of Scripture in the midst of a sermon. A biblical citation that was not included in my sermon notes is suddenly brought into my mind, and I am enabled to quote it with remarkable precision. This referencing of Scripture far exceeds my otherwise normal ability to recall a passage. As I stand in the pulpit, a text of Scripture instantaneously flashes into my mind. In the heat of the moment, it quickly comes out of my mouth. It is inevitably a verse that drives home the truth I am stressing. Quite frankly, it is a verse that makes the point better than what is in my notes. Only God at work within me could have done this.

Deepened Convictions in the Truth

Further, the Holy Spirit also deepens the convictions of the preacher in the truth. When emboldened by the Spirit, he never believes the Scripture more deeply and holds to it more strongly than when he stands in the pulpit. His

certainty about the truth is greatly intensified. His adherence to sound doctrine is solidified. His assurance of the reliability of Scripture is all the more galvanized. In this moment, he holds to the tenets of the faith with an even stronger grasp. As he stands before an open Bible, the Spirit makes him more resolute than ever. Such a preacher may normally be introverted or reticent. But in the pulpit, he becomes as bold as a lion and roars the truth. Otherwise naturally soft spoken, he suddenly becomes outspoken with an unwavering confidence.

Outside of the pulpit, this man may be somewhat hesitant to speak up. He may even be reclusive and shy. But while preaching, he is ready to confront the world with the truth. While delivering the sermon, there is not a hesitant bone in his body. He is emboldened and ready to storm the gates of hell. He is a frontline warrior and a force for God. The introvert has become an extrovert. The withdrawn personality has become fearless and audacious. He holds nothing back. He has been set free from any fear of man. By the Spirit’s emboldening, he stands assured as an emphatic, even dogmatic preacher for the Lord.

This was certainly the case with Stephen as he stood before the Sanhedrin. He was “full of the Spirit” and, thus, “full of grace and power” (Acts 6:3, 5, 8). As he addressed these unconverted religious leaders, he became lionhearted with a depth of conviction that emboldened him even in the face of his own martyrdom. Not only did he have an extraordinary recall of the Scripture (Acts 7:2–53), but he was made by God to be unwavering in the truth as they viciously opposed him. He was “full of the Spirit” (Acts 7:55) and remained resolute in his stance for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an empowering that can only come from God by His Spirit.

This is precisely how the apostle Paul preached. When he came to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, he explained, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5). True, it had come in word. But it also came in the power of the Holy Spirit that showed itself with a deep certainty that the gospel would radically change human lives. This was the firmly grounded confidence the Holy Spirit gave the apostle as he preached in Thessalonica and elsewhere.

By this Spirit-given confidence, the preacher is made immovable in his convictions, more than he may otherwise be. Everything seems so certain. The cross is seen to be all the more necessary. Heaven seems all the more desirable. Hell appears all the more dreadful. Every biblical truth is all the more believed. He cannot hold back its proclamation. These truths preached come out of the depths of his

soul. Never does he believe more strongly as when he stands to preach. Even a mild-mannered man expresses what he believes without any hesitation.

Enlarged Love for People

At this same time, the Spirit-empowered preacher is given an increased love for those to whom he speaks. As he steps into the pulpit, his heart is enlarged more than at any other time. He is given deeper affections for people. He feels an intensified passion for their spiritual good. All genuine love is produced by the Holy Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22). Without this love, all preaching is profitless. Paul writes, “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). The Holy Spirit must give such genuine concern for those whom the preacher addresses if the sermon is to succeed in their hearts.

Under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, the preacher feels a new depth of love for those to whom he preaches. He suddenly becomes gripped with an overwhelming desire for their spiritual development. Perhaps otherwise stoic or aloof, this man now groans within himself for the spiritual good of those to whom he preaches. He finds himself more sensitive to their needs. He is truly concerned that Christ be formed within them (Gal 4:19). A new wave of compassion and longing for their spiritual development fills his soul.

In the pulpit, the Spirit-empowered preacher cannot abuse this opportunity for selfish gain. Under the Spirit’s power, he dies to self. He cannot manipulate people for his own benefit. Instead, he must sacrifice himself for the good of his listeners. He submits himself afresh to the higher purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives. The Spirit causes him to abandon self-centered ambition and thoughts of personal flattery. He believes that the God whom he preaches will do much good to those to whom he proclaims the Word. He cannot rest until those to whom he preaches rest in God.

Enhanced Persuasion with People

The Spirit-filled preacher is a persuasive preacher as he proclaims the Word of God. He is never content to merely allow his listeners have a “take it or leave it” attitude with the truth. He understands that the presentation of the truth is never an end in itself. He knows the Scripture he preaches is only a means to a greater end. His listeners must not only learn the truth, but live it. The Spirit-directed preacher knows that the goal is not mere information, but transformation. With this in mind, the divinely empowered minister is relentlessly trying to win people to Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul was certainly filled with the Spirit. Therefore, he was an intentionally persuasive preacher. He writes,

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11). This word “persuade” (*peithō*) means, “to convince, to induce one by words to believe, to seek to win one, to move one to do something.” Under the influence of the Spirit, this was the goal of the preaching of Paul. He was relentless in his aim to capture the hearts and lives of those to whom he preached. The Holy Spirit persuaded him to persuade others. It is always this way for a preacher.


When Paul came to Corinth, he was intentionally “trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). He was not merely teaching them. More than that, he was trying to move them to believe in Christ. Those who heard Paul preach accused him, “This man persuades men to worship God” (Acts 18:13). Even his adversaries understood how persuasive he was with men. In Asia, Paul’s opponents acknowledged, “this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people” (Acts 19:26). Agrippa confessed to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28). When imprisoned in Rome under house arrest, Paul received large numbers to whom he spoke, and it was said that he was “trying to persuade them concerning Jesus” (Acts 28:23). Wherever Paul went and to whomever he spoke, he was persuasive.

Such persuasion in preaching is one distinguishing mark of a Spirit-empowered man. Such a preacher becomes aggressive in his efforts to move his listeners to believe in Jesus Christ. He cannot have a *laissez faire* attitude that comes across as nonchalant. A Spirit-filled preacher will not be casually calm in the pulpit. Instead, he will be assertive in order to urge his listeners toward Christ.

Thus, the Spirit-empowered preacher will be impelled to challenge the listeners to whom he preaches. By God’s direction, such a preacher will become more aggressive to win his listeners to follow Jesus Christ. He will challenge his listeners to pursue Him. He will capture their attention with the gospel. He *must* have a hearing with them. He is convincing in presenting the truth. His listeners must not only receive what he expounds, but receive it wholeheartedly. Such a preacher will challenge his listeners until all have believed. He is not content simply to know the truth. Nor is he satisfied that the truth is merely acknowledged as such. His listeners must act upon the message he proclaims.

Intensified Burden for Conversions

A Spirit-filled preacher will be gripped with a burden to win the souls of men and women to the truth of Scripture. The lost condition of his listeners will weigh heavily upon him. Under the influence of the Spirit, he will be greatly concerned that the unconverted be won to the truth of Scripture. Though he knows he leaves the results with God, this



HOW CAN ANYONE CARRY OUT THE EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGE OF PREACHING? THE ANSWER LIES NOT IN THE PREACHER HIMSELF. THE ANSWER IS FOUND IN THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO INDWELLS HIM.

Spirit-empowered preacher will still long for people to be brought to faith in Christ. He must gain a positive reception for the truth. His message must be believed. This is the heavy weight that his soul feels.

This same strong desire to reach souls for Christ was expressed by the apostle Paul when he wrote, “I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart” (Rom 9:2). His burden was to reach his lost fellow Jews for Christ. He said, “I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). This is in the same chapter in which he lays out his case for sovereign election. After stating that God is the Potter and all humanity the clay from which God makes vessels of destruction and vessels of mercy, Paul added, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation” (Rom 10:1). Even in the face of divine determinism, Paul was intensely burdened that all would come to faith in Jesus Christ.

This is precisely how the Holy Spirit makes every preacher feel burdened to win those to whom he speaks. He must not only faithfully convey the truth of the Word of God, but present the truth as only a means to a greater end. The truth of the Word must be believed by those who hear him. This man of God will not rest until the gospel is believed. This is the unceasing burden carried by every Spirit-filled preacher.

“God Gave His Holy Spirit

How can anyone carry out the extraordinary challenge of

preaching? The answer lies not in the preacher himself. The answer is found in the Holy Spirit who indwells him. God must fuel the fire within him in order to empower him to preach with supernatural power. It was John Knox, the great Scottish Reformer, who said, “God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance.” This is the only explanation for how any man has the ability to be a preacher who is mightily used by God. The greatness lies not in the man. The power is given by the One who lives within and lords over him. The power comes from the indwelling Spirit who enables His servants to proclaim the Word.

Under the control of the Spirit, the preacher is supernaturally enabled to speak with an ease of words. He is given an ease of utterance and an ease of expression. What he attempts to say flows out of him with rapidly and smoothly. Lloyd-Jones explains that the Spirit gives “clarity of speech” with an “ease of utterance.” With little effort, God is giving him this quickened manner of speech.

So indispensable is this spiritual power in preaching that Spurgeon confided, “It were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit.” May the Lord give the fullness of His Spirit to every preacher of His Word. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers His servants to succeed in the mission to which they are called. May it be so in each of our preaching. ✦

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the POWER OF PREACHING

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN



Andrew Fuller is remembered for many things: his defense of the free offer of the gospel and his missional theology, his ardent defense of classical Christianity and keen rebuttal of major theological errors thrown up in the wake of the British Enlightenment (like Deism and Socinianism), the key role that he played as the secretary of the fledgling Baptist Missionary Society from 1793 till his death in 1815, his remarkable ability for sustaining vital Christian friendships with men like William Carey (1761–1834). Preaching, though, is not something for which he is usually remembered. Yet, after his official call to the pastoral ministry of Soham Baptist Church in 1775 at the age of twenty-one, there were few Sundays that he did not preach between then and his death forty years later. Possibly one

reason why he is often overlooked in surveys of the history of preaching is that, according to his early biographer and one-time friend, John Webster Morris (1763–1836), Fuller

had none of that easy elocution, none of that graceful fluency, which melts upon the ear, and captivates the attention of an auditor. His enunciation was laborious and slow; his voice strong and heavy; occasionally plaintive, and capable of an agreeable modulation. He had none of that eloquence which consists in a felicitous selection of terms, or in the harmonious construction of periods; he had a boldness in his manner, a masculine delivery, and great force of expression.

And yet, as Morris admitted, Fuller turned out to be a popular preacher; by the close of his ministry, a thousand or so would regularly attend his preaching in Kettering.

More positively, Morris did note that Fuller's "preaching was distinguished for depth of thought, a fulness of scriptural truth, and great perspicacity and force . . . It was like a blazing torch in the midst of the churches." Fuller also preached in a day when there were a number of pulpit celebrities, including his friend, the inimitable Robert Hall, Jr. (1764–1831), the memory of whose preaching overshadowed that of many others like Fuller.

Whatever the reasons for the "forgotten heritage" of Fuller's sermonic corpus, it is evident from various sources, including a large number of extant ordination sermons, that Fuller gave much thought to the significance and nature of preaching in pastoral ministry. The following article seeks to isolate one aspect of Fuller's thinking about preaching, as necessary in his day as it is in ours: divine unction.

"Full of the Holy Spirit"

Thomas McKibbens, Jr. finds the following description by Fuller from a letter to his close friend John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825) to be a helpful summary of his thinking about the task of the preacher. Fuller is writing about the students under Ryland's care at Bristol Baptist Academy, where Ryland had been the principal since 1793: "I wish they may so believe and feel and preach the truth, as to find their message an important reality, influencing their own souls and the souls of others." If the preacher's own life and that of his hearers is to be shaped by the "important reality" of the Scriptures, he needs to "believe and feel" the truth he preaches. But from whence comes this power to "believe and feel"? For Fuller, it is incontestable that there is only one source, namely, the indispensable presence of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Fuller's lengthiest discussion of this element of preaching is found in one of his earliest ordination sermons. Based on Acts 11:24, it was preached at the ordination of Robert Fawcner on October 31, 1787, in Thorn, Bedfordshire. The context of this verse in Acts was the ministry of Barnabas at Antioch. The verse itself described Barnabas as "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith," and then added right after this description "and much people was added to the Lord" (KJV).

In his sermon, Fuller first explained the implications of the description of Barnabas as a "good man." He then turned to the phrase "full of the Holy Spirit." Fuller understood this to mean that Barnabas was "full of those fruits of the Spirit mentioned" in Galatians 5:22–23 and was, as it were, "overcome . . . with the holy influences and fruits of the blessed Spirit." A pastor, in other words, had to be a man whose inner life was being deeply shaped by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. Fuller went on to



MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN is professor of church history and biblical spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. He is also Director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies.

equate this to what is described in 1 John 2:20 as "an unction from the Holy One" and observe that such an anointing was vital for pastoral ministry.

In Fuller's mind, there were five ways in which this unction shapes a pastor's life. First of all, it enabled the pastor "to enter into the spirit of the gospel" and to rightly understand the truths at the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, Fuller was convinced that if Christians in general "had more of the Holy Spirit of God in their hearts," there would be far less friction between them concerning such great truths as "the loveliness of the Divine character," "the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the total depravity of mankind, the proper Deity and atonement of Christ, justification by faith in his name, the freeness and sovereignty of grace, and the agency of the Holy Spirit." All of these truths had come into dispute in eighteenth-century England as a result of the rationalism of the British Enlightenment and, Fuller implied, only the Holy Spirit's presence could protect the pastor against speculations aroused by this corrosive rationalism. Little wonder he urged Fawcner to make Psalm 51:11 his prayer: "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

Second, Fuller was convinced that "being full of the Holy Spirit" will lead a preacher to use the very words of Holy Scripture that the Holy Spirit has inspired rather than various alternatives which, while they might be more familiar to the ears of the preacher's audience, nonetheless subtly change the meaning of what is being communicated. Examples of such sermonic substitutions from his own day, according to Fuller, were to use "morality" in place of "holiness," "virtue" instead of "godliness," "good men" for "believers [and] saints," or to replace "communion with

THE SPIRIT'S ANOINTING WILL BE SEEN IN A HARMONY BETWEEN WHAT A MAN PREACHES AND INCULCATES FROM THE PULPIT AND HOW HE LIVES HIS LIFE.

God” with “happiness of mind.” If such substitutions become the norm, Fuller reasoned, it will result in “the gospel heathenized, and will tend to heathenize the minds” of both the preacher and hearer. For Fuller, the Spirit’s help is not only vital in the discernment of biblical truth, but also in its communication: “spiritual things will be spiritually discerned, and if spiritually discerned, will be spiritually communicated.”

The anointing of the Holy Spirit will thus give a man a desire to speak in the very language used by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. As Fuller told Fawcner: the more you are filled with “an unction from the Holy One, the greater relish you will possess for that savory manner of conveying truth” as found in terms drawn directly from the Bible. Fuller’s use of affective terms here—“relish,” “savory”—is noteworthy. It is obvious that, for Fuller, the infilling of the Holy Spirit is closely tied to the creation of a spiritual appetite.

Then, the Spirit’s anointing will be seen in a harmony between what a man preaches and inculcates from the pulpit and how he lives his life, for, and here Fuller cited Proverbs 17:7 as proof: “Excellent speech becometh not a fool.” Fourth, this anointing will “give a spiritual savor” to the minister’s speech as he visits the members of his church and will enable him to love them. Finally, the Spirit’s infilling will impart to the minister “a meek, mild, peaceful, humble spirit.” It is noteworthy that these final three effects of the Spirit’s anointing concern more than simply the act of sermon preparation and its delivery. The unction of the Spirit, in Fuller’s thinking, does not simply relate to empowerment in preaching, but has an effect upon the whole of the preacher’s life and ministry.

“Eminent Spirituality in a Minister”

After discussing what it meant for Barnabas to be “full of faith,” Fuller closed Fawcner’s ordination sermon with a discussion of the final phrase of Acts 11:24, “and much people was added to the Lord.” He discerned that Luke’s placement of this phrase immediately after his description of Barnabas was intended to lead the reader to draw a connection between Barnabas’ character and his success as a minister.

Fuller was unwilling to argue that ministerial success is automatically dependent upon spirituality. In other words, he was convinced, as was most of western Christianity after the fourth-century Donatist controversy, that “the quality and state of he who administers the sacraments and the Word of God . . . did not have an influence on its efficacy.” Nevertheless, Fuller did believe that ministerial “want of usefulness is often to be ascribed to . . . want of spirituality, much oftener than to . . . want of talents.” He thus laid it down as a rule: “eminent spirituality in a minister is usually attended with eminent usefulness,” where “eminent spirituality” is to be understood in light of what Fuller has already said about the fullness of the Holy Spirit/the Holy Spirit’s anointing.

Such “eminent spirituality” was manifest in three ways. First, it is characterized by a “holy love to Christ and the souls of men.” For illustration, Fuller turned to three examples from the Old Testament—Hezekiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. He knew of many other notable examples, but he was running short on time, so he had to say:

Time would fail me to speak of all the great souls, both inspired and uninspired, whom the King of kings has

delighted to honor: of Paul, and Peter, and their companions; of [John] Wickliff, and [Martin] Luther, and [John] Calvin, and many others at the Reformation; of [John] Elliot, and [Jonathan] Edwards, and [David] Brainerd, and [George] Whitefield, and hundreds more whose names are held in deserved esteem in the church of God. These were men of God; men who had great grace, as well as gifts; whose hearts burned in love to Christ and the souls of men. They looked upon their hearers as their Lord had done upon Jerusalem, and wept over them.

This list of Fuller's heroes reflects his catholicity and willingness to look beyond his own Calvinistic Baptist heritage for models in ministry. And yet it bears noting that, after the death of his close friend Samuel Pearce (1766–1799) of Birmingham, Fuller did not hesitate to recommend this Calvinistic Baptist pastor as a model preacher. As he stated in a later ordination sermon with regard to the way in which the gospel should be preached:

Consider the examples held up for your imitation. You have Peter...Paul...John... Nay, more—you have Christ. Nor have you examples in distant ages only; but you have seen some, even among you . . . Pearce!

"Eminent spirituality" also produces an ardency for "the glory of God, and the welfare of men's souls," which are "ends which God himself pursues." As Fuller pithily observed in another ordination sermon, "a cold manner" in preaching "disgraces important truth." Third, "eminent spirituality" is accompanied by a genuine humility. In fact, Fuller wondered if "one considerable reason why most of us have no more real success in our work than we have" is because "we have not grace enough to bear prosperity."

"The Presence of Christ"

A second ordination sermon in which Fuller deals with the spiritual anointing needed by pastors is a much smaller text, and more typical of the sermons of Fuller that survive, for Fuller rarely wrote out a full manuscript before preaching. Neither the date nor context of this ordination sermon is known. Fuller's text on the occasion was the benediction of 2 Timothy 4:22, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit." The blessing in view here, Fuller explained, is nothing less than "communion with Christ," the "unction by which we know all things" (an allusion to 1 John 2:20), and the source of grace in the life of any true pastor.

Fuller delineated four implications of this blessing/communion/anointing—without which nothing can be done for Christ. First, it leads the minister to "delight in the

doctrine of Christ." In other words, his preaching is solidly Christ-centered. As Fuller noted about such preaching in another ordination sermon:

We preach "Christ Jesus the Lord." This is the grand theme of the Christian ministry. . . . Preach Christ, or you had better be any thing than a preacher. . . . If you preach Christ, you need not fear for want of matter. His person and work are rich in fullness.

Then, this blessing or anointing "gives a divine energy to our preaching." Such "energy," Fuller hastened to point out, is quite different from "the greatest eloquence," for the latter is never "a means of conversion" or conviction. Fuller found biblical evidence for this assertion in the preaching of Stephen (Acts 6:10), Apollos (Acts 18:25, 28), and Paul (1 Cor 2:4), where the common factor is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Third, this anointing or blessing will make pastoral visitation "savory and useful." Finally, this anointing is needed to withstand the various trials involved in pastoral ministry: the way that God's people grieve their leaders—Fuller does not say anything about church leaders grieving the congregation, though this also happens—and hurt each other; and the way that some of the church members reject their pastor's doctrinal views or criticize aspects of his mode of living. Again, it is noteworthy that Fuller does not restrict the anointing of the Spirit to a sermonic context. It must accompany the Christian leader throughout the various areas of his life.

"Very Affecting" but not "Enthusiastic"

In the judgment of Edwin Dargan, the early twentieth-century Southern Baptist historian of preaching, Fuller was "a strong expounder of the Scriptures," but his sermons contain "little warmth—no heat; imagination is scarcely in evidence at all; and 'flights of eloquence' nowhere appear." Dargan, of course, never actually heard Fuller preach. A member of Fuller's congregation by the name of George Wallis who regularly sat under Fuller's preaching described it in his diary as "very affecting and evangelical."

Fuller himself actually decried preaching "without feeling," for, he asked, "how can we display the evil of sin, the love of Christ, or any other important truth, unless we feel it?" Again, he could tell a newly ordained pastor, the "gospel is a message of love, and therefore it ought to be preached with great affection." The preacher, both in his preparation to preach and the preaching itself, must pursue these tasks with genuine heart-felt and heart-burning ardor. The place where such ardor was kindled was in private prayer.

“Walking with God in the closet,” Fuller once noted in an ordination sermon on John 5:35, “is a grand means, with his blessing, of illuminating our minds and warming our hearts.” And it was in these times of private prayer that Fuller presumably expected the minister to pray for, among other things, the anointing of the Spirit.


At the heart of Fuller’s understanding of preaching, then, was that it must be grounded in ardent love—for God and for people—but like many others in the eighteenth century, he was opposed to what that era called “enthusiasm,” that is, the assertion of spiritual affections without the Spirit-given means. For instance, Fuller emphasized that the anointing of the Spirit did not relieve the preacher of study. “It is a shameful abuse of the doctrine of Divine influence,” he asserted, “to allege it as a reason for neglecting diligent study for the pulpit.” Spirituality and learning were not mutually exclusive. What Fuller prized was the commingling of both. He stated as much in an address given in the final years of his life to the students of what was then called the “Baptist Academical Institution at Stepney” in London, established in 1810:

To what is it owing that some of our churches have been prejudiced against an educated ministry? I may be told, to their ignorance; and in part it is so; but in part it is owing to other causes. The lightness, the vanity, the foppery, and the irreligion of some young men have produced not only this effect, but an abhorrence of the very worship of God, as by them administered. Who were ever known to be prejudiced against [Samuel] Pearce, a [Benjamin] Francis, or a [Benjamin] Beddome, on account of their education? If there were individuals of this description, let them be disregarded

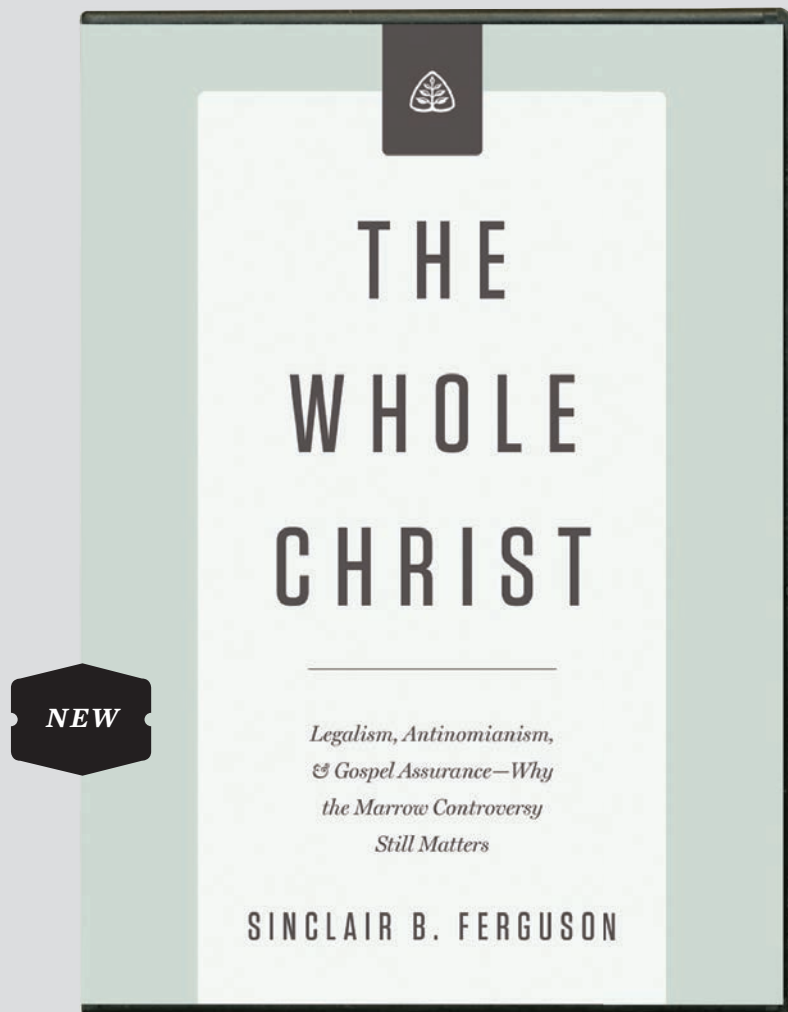
as ignorant, and let them be told that vicious characters are found among the uneducated as well as the educated. But be it your concern, my dear young men, to shun these evils. The instructions which you receive, if consecrated to Christ, will be a blessing to you; but if your object be to shine before men, they will be a curse.

There were some in the English Baptist congregations of Fuller’s day who were deeply suspicious of learning because they had encountered seminary students who were marked by “vanity, . . . foppery, and . . . irreligion.” But that was no reason to reject learning, Fuller argued. He then cited the examples of three remarkable eighteenth-century Baptists whom he had personally known—Samuel Pearce, Benjamin Francis (1734–1799) of Horsley, and Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795) of Bourton-on-the-Water—all three of whom were graduates of Bristol Baptist Academy but all of whom were known for their preaching and piety. Learning per se was no impediment to spiritual unction, as these three men clearly demonstrated.

Fuller himself did not have formal theological education, but that did not prevent him from using his God-given abilities to become a first-rate preacher of God’s Word. As the nineteenth-century doyen of homiletics, John A. Broadus, noted, although “Andrew Fuller . . . had practically no knowledge of the original languages [of the Bible], . . . his interpretations of Scripture are clear and safe in a degree very rarely surpassed.” But, as we have seen in this essay, there is another reason for the impact of Fuller’s preaching, namely, what he had described in 1787 in the Thorn Baptist meeting-house as “eminent spirituality.” ♦



AT THE HEART OF FULLER'S
UNDERSTANDING OF PREACHING WAS
THAT IT MUST BE GROUNDED IN ARDENT
LOVE—FOR GOD AND FOR PEOPLE.



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the HOLY SPIRIT and the UNIQUE POWER OF PREACHING

JOSEPH A. PIPA

The Bible teaches that preaching has a unique function; God applies His accomplished redemption through preaching. In *The Preacher's Portrait*, John Stott wrote that preaching is the applicatory act of redemption:

It is by preaching that God makes past history a present reality. The cross was, and will always remain, a unique historical event of the past. And there it will remain, in the past, in the books, unless God himself makes it real and relevant to men today. It is by preaching, in which he makes his appeal to them through men, that God accomplishes this miracle. He opens their eyes to see its true meaning, its eternal value and its abiding merit. "Preaching," writes Dr. Mounce, "is that timeless link between God's great

redemptive Act and man's apprehension of it. It is the medium through which God contemporizes his historic self-disclosure and offers man the opportunity to respond in faith." But it is more even than this. God not only confronts men through the preacher's proclamation; he actually saves men through it as well. This St. Paul states categorically: "Since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of the *kerygma* (preaching) to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21). Similarly, the gospel is itself "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom 1:16, 17).

Preaching, therefore, is the chief means of grace and should occupy the central place of the church's ministry. The Heidelberg Catechism points out that preaching is part of the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven:

Q. 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?
A. The preaching of the holy gospel and church discipline, by these two the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and closed to unbelievers.

Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel? A. According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them.

The Westminster Divines highlighted the importance of preaching in the Larger Catechism:

Q. 155. How is the word made effectual to salvation?
A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation."

To accomplish this function, God adorned preaching with a unique authority. When a commissioned man preaches the infallible Word of God, God the Spirit takes the spoken proclamation of the divine, inerrant Word of God and speaks uniquely through him. As Marcel said in *The Relevance of Preaching*:

In other words, preaching is not an empty noise, but a power; not a pure and simple declaration of his will, but indeed the very accomplishment of that will (Isa 55:11). Such is the testimony of Christ and the scriptures concerning the preached word, which, by its very nature as word of God, is and remains as effective as the word by which God creates and sustains the world or that word by which Christ calms the tempest (Mark 4:39), heals the sick (Matt 9:6), casts out demons (Matt 8:16), and raises the dead (Luke 7:14; 8:54; John 5:25, 28; 11:43; etc.). The word by which God works in the oral and spiritual realms by the preaching of the gospel is equally effectual and powerful, because, under his



JOSEPH A. PIPA is president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Taylors, SC where he is also professor of historical and systematic theology. He is the author of numerous books and articles.

orders and by virtue of his will, it is a word of God.

The Reformers' position on the unique authority of preaching is summarized in the Second Helvetic Confession, chapter one: "Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be feigned nor to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; who, although he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God abides true and good." Chapter eighteen, concerning when evil ministers should be heard, states, "For we know that the voice of Christ is to be heard, though it be out of the mouths of evil ministers; forasmuch as the Lord himself said, 'All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works.' (Matt 23:3)."

For preaching to accomplish God's purpose, however, the Holy Spirit must act in a unique way. Paul wrote that preaching possesses this divine efficacy when blessed by the Holy Spirit: "And my speech (*logos*) and my preaching (*kerygma*) was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [power of Spirit]" (1 Cor 2:4).

The cause of the efficacy is not simply moral persuasion. There are those who think that the power of preaching lies in the persuasive power of the words. We know that in effectual calling God makes the Word persuasive, but the Word does not possess any persuasiveness apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Others suggest that there is an

inexorable spiritual law that the preached Word operates automatically, apart from the Spirit. This position is that of the Lutherans. Such a position detracts from the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in His work.

The Bible clearly teaches that the efficacy of preaching depends on the Holy Spirit, who is sovereign in making the work of preaching efficacious. Jesus says in John 3:8, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The Spirit must join Himself to the preached Word and act with it.

Calvin also insisted on the importance of recognizing the sovereignty of the Spirit. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 3:6, he says:

This does not mean that the grace of the Holy Spirit and his influence are tied to preaching, so that the preacher can, whenever he pleases, breathe forth the Spirit along with the utterance of the voice. We are, then, Ministers of the Spirit, not as if we held him enclosed within us, or as it were captive—not as if we could at our pleasure confer his grace upon all, or upon whom we pleased—but because Christ, through our instrumentality, illuminates the minds of men, renews their hearts, and, in short, regenerates them wholly.

The work of preaching, therefore, should be made dependent on the Spirit. In both his preparation and proclamation, the preacher must actively depend on the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit and Preparation

With respect to preparation, the preacher can speak in the name of God and proclaim the Word only if the Spirit first reveals its meaning to him. Marcel wrote, “Since the mysteries of God are accessible only to the spiritual man, the Holy Spirit mediates to each of us the discovery and the understanding of the truth The preacher can speak in the name of God and proclaim the word only if that word has been first explained to him by the Spirit. To this end, he must invoke the Holy Spirit each day and when he prepares to preach.” The Spirit must illumine the preacher so that he understands the passage on which he intends to preach. The pastor must pray over his preparation. Too often we prepare in our own strength. We think we know how to exegete and write sermons; therefore, we do not do so in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Instead, we should approach the work of preaching earnestly asking God to explain the text to us and to give us the message the Spirit has for our people.

Not only must we pray over the text of Scripture in order

to understand it correctly, but we also are to pray over the content of the sermon; we pray that the Spirit might give us His message. In connection with praying for the message, we must be praying for our people and asking God to give us His word that they need. Baxter exhorted in *The Reformed Pastor*:

Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence on Christ. We must go for light, and life, and strength to him who sends us on the work Must I daily plead with sinners about everlasting life and everlasting death, and have no more belief or feeling of these things myself[?]. . . . Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent?

As Baxter points out, we need to be in regular prayer for those to whom we will preach. If we are not praying for them, we will not be able to speak to them with power. Preachers should have the regular habit of praying weekly for their hearers by name and need. They should also pray for those visitors who come—that God will send people in whose hearts He is at work. Members of the church should be praying for the same things during the week.

The Spirit and Proclamation—Defining Uction

With respect to proclamation, the prepared sermon can only become the powerful Word of God when blessed by the Holy Spirit in the act of preaching. As Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” We must note the difference between the sermon prepared in the study and the sermon preached. Both works are necessary, but they are separate acts. Marcel said, “They make a capital error, who think that the preacher, because he is present and the service begins, possesses his sermon (that he is prepared to read it if it is written, to give it from memory, to improvise with the help of an outline, etc.), and that it is enough that this ready-prepared sermon be rendered in a few minutes in order for the preaching of God’s word to be heard.” The sermon is what we prepare in the study; preaching is the act in the pulpit. One may have a good sermon and bad preaching or a bad sermon and good preaching. As we preach, we have sometimes experienced the reality of having a good sermon on paper—in our notes—but in the act of preaching it was dull and lifeless. We also have experienced and heard messages

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE ACT OF PROCLAMATION IS CALLED "UNCTION."

preached when the sermon was technically not a good sermon, but the preaching was powerful. Our aim is to have both a good sermon and good preaching.

The work of the Spirit in the act of proclamation is called “unction.” The term means “anointing” and refers to the Spirit’s work on the preacher as he preaches. Marcel defined unction this way:

When, in preaching, a man abandons himself to the freedom of the Spirit, he discovers that his faculties are developed above normal: freedom is given not only to the soul but also to the tongue; his mental penetration is deeper; his ability to picture things in his mind is greater; truth works a greater power in his soul; his faith is more intense; he feels himself involved in a living and compact reality. His feelings are much more sensitive and spontaneously permeate his heart. He comes to think the thoughts of Christ, to experience the feelings and emotions of Christ. . . . The spirit endows his word, his expression, with a natural freshness and vitality which gives the word a new and original appearance and which belong only to the spoken style.

Marcel continues: “The preacher who abandons himself to the power and freedom of the Spirit has the experience that from the time he begins to speak (when he was trembling a few moments before—and he will tremble if he knows to what God has called him!) he is independent of circumstances, freed from every fear, of the fear of the public or of the judgment of certain ones whose incredulity or critical bent he knows. In accordance with the promise, he receives the gift of being free.”

In *The Art of Prophecy*, William Perkins dealt with unction under preaching in the “demonstration of the Spirit.” He says that this demonstration “becomes a reality when, in preaching, the minister of the Word conducts himself in such way that everyone—even those who are ignorant of the gospel and are unbelievers—recognize that it is not so much the preacher who is speaking, but the Spirit

of God in him and by him (Mic 3:8; 1 Cor. 2:4; 14:24, 25; 4:19, 20). This is what makes his ministry living and powerful (Luke 11:27).”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed out that there is also unction on the congregation: Preaching “should always be a transaction between preacher and listener with something vital and living taking place. It is not the mere imparting of knowledge, there is something much bigger involved. The total person is engaged on both sides; and if we fail to realize this our preaching will be a failure.” Marcel explained the result of the Spirit’s unction on a congregation:

These are facts of experience, not only for the preacher (or the Christian who is called to bear witness), but also for the hearer whose heart the Lord opens to be attentive to the word (Acts 16:14). The Spirit begins to speak a language suited to each soul he cherishes, and for everyone present he makes the preaching of the word relevant. The believers find themselves equally freed from every subjective estimation concerning the pastor as man, his failings, his awkwardness, his age, etc. Preaching by the Spirit, this man becomes for them the man of God in the relevance which God accords that face to face situation. No law of collective psychology can account for these effects. They are the results of the free work of the Holy Spirit.

Those of us who preach have experienced the phenomenon when a hearer approaches us (sometimes angrily) asking, “Who told you about me?” Or, the hearer testifies that we preached as if we understood exactly what he was thinking. Such responses are the product of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

As stated above, the Spirit works sovereignly. He will give various measures of outward manifestations of power as He pleases. At times, He will work powerfully in individuals when the preacher has not felt any evidence of power or unction. But preaching will always accomplish God’s purposes (Isa 55:10, 11). At times, God will immediately

convert men and women under the preaching of the Word, as He did with Saul of Tarsus (Acts 13:48; 16:14). Most often, He works more slowly, as He did with Nicodemus. We also must remember the sobering truth that sometimes He will use preaching to harden sinners: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:14–16). But when all is said and done, the glory belongs to God (Rom 11:33–36).

The Practical Aspects of Unction—Seeking Unction

What then are the things we do to seek the Holy Spirit’s unction? First, we must pray for unction. The minister must prayerfully seek the ministry of the Spirit both during his preparation and for his proclamation. He needs to meditate prayerfully on his sermon, asking God to apply it to his own heart and life. Particularly before entering the pulpit to lead corporate worship and preach, the minister needs to plead with the Lord to grant the ministry of the Holy Spirit in unction. There is no more important work in the preaching of God’s Word.

The work of prayer also belongs to the congregation. We need to train our congregations to seek the Lord daily in private and family worship for the preparation and proclamation of the Word of God. God’s blessing on preaching should be primary thing prayed for in the church’s prayer meeting. In fact, every church needs to have a commitment to the prayer meeting if it expects the Holy Spirit to work in its midst. This means that we must teach our people to be praying for us as we study, and for themselves as they hear. We must teach them to pray for the act of preaching as well—that God will come down powerfully on the preaching of His Word.

Second, we must approach the work of preaching with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, aware that if He does not bless the preaching, it will be spiritually useless. Albert Martin said in *Preaching in the Holy Spirit* that we quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19) when have “a carnal and slavish attachment to the labors of the study.” The preacher must handle himself in such a way that the Spirit is free to intervene in the course of preaching. It is a capital error to think that the preacher possesses the sermon and delivers himself of what he concocted in the study. Martin concluded, “We ought to come to our pulpits with a prayerful expectation that, in the gathering of the people of God in the context of the promised special presence of Christ, Christ Himself will grant unplanned and unpredictable dimensions of His activity by the Spirit, which will require something other than a carnal and slavish attachment to the labors of the study, regardless of the form—manuscript, notes, memorized text—in which we bring the fruit of that study into the pulpit.” Marcel expanded:

If the word which is going to be uttered is to be the preached word of God, it must be uttered with the assistance and power of the spirit. Before the “sermon” begins, nothing exists either for the preacher or for the believers concerning this word so long as it is yet to be preached. It still depends entirely on the freedom of the Spirit and is to be submitted to him. Only the intervention of the Spirit can lift that word to make it neither a lecture, a recitation, a discourse, and elocution, nor a meditation, but a preaching, a word spoken in the vitality of the Spirit, and therefore preached. If the Spirit is absent, there is, in a manner of speaking, a sermon, but no preaching.

The preacher must actively depend on the Spirit in the act of preaching and allow Him freedom of action. In Matthew 10:19–20, Christ instructs His apostles that when they are

THE PREACHER MUST ACTIVELY DEPEND
ON THE SPIRIT IN THE ACT OF PREACHING
AND ALLOW HIM FREEDOM OF ACTION.

called on to give an answer for their faith, they need not worry about what they will say: “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” Although this teaching primarily speaks to our need to give an answer for our faith when we are called upon to do so, a secondary application is to the work of the preacher. Marcel calls this

An injunction and promise valid in all circumstances for every preacher! This does not, therefore, here mean an indirect dependence, a repetition of what Christ has already said during preparation and before the worship hour. Preparation and even redaction constitute only a preliminary part of preaching. It means rather that the preacher, in church, is to yield himself a malleable and living organ for what Christ by the Spirit wills him to say to those who hear. If Christ is left free, he will constrain the preacher to add, delete, and modify (in form or even in content) such and such portion of that which he had intended to say, which he cannot now say. If the preacher is and remains dependent upon his manuscript or upon his memory, there is not just one prisoner—there are two: the preacher and the Spirit, and through the Spirit Christ. The written or memorized text of the sermon at this moment exercises its dominance; Christ through the Spirit is not free. To sound out the scriptures in the study, to prepare, to write, to reflect, to pray, on the one hand, and to preach, on the other, are distinct acts which employ the distinct and complementary interventions of the Spirit. One cannot replace the other.

If we have properly prepared and have a good outline, we may prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the exact words we will utter. Our desire is to speak “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13).

For this reason, historically, the Reformed have been committed to extemporaneous preaching. Extemporaneous preaching is not unprepared preaching; it is trusting the Spirit for the words of expression. In a letter to Duke of Somerset, Calvin declaims against reading of sermons and says,

What I have thus suggested as to the manner of instruction is only that the people be so taught as to be touched to the quick, and that they may feel that what the Apostle says is true, (Hebrews 4) that “the word of God is a two-edged sword, piercing even through the thoughts

and affections to the very marrow of the bones.” I speak thus, Monseigneur, because it appears to me that there is very little preaching of a lively kind in the kingdom (England), but that the greater part deliver it by way of reading from a written discourse . . . But all these considerations ought not to hinder the ordinance of Jesus Christ from having free course in the preaching of the Gospel. Now, this preaching ought not to be lifeless, but lively, to teach, to exhort, to reprove, as Saint Paul says in speaking thereof to Timothy (2 Timothy 3). So indeed, that if an unbeliever enter, he may be so effectually arrested and convinced, as to give glory to God. . . . You are also aware, Monseigneur, how he speaks of the lively power and energy with which they ought to speak, who would approve themselves as good and faithful ministers of God, who must not make a parade of rhetoric only to gain esteem for themselves; but that the Spirit of God ought to sound forth by their voice, so as to work with mighty energy. Whatever may be the amount of danger to be feared, that ought not to hinder the Spirit of God from having liberty and free course in those to whom He has given grace for the edifying of the Church.

Spurgeon enforced this point:

In the pulpit do we really and truly rest upon the aid of the Spirit? I do not censure any brother for his mode of preaching, but I confess that it seems very odd to me when a brother prays that the Holy Ghost may help him in preaching, and then I see him put his hand behind him and draw a manuscript out of his pocket, so fashioned that he can place it in the middle of his Bible, and read from it without being suspected of doing so. These precautions for insuring secrecy look as though the man was a little ashamed of his paper; but I think he should be far more ashamed of his precautions. Does he expect the Spirit of God to bless him while he is practicing a trick? And how can He help him when he reads out of a paper from which anyone else might read without the Spirit’s aid? What has the Holy Ghost to do with the business? Truly, He may have had something to do with the manuscript in the composing of it, but in the pulpit His aid is superfluous. The truer thing would be to thank the Holy Ghost for assistance rendered, and ask that what He has enabled us to get into our pockets may now enter the people’s hearts. Still, if the Holy Ghost should have anything to say to the people that is not in the paper, how can He say it by us? He seems to be very effectually blocked as to freshness

ALTHOUGH WE ARE TO HEED THE LAWFULLY ORDAINED MAN WHO IS SPEAKING BIBLICALLY EVEN WHEN HIS LIFE DOES NOT MATCH HIS WORDS, THERE WILL BE NO SPIRITUAL POWER WITHOUT GODLINESS.

of utterance by that method of ministry. Still, it is not for me to censure, although I may quietly plead for liberty in prophesying, and room for the Lord to give us in the same hour what we shall speak.

In *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, John Piper details a procedure he uses to keep himself mindful of his dependence on God as he approaches the act of preaching. He does five things summed up in the acronym APTAT. First, “I *Admit* to the Lord my utter helplessness without him.” He confesses that he can do nothing without God’s grace and strength. Second, “I *Pray* for help. I beg for the insight, power, humility, love, memory, and freedom I need to preach this message for the glory of God’s name, the gladness of his people, and the ingathering of his elect.” Third, “I *Trust* not merely in a general way in God’s goodness, but in a specific promise in which I can bank my hope for that hour.” Fourth, “I *Act* in the confidence that God will fulfill his Word. I can testify that, although the fullness of blessing I long to see has been delayed, God has met me and his people again and again in the display of his glory and the creation of glad submission to his will.” And fifth, “I *Thank* God. At the end of the message I express gratitude that he has sustained me and that the truth of his Word and the purchase of his cross have been preached in some measure in the power of his Spirit to the glory of his name.”

I also use Piper’s acronym; my approach to preaching is to empty my mind of all concern with what I am about to say. I am aware that if the Spirit deserts me, I have nothing of profit to say. I cast myself on the Spirit for thoughts, affections, words, and strength to express the truth He would have me to express in my sermon. As I preach, I am continually seeking the Spirit’s aid. Afterwards, I pray over the sermon and ask the Spirit to continue to make it profitable to the hearers.

To summarize how we should conduct ourselves in the pulpit, Thomas Boston gave us a “checklist”:

Before Preaching:

- Pray to be tied to the Scriptures and put away from human wisdom.
- Pray that your heart may be melted with the sad state of your people.
- Pray that your soul will be warmed with zeal for God’s glory.
- Pray for clarity.
- Pray for bodily strength.
- Pray against all distractions.

After Preaching:

- Follow the example of Christ, who goes aside to pray after He teaches (see Mark 6:34–46).

- Pray that the Word not be like water spilled onto the ground. Pray that the Word not be “snatched away” as in the Parable of the Sower.
- Pray for pardon in the failings of your preaching.
- Pray that conviction of sin would set in, consuming your hearers and driving them to Christ!

The third thing necessary in seeking unction is a holy life. True spiritual eloquence depends on a holy life. Although we are to heed the lawfully ordained man who is speaking biblically even when his life does not match his words, there will be no spiritual power without godliness.

Perkins gave five reasons why godliness was necessary for a preacher. First, the minister must set the example of what he preaches because biblical doctrine is difficult to understand and practice (Phlm 4:8; 1 Tim 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3). Second, only the godly can understand the inward sense of the Scripture as he experiences the Word in his heart (Gen 18:17–19; Ps 25:8, 9; Amos 3:7). Third, God hates the combination of godly speech with ungodly life (Ps 50:16, 17). As Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–c.389) said, “it is as strange to see someone who is supposed to guide others on the way wandering out of the way himself, as it is to see a physician with signs of disease in his own body.” Fourth, ministerial sins bring great offence to the gospel: “Ordinary people do not distinguish between the ministry and the minister. They are not able to see the importance of the ministry without first assessing the person of the minister. Herod heard John Baptist willingly, not because he was a good minister, but because he was a good man (Mark 6:20).” Gregory of Nazianzus strikes the right note again when he says: “He that teaches sound doctrine, and lives wickedly, reaches with one hand what he knocks away with the other.” John Chrysostom (347–407), commenting on Matthew 20, says: “the doctor of the church by teaching well and by living well instructs the people how they ought to live well; but by living ill he instructs God how to condemn him.’ And again: ‘It is an easy matter to show wisdom in words; teach me to live by your life, this is the best teaching.’ Words do not make as great an impression on the soul as works do!” Fifth, an unholy minister is not worthy to stand before God (Lev 10:3; Isa 6:6–8; Jer 15:19). “That is why the judgments of God remain for wicked ministers to tremble at (1 Sam 2:17, 25).”

Martin wrote that we can grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30) by our unholy lives: “If we would have biblical grounds to expect the immediate agency and operation of the Holy Spirit in and on us in our preaching, we must be able to say with the apostle Paul, ‘I know nothing by [against] myself’ (1 Cor 4:4). Further, we must also be able to say with the

apostle, ‘And here do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men’ (Acts 24:16).”

Perkins pointed out six aspects of ministerial holiness. First, a minister must maintain a good conscience (Acts 24:16; 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Tim 1:19): “Without this, the mouth of the preacher will be closed (Isa 56:10).” Second, he must possess an inward feeling of the doctrine to be delivered. “Wood that is capable of burning is not set alight unless fire is put to it. Similarly anyone who would encourage godly affections and desires in others must first have godly affections himself. Thus, whatever response a particular sermon requires should first be stirred up privately in our own minds, so that we can kindle the same flame in our hearers.” Third, a minister must fear God, “so that, filled with a reverent sense of the majesty of God, we will speak soberly and with moderation.” Fourth, he must love the people (1 Thess 2:7). “To encourage this affection, the minister must pray seriously and fervently for the people of God (1 Sam 12:23).” Fifth, he must live blamelessly before the church and the world: “the minister must also be worthy of respect for his constancy, integrity, seriousness and truthfulness. He must know how to respect others in private or in public, in keeping with the character of his congregation.” Sixth, he is to be temperate, “inwardly restraining any strong feelings. Both his outward style of behavior and his gestures ought to be moderate and straightforward. In this way he will be marked by dignity and authority. Consequently he must be neither covetous, nor a heavy drinker, nor litigious, nor a pugnacious character, nor given to bursts of anger. Those who are younger men must devote themselves to godliness, and reject the lusts of youth (1 Tim. 4:7).” As we seek unction for our preaching, we need to seek a daily anointing in order that we may live godly lives and that those around us will see the work of the Spirit within us.

The fourth important ingredient in seeking unction is to preach Christ. Martin emphasized this element in seeking unction: “The Holy Spirit is grieved when there is an insufficient measure of preaching Christ in our sermonic endeavors.” The Spirit’s ministry is to exalt Christ; He delights in shining the floodlights on the person and work of Christ. Paul’s determination was to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Our sermons must be full of Christ.

Martin suggests questions by which we may evaluate the place of Christ in our sermons: “Where was the person and work of Christ in that sermon? Have I traced back to Christ, the source of all the grace and power for sufficiency to perform the duty, all the duties I have articulated?

Have I drawn motives for obedience from our hearers' relationship to Christ? Have I traced back to Christ, who is the great fountainhead of all redemptive privilege, the privileges of grace I have expounded?" If we are to enjoy the Spirit's blessing on our preaching, our sermons must be full of Jesus Christ.

Each of us needs urgently to seek the unction of the Holy Spirit in his preaching. Let us use these steps that the Bible teaches.

Practical Effects of Unction

Style

The commitment to the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching led our fathers to emphasize plain preaching. Perkins related the plain style to unction: "Now we must think about the actual preaching itself. Here two things are essential: (i) the hiding of human wisdom, and (ii) the demonstration or manifestation of the Spirit." Perkins related plainness and unction: "To preach in the demonstration of God's Spirit is to preach with such plainness, and yet with such power, that even the least intellectually gifted recognize that it is not man but God himself who is teaching them. Yet at the same time, the conscience of the mightiest may feel not man but God reproving them through the power of the Spirit." He called plain style spiritual: the audience is able to judge that the Spirit is speaking through the words and gestures of the minister. Spiritual speech is marked by words that are simple and clear, expressing the majesty of the Spirit. The minister's language must be plain so that the people will understand him. "Spiritual speech is speech which the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Cor 2:13). It is both simple and clear, tailored to the understanding of the hearers and appropriate for expressing the majesty of the Spirit (Acts 17:2, 3; 2 Cor 4:2-4; Gal 3:1)."

This plain style predominates all Protestant preaching, with the exception of high Anglicans. The purpose of plain style was not simplicity for the sake of simplicity, but simplicity for the sake of communication. It was a philosophy of communication that sought to speak to the people in a way they could readily grasp the truth of the sermon. As Alan Fagar Herr, author of *The Elizabethan Sermon*, noted, "The plain style is sober, simple in expression, as direct as possible, and free from ornamentation of either fantastic ideas or verbiage . . . it appears, on the whole, to be the spontaneous creation of the spirit of the Reformation."

Marcel added, "In form and language, preaching should be stripped of everything which does not tend to edify. Superfluous theological discussions, useless or subtle questions which would confuse believers, are excluded." Calvin spoke plainly and simply in order to be understood by the common people. He opposed all pulpit discourse that exalted the

preacher and not God:

If he who speaks wishes to please, if he wishes to demonstrate his abilities, if some mad desire transports him so that he is oblivious of the salvation of his hearers, he is guilty of rank sacrilege, since he uses the word of God for a purpose that is not sacred. It is indeed true that men gladly have itching ears, for something new. It makes no difference what! So intense is our desire that many who undertake to teach for the sole purpose of feeling their ego and being praised ferret out and present frivolous questions. If the questions have some appearance of subtlety, they are satisfied and cease to bother about edification.

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:13, Calvin wrote:

By the words "taught by human wisdom," Paul means those which savor of human learning, and are polished according to the rules of the rhetoricians; or are purposely and proudly overloaded with philosophy in order to rush hearers into admiration. But the words "taught by the Spirit" are suitable for a style which is sincere and simple, rather than empty and ostentatious, and one more in keeping with the dignity of the Spirit. For in order that there may be eloquence, we must always be on the alert to prevent the wisdom of God being spoiled by a forced and common brilliancy. But Paul's way of teaching was such that in it the power of the Spirit shone forth, pure and simple, without any external assistance.

The plain style was not a dull, drab, or unadorned, but rather a style of communication that was direct and in the language of the hearers. Rhetoric, therefore, took second seat to truth. The reformed preacher thought it would have violated his hearers and the Word of God to bypass the minds of the hearers with the tricks of rhetoric. They did not want to encrust the clear teaching of the Word of God with metaphysical wit. John Owen, after describing a number of the rhetorical flourishes of the metaphysical styles, observed:

Such things become not the authority, majesty, greatness, and holiness of Him who speaks therein. An earthly monarch that should make use of them in his edicts, laws, or proclamations would but prostitute his authority to contempt, and invite his subjects to disobedience by so doing. How much more would they unbecome the declaration of His mind and will, given unto *poor worms*, who is the great possessor of heaven and earth!

OUR AIM IS FOR PEOPLE TO LEAVE MARVELING AT GOD'S GREATNESS AND NOT AT OUR ABILITY.

The plain style includes four things. First, the hiding of human wisdom “both in the content of the sermon and in the language.” We seek to proclaim *God’s Word*, not our knowledge, skill, and erudition, so that “the hearers ought not to ascribe their faith to the gifts of men, but to the power of God’s Word (1 Cor 2:1, 2, 5).” This does not mean that the sermon circumvents the full content of a text and all the great truths of God’s Word, but we are not to make display of our intellect and learning—not to carry all the facts of preparation into pulpit.

Therefore, we are to avoid lengthy quotations from commentators and theologians and abstract theological discussion. This commitment does not mean that we should be lazy. We should use the highest means possible both in our academic preparation for ministry and for each sermon; we ought to prepare diligently.

Perkins pointed out the relation of plainness in content to power:

Since even the uneducated person sees his faults revealed, it follows that he understands what is said; and if he can understand it, then it must be plain. Then, in addition, notice the power: his conscience is so convinced, his secret faults so unveiled, and his heart so ripped up that he says, “Certainly God speaks in this man.”

This is the real evidence and proof of God’s Spirit. It is taken as high commendation in the world’s eyes when men say of a preacher, “He is a real scholar,” because he is scholarly, well-read, has a retentive memory and a good delivery. So it is, and such commendation (if deserved) should not be despised. But what commends a man to the Lord his God and to his own conscience is that he preaches with a plainness suited to the ability, and so powerfully to the conscience, of a wicked man that he realizes that God is present in the preacher.

Second, the plain style includes a simple vocabulary. We are to use the vocabulary of the common people; we are not to make our words a display of our learning. We adopt a crucified style adjusted to the weak. Our aim is for people to leave marveling at God’s greatness and not at our ability. Most newspapers and magazines today are written with a middle school level vocabulary. We need to preach at that level. This commitment does not mean that we fail to use the great theological terms of the Bible: election, justification, sanctification, propitiation, and so on. We must not cheat our people by not exposing them to the great words of Scripture. But we should remember periodically to define them as we use them. We may also stretch our people by using a more difficult word and then explaining it in the next sentence. We should avoid use of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew terms.

A third mark of plain style is concreteness of expression. This involves expressing biblical truth and doctrines in the language of the market and office and classroom. For instance, preachers should make good use of metaphors and similes. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a term that ordinarily designates an object or idea is used to designate a dissimilar object or idea in order to suggest comparison or analogy. As 1 Corinthians 3:9 says, “For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” A simile is a figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, introduced by “like” or “as.” Many of Christ’s parables use similes: “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field” (Matt 13:24). Such figures of speech give arms and legs to truth, making it extremely memorable.

Fourth, the plain style is natural. It is good to listen to other preachers and have models, but we also must be ourselves in the pulpit. Our aim is not to preach like our favorite preacher. Rhetorical devices are helpful, but we should not

become studied or artificial. Above all, preachers must be sincere. If we speak naturally from our hearts, we may not be as eloquent as others, but we will exemplify the type of plain speaking that God greatly blesses.

The Directory of Worship summarizes the basic elements of plain style, asserting that we should preach

Plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.

Delivery

Delivery also is connected to the Spirit's role in preaching. With respect to your voice, seek to develop the use of your voice both its range and its loudness. Begin in a moderate range with moderate volume. Become more fervent and vehement as emotions build, particularly in exhortation. Vary voice range in order to make emphasis and to keep attention. Develop a diversity of pace and make use of pauses.

With respect to gestures, Perkins said, "There should be a gravity about the gestures of the body which will in their own way grace the messenger of God... the arm, the hand, the face and eyes may express and (as it were) speak the spiritual affections of his heart."

A man who enjoys the unction of the Spirit will preach with zeal and passion; when the Spirit is upon a man there will be an obvious zeal in his preaching. This zeal will manifest itself differently in each man, according to his gifts and personality, but each man must preach with a passion. Richard Baxter insisted on the need to have one's heart stirred up:

I confess I must speak it by lamentable experience, that I publish to my flock the distempers of my own soul. When I let my heart go cold, my preaching is cold;... and so I can oft observe also in the best of my hearers that when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold too; and the next prayers which I have heard from them have been too like my preaching.

Later he gave this counsel:

O sirs, how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow-men is involved in it! Methinks we are in nothing so want-

ing as in this seriousness; yet is there nothing more unsuitable to such a business, than to be slight and dull. What! Speak coldly for God, and for men's salvation? Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, and yet speak in a drowsy tone? In the name of God, brethren, labour to awaken your own hearts, before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners. Though you give the holy things of God the highest praise in words, yet, if you do it coldly, you will seem by your manner to unsay what you said in the matter.... The manner, as well as the words, must set them forth....

Though I move you not to constant loudness in your delivery (for that will make your fervency contemptible), yet see that you have a constant seriousness; and when the matter requireth it (as it should do, in the application at least), then lift up your voice, and spare not your spirits, Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, wither here or in hell.

The Westminster Larger Catechism 159, in answering the question "How is the word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?" gives a good summary of the elements of Spirit anointed preaching:

They that are called to labour in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.

God the Spirit therefore makes preaching his major medium. Preaching is the public, authoritative, verbal proclamation of the word of God that explains and applies this word. The one who preaches is to be commissioned by Christ through his church. When such a one preaches the word in the power of the Spirit, Christ is present and speaks through him. By the Spirit's sovereign power God will convert and sanctify.

As the church believes and acts on these truths she will be able to preach to a culture that is unwilling and unable to listen. God will continue to work through the foolishness of preaching to build his church. ♦

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CHRIST DIED FOR GOD

JOHN 18:39-19:7

Through the centuries the debate has raged over who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. Some blame the Romans, since they are the ones who sentenced and executed Him. Others argue that the Jews (particularly their leaders) were responsible, since they asked Pilate that He be executed. One of the disciples on the road to Emmaus lamented that “the chief priests and our rulers delivered [Christ] to the sentence of death, and crucified Him.” “This Man,” Peter told the crowds in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, “you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

Peter and John boldly declared to the Sanhedrin that Jesus was the one “whom you crucified” (Acts 4:10) and, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross” (5:30). Stephen accused the same Sanhedrin of being Christ’s “betrayers and murderers.” The Jewish people themselves accepted responsibility for Christ’s death when they cried out, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” (Matt 27:25).

The truth is that, humanly speaking, the Romans played a part while key Jewish leaders were the instigators who bear the greatest blame for Christ’s death. But the real responsibility does not rest solely with either of them; what put Him on the cross was God’s own determination to punish His Son for all the sins of all who would ever be saved. John the Baptist hailed Him as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The writer of Hebrews said that He “has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26). In his first epistle, John wrote that “He Himself is the propitiation for



JOHN MACARTHUR is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's University and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.

our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2) and “He appeared in order to take away sins” (3:5). Our sins put Him on the cross.

Jesus Christ was no victim. Neither the Romans nor the Jews had the power to take His life. For that matter, neither did all the sinners for whom He died. “No one has taken [My life] away from Me,” He said, “but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father” (John 10:18). He told Pilate, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (see the discussion of v. 11 below). His Jewish adversaries sought to kill Him, but were unsuccessful “because His hour had not yet come.”

Ultimately, Christ died not because of any human intentions, schemes, or actions, but because of the will of His Father. In the same sermon in which he indicted Israel for killing Jesus, Peter nonetheless affirmed that He had been “delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). In another sermon, Peter reminded the people that “the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). The early church prayed, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27–28). In an example of God’s using the wrath of sinful men to praise Him (Ps 76:10), Paul declared, “Those

who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him” (Acts 13:27). In his magnificent prophecy of Christ’s death, Isaiah said, “It was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isa. 53:10). Speaking of His death, Jesus said, “The Son of Man is going as it has been determined” (Luke 22:22).

But God’s sovereign control of events does not relieve individuals of responsibility for their actions. This passage gives the account of the last phase of Christ’s civil trial. As was the case with the first phase of that trial, it was presided over by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea.

As he did throughout his gospel, John presented the majesty and dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ—even as He was beaten, unjustly sentenced to death, and led away to be crucified. The apostle did so by contrasting Him with the weak and vacillating Pilate, who lost his composure, his control over events, and was pressured into sentencing an innocent man to die. The story of Pilate’s downfall reveals his failed proposals to dispose of the case, his fatal panic as events spiraled out of control, and produced his final pronouncement of the death sentence on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pilate had already tried unsuccessfully to rid himself of this explosive case. In 18:31 he had half mockingly said to the Jewish leaders, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.” The Jews refused, since, as they were forced to admit, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” Pilate then tried to transfer the case to Herod Antipas, who ruled Jesus’ home region of Galilee (Luke 23:7). But Herod merely mocked Jesus and then sent Him back to Pilate, leaving the latter still caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, he had formally pronounced Jesus to be innocent (18:38); according to the proud tradition of Roman justice, Pilate should have released Him. But to do so would have infuriated the Jewish leaders, and possibly touched off a riot that could have cost him his position as governor.

Desperate to extricate himself from the tense, dangerous situation, Pilate came up with another plan. There was a custom that the governor release someone (i.e., a prisoner held by the Romans) as a goodwill gesture at the Passover.

Pilate accordingly said to the crowd, “Do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?” By referring to Jesus by that title, Pilate again mocked the Jewish leaders, who vehemently rejected Jesus as their king. The governor’s offer appeared to be a logical solution to his problem. By now people had gotten wind of what was happening, and a large crowd had assembled outside the Praetorium. Pilate knew that many in that crowd had hailed Jesus as

their messianic King earlier in the week. He hoped to play them off against their leaders and force the latter to agree to Jesus’ release.

Unfortunately, Pilate underestimated both the chief priests’ resolve and the crowd’s fickleness. The sight of Jesus, a bound, helpless prisoner of the Romans, made it clear that He was not going to meet their messianic expectations and drive out their oppressors. That allowed the persistent chief priests to manipulate the crowd (while Pilate was temporarily preoccupied with a message from his wife; Matt 27:19) into crying out, “Not this Man, but Barabbas.” Barabbas, as John’s footnote indicates, was a robber. He was no common, petty thief, however. Matthew calls him a “notorious prisoner” (Matt 27:16), while Mark (15:7) and Luke (23:19) note that he was a murderer and an insurrectionist. The specific insurrection he was involved in is unknown, but such uprisings, precursors of the wholesale revolt of A.D. 66–70, were common at that time. Ironically, the same Jewish leaders who had demanded that Pilate condemn Jesus as an insurrectionist now demanded the release of the notorious insurrectionist Barabbas.

Pilate was rapidly running out of options. Almost plaintively, he asked the crowd, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” With one voice “they all said, ‘Crucify Him!’” In a last, desperate attempt to appease them, he then took Jesus and scourged Him. By brutally punishing a man whom he had already declared innocent, Pilate plunged further down into the abyss of injustice.

Scourging was a hideously cruel form of punishment. The victim was stripped, bound to a post, and beaten by several torturers in turn. Jewish law set the maximum number of blows at forty, and in practice the Jews gave a maximum of thirty-nine (to avoid accidentally exceeding forty blows). The Romans, however, were not bound by any such restrictions. The punishment would continue until the torturers were exhausted, the commanding officer decided to stop it, or, as was often the case, the victim died. The whip consisted of a short wooden handle to which several leather thongs, each with jagged pieces of bone or metal attached to the end, were fastened. As a result, the body could be so torn and lacerated that the muscles, bones, veins, or even internal organs were exposed. So horrible was this punishment that Roman citizens were exempt from it. The scourging He endured left Jesus too weak to carry the crosspiece of His cross all the way to the execution site. Pilate hoped that this brutalizing of Jesus short of death would satisfy the bloodthirsty mob. ❖



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I KNEW

STEVEN J. LAWSON



I am very privileged to have known Doctor Robert Charles Sproul. We know him as R. C. This titanic figure was an evangelical Atlas, a formidable theologian, prolific author, and endearing pastor who will long be remembered for his substantial and significant contribution to the course of evangelical Christianity over many decades.

A Fixed North Star

In our day, many Christian leaders have been flashing meteors in the sky. They have appeared for a brief moment on the scene, and then disappeared. But few men have been a fixed north star, who year after year and decade after decade have provided gospel light from their many sermons, lectures, and books. R. C. Sproul has done just this. This gifted man has given the Christian world a lifetime of treasured resources that have shaped our knowledge of God.

The books authored by Dr. Sproul are far too numerous to list, but they include: *The Holiness of God*, *Lifeviews*, *Chosen by God*, *One Holy Passion*, *Pleasing God*, *Surprised by Suffering*, *The Glory of Christ*, *Following Christ*, *The Soul's Quest for God*, *Faith Alone*, *The Invisible Hand of God*, *Grace Unknown*, *Willing to Believe*, *Getting the Gospel Right*, *Saved from What?*, *Defending Your Faith*, *Scripture Alone*, *What Is Reformed Theology?*, *The Reformation Study Bible*, and *A Taste of Heaven*.

Reclaiming the High Ground

These works written by Dr. Sproul are not your normal Christian books—they are *not* mere fluff. These are not books that have compromised the Christian message in order to be popular. These are books that have clearly articulated the God-exalting truths of the Bible that the evangelical world has so desperately needed to recover.

For over forty years, Dr. Sproul dusted off the high ground of a biblical Reformed theology—and took his stand there. We, his many students, have been pulled up by him to this lofty mountain peak and have seen God as we have rarely seen Him elsewhere.

Through these many books, Dr. Sproul is, I believe, the *one* man most responsible in this generation for the current resurgence of Reformed theology. He has brought the theology of the Reformation out of the ivory tower of the academicians and made it accessible to the average person in the pew. His doctrinally sound books have influenced two and even three generations of Christians with a high view of the holiness and sovereignty of God.

A Guardian of the Gospel

Dr. Sproul has been a guardian of the gospel at all costs. He has been a staunch defender of the faith. He has safeguarded

the “queen of the sciences”—the robust theology of Scripture—and has protected her “crown jewels,” the doctrines of grace. He has faithfully upheld the grand truths of the supreme authority of God, the mystery of His providence, the depravity of man, the definiteness of the atonement, the supremacy of Christ, the purity of the gospel, the necessity of justification by faith alone, and the irresistibility of regeneration.

In all of this, Dr. Sproul has fought the good fight. He has run the course. He has kept the faith. He has contended for the gospel against its many foes. He has not entertained us, but has expounded, expounded, exegeted, and explained the biblical text, and in so doing, he has edified and equipped us.

What is even more amazing is the *winsome* way in which Dr. Sproul has done this. He has spoken and written with much grace and dignity. He has been engaging with his words and endearing in his manner. *No* man in our times has exposed so many to the doctrines of grace as R. C. Sproul. Moreover, *no* man has done so with such a broad appeal and wide acceptance. R. C. has impacted the world without bells and whistles. He has been armed with simply an *open* Bible, a *renewed* mind, and the *power* of the Spirit.

Electrifying in the Classroom

In 1986, I can vividly recall when the book *The Holiness of God* first hit my spiritual life with the force of a category five hurricane. It rocked my world and revolutionized my life. The effect was so profound that when it came time to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree, there was only one choice for me. I was compelled to sit under the influence of this distinguished professor at the seminary where he taught.

When the time came for my first class under this formidable figure, the growing anticipation of experiencing Sproul did not exceed the reality. The classroom was filled with a buzz of excitement as we awaited his arrival. Every student was seated long before he walked in. Not one of us would have dared to be late for this class. When the door swung open, striding into the room, Dr. Sproul. On one side was his vivacious wife, Vesta. On the other side was the beaming president of the seminary, showing off his prized faculty member. This grand entrance felt more like a heavyweight champion entering the ring, escorted by his entourage.

In person as on the page, Sproul was passionate, powerful, persuasive, provocative, and penetrating. I want you to know, it was *electrifying!* My life and my character were forged upon the anvil of that class, and Dr. Sproul was the skilled hammer.

Undergoing Inspection

The first matter of business for Dr. Sproul that day was to

have us stand to our feet. He then began pacing back and forth, inspecting all of us, assessing how each man was dressed and presenting himself. This was akin to a five-star general inspecting his troops. His penetrating eyes sized up each student from top to bottom. Nothing escaped his gaze. He examined what each man was wearing. He analyzed how our hair was combed. He scrutinized our glasses. He commented on any facial hair. He then critiqued—out loud, mind you—how each man was presenting himself. He even made fun of some men who wore tasseled loafers. He called them “fruit loops.” This assessment was given publically in front of the entire class.

This class was called “Communication,” and this master communicator was giving us our first lesson. Not all communication is verbal. We were being schooled in the reality that much of what we convey is non-verbal. He stressed that we are communicating before we ever open our mouths. Point made.

Mobilizing the English Language

Dr. Sproul then proceeded to lecture us on the proper use of the English language. If we are to preach effectively, he maintained, we must employ well-crafted words and phrases in our sermons. We have little more going for us as a preacher, he affirmed, than what comes out of our mouths. So, we must choose our words carefully and use them strategically. Hence, his emphasis upon English. This was exactly what I had never wanted to hear. What my father, who was a professor, and my high school teachers had belabored with me. But I had refused to listen. However, Dr. Sproul was saying it now, and I was buying everything he was selling.

This master communicator demanded that we not repeat our words when we stood in the pulpit. He preached that the law of diminishing returns is in effect when we use the same word multiple times. So, he reinforced with us with the need to acquire an arsenal of synonyms at our beckoning call. He underscored that we must discard our tired words for stronger ones. He demanded that I stop saying “very” in order to prop up a weak word. He stressed that I must use a more potent word that would better communicate. Yes, sir.

Identifying “The Uniform”

Dr. Sproul was also known to give a lecture on old-school attire, which was a *tour de force* in understanding the proper presentation for a leader. He explained how there is an unofficial but recognizable uniform that respected leaders wear. One to which people subconsciously respond. We also heard about the time he attended the International Council for Biblical Inerrancy. He claimed he knew exactly who the chairman would be. He wrote down the name on the back

side of a piece of paper and kept it concealed. Sure enough, his insight was correct. The one man in the room wearing the uniform was James Montgomery Boice, and he was named the chairman. What more proof could we want?

Dr. Sproul challenged us to present ourselves as leaders. The businessmen in our congregations, he chided, are often hesitant to introduce us to their work associates. He said we look more ready for a junior high lock-in than for an adult conversation.

On one occasion, Dr. Sproul stood in front of us and demonstrated how to properly tie a men’s tie. By this point, he was becoming more like a father figure to us. After he had tied his tie, he looked down at his bulging waistline and snapped, “I need to start buying ties with a bump in them.” His self-deprecating humor disarmed us. It drew us even closer to him.

Speaking with Your Hands

Soon the time came for each of us to preach in class. Dr. Sproul assigned me Daniel 5 and the account of Belshazzar’s drunken feast. When I stood before the class, he was sitting in his customary place—in a chair in the back of the class, rocking back and forth on its two back legs. Trust me, I was well aware of where he was. As I progressed in my sermon, I reached the verse where the divine hand mysteriously appeared in the midst of the drunken orgy and began writing on the wall. As I was explaining this dramatic scene, I gestured with my right hand, as though it was the finger of God writing on the wall of the banquet hall.

Like he was shot out of a cannon, Dr. Sproul bolted out of his chair and flew up the center aisle to the podium where I stood. Abruptly interrupting my delivery, he barked, “Who told you to motion like that?” Fearing his reprisal, I apologized, “No one, sir. It just seemed like the thing to do.” I knew my dress-down was coming. Publically. Before my peers. But he turned to the class and snapped, “That is exactly what I want to see each one of you do. Gesture with your hands. Now, continue the message, Lawson.” He spun around and marched back to his chair in the back of the room.

Making Eye Contact

I worked up my nerve to continue preaching. But it was not long before Dr. Sproul interrupted my sermon a second time. He did not like that I was using sermon notes. This mastermind never used notes. He grabbed my manuscript from off the podium and stomped back to his seat with them. He asserted, “Now preach.” He wanted better eye contact from me with the listeners. He wanted greater freedom of expression. These were all things I desperately needed.

To make his point, Dr. Sproul stood before the class and



challenged us to throw any topic at him. He would spontaneously preach on any subject whatsoever, without notes. Only he could have pulled this off. Someone in the class yelled out, “the sovereignty of God,” which was like lobbing him a softball down the center of the plate. He swung hard and knocked it out of the park. He pulled out of the back of his mind the illustration of a sign that was posted during the American Revolutionary War that read, “We will have no sovereign over us.” He used that to indict fallen man’s aversion to this truth. He explained that the nature of our flesh never wants a sovereign God ruling over us. But then, he explained, divine sovereignty is God’s favorite doctrine. He said it would be our favorite doctrine if we were God. I could hardly write down these one-liners fast enough.

Encouragement on Steroids

One particular assignment that Dr. Sproul gave us was to write a theological paper. The topic I chose escapes my memory, but I will never forget what he wrote at the top of my paper. When it was returned to me, he wrote plain as day at the top of the page, “Steve, you can write. I want you to pursue writing.” I would have been otherwise reluctant to

pursue this. But if Dr. Sproul says I can write, then I surely can. If he had told me I could run through a brick wall, I would have taken a running start. I took his word as gospel and began a ministry in writing. That brief comment, written in his virtually illegible handwriting, launched me in the direction of becoming an author. I would have never done so on my own initiative. The mere fact that I am writing this reflection about him is the direct result of his influence upon me.

That classroom and those memories became an Upper Room for us. The Lord met with us through this one man’s dominant presence. So impactful was our time together that whenever I would return to my home church after classes, the lay leaders told me that I always preached better after having been with Dr. Sproul. Truth is, it has always been that way. I have always been better at whatever God has called me to do as a result of being with him.

Outside the Classroom

That was thirty years ago, and I would have never dreamed that I would know Dr. Sproul in another light. It has since been my privilege to serve with him at Ligonier Ministries

as a teaching fellow and a member of the board. This has allowed me even closer access to him. The influence that he has exerted upon me has only grown.

I have been able to play many rounds of golf with him, and he has loved to instruct me in my swing. You have to know that in his heyday, R. C. was a scratch golfer. Even into his 70s, he regularly shot his age. This is a remarkable accomplishment that few are able to do. He liked to take me to the practice tee and give me instruction. I lovingly called him, “Coach.” “Hey, Coach” became my term of endearment for him.

No one else could go from being so serious about the holiness of God to laughing so loud that all around could hear him. One night at dinner, he laughed so hard with Sinclair Ferguson and me that he literally pulled a muscle in his rib cage. I am serious. We had to call my brother, a physician, to come to the restaurant and attend to him. How many people do you know who have hurt themselves laughing? R. C. did.

Having a meal with R. C. was always quite an event. He was always on some new diet. The way he would work around this was to order my meal for me. This way, he could eat what he would have ordered for himself off my plate. He was the smartest man in the world, yet he always thought that Vesta could not see him eating off my plate. Even though she was seated right next to him. Not only would he eat my steak, but he would also eat out of my baked potato. He would then order crème brulee for me and eat a sizable portion of it. All because he was on a diet.

The Practical Joker

It was also my joy to travel with R. C. on various church history trips. I’ll never forget our leading a group through New England to visit the sites of the Pilgrims and of the Great Awakening. During the course of that trip, I mistakenly pronounced the word indefatigable. It was somewhat of a tongue twister for me, and I could never say it right. R. C. naturally loved to jab at me for this. He would not let it rest.

When we came to Philadelphia, I was excited to lead us to the statue of George Whitefield on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. As we were standing there with our entire tour group, R. C. asked me in front of everyone to read the back engraving at the base of the statue. I was so overwhelmed that R. C., my esteemed professor, would ask me to read this.

As I began to read the engraving, with my head held high with this new affirmation from R. C., I soon came to the word I could not pronounce. R. C. had set me up. There was that word, indefatigable. I all but swallowed my tongue trying to say the word. R. C. threw back his head and gave the loudest laugh that I have ever heard in my life. I had stepped

right into his trap. And how he loved it! And I loved that he loved it.

A Lasting Influence

Dr. R. C. Sproul will always be my professor. I will always be his student. In eight years of seminary, I had many different professors. But in my heart, I only had one. To this day, I still carry his influence in my life and ministry. He still sits on my shoulder and speaks into my ear. He still sits on the chair in the back of the classroom and gives me his evaluation and guidance. The lessons he taught have not been forgotten. They are permanently lodged in my memory.

Like no other person, this amazing man was used by the Lord to impact my life. He took me several levels higher in ministry skills—showing me how to think, write, and speak. He taught me that it is not only *what* I say, but *how* I say it. Moreover, he taught me that it matters *how* I live the truth. *How* I stand for it. And *that* I defend it. The impact of his penetrating words is safely deposited within me.

A sacred stewardship has been entrusted to me. Dr. Sproul made a significant investment in me that I must now deposit into others. I now serve as the dean of the Doctor of Ministry program for another seminary. I rarely enter into the classroom without thinking of that first encounter with him. Though he is no longer with us, he nevertheless continues to multiply himself through his lasting influence. Long live the legacy of this extraordinary life.

Another Luther Has Risen

Several years ago at The Shepherd’s Conference, John MacArthur introduced Dr. Sproul by saying, “He is the Martin Luther of our times.” This is true—R. C. Sproul *is* the Martin Luther of our times. His books have been the Wittenberg door upon which he has nailed the truth to our minds.

Some 150 years ago, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said,

A reformation is as much needed now as in Luther’s day, and by God’s grace we shall see it, if we trust in Him and publish His truth. But mark ye this, if the grace of God be once more restored to the church in all its fullness and the Spirit of God be poured out from on high and all its sanctifying energy, there must come such a shaking as has never been seen in our days. We want such a one as Martin Luther to rise from his tomb.

Another Martin Luther *did* rise from his tomb. His name was the Reverend Doctor Robert Charles Sproul. ♦



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ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER *on* SPIRIT-WORKED FAITH VERSUS DEAD FAITH

JOEL R. BEEKE



The nineteenth century was a time of great change in the churches of Britain and the United States. This period witnessed an explosion of worldwide missions, as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Henry Martyn, Hudson Taylor, and many others led waves of Protestant missionaries to fields around the world.

At the same time, churches came under attack both from the challenge of new cults and sects, and from the philosophical acids of Darwinism and German Higher Criticism. In the midst of these remarkable events, God raised up a stream of faithful men who preached Reformed doctrine to the heart, worked by the Holy Spirit in the soul. One of the greatest of these preachers was Archibald Alexander (1772–1851). After briefly summarizing his life and ministry in this article, I will focus on how he

preached Spirit-worked faith in contrast to dead faith in one of his sermons. Such discriminatory preaching is all too rare today.

Archibald Alexander: Life and Ministry

Archibald Alexander was born on April 17, 1772, near Lexington, Virginia. He grew up as a member of a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian family on the American frontier, living in a log cabin and memorizing the Westminster Shorter Catechism. He was also influenced by the writings of the English Puritan John Flavel. After a prolonged struggle with doubt and conviction of sin, he was converted at age seventeen.

At this point, Alexander had already begun studying under William Graham (1745–1799) at Liberty Hall Academy (now Washington and Lee University). He continued those studies after his conversion with an eye to becoming

a minister. Graham passed on to him the theology he had learned from John Witherspoon (1723–1794), president of the College of New Jersey (today’s Princeton University) and the only minister to sign the American Declaration of Independence. Alexander continued to study Puritan writers such as William Bates, Thomas Boston, Jonathan Edwards, and John Owen. After serving as an itinerant evangelist in Virginia and North Carolina, he was ordained as a settled pastor in 1794. In 1796, he became president of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia while continuing to preach in various churches. He was called to serve as the pastor of the large Pine Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in 1807. There he founded a society for street preaching and evangelistic visitation.

In 1808, he began to call for the founding of a seminary to train Presbyterian ministers. Two years later, he was awarded the doctor of divinity degree by the College of New Jersey. In 1812, the General Assembly appointed him the first professor of the newly instituted Princeton Theological Seminary. He served there for thirty-nine years, mostly as professor of didactic and polemical theology.

The small school blossomed and bore much fruit. W. J. Grier writes, “His classes at Princeton grew from nine in the first year until by the time of his death 1,837 young men had sat at his feet.” Alexander’s colleagues Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and Samuel Miller (1769–1850) held him in the highest regard. There was a beautiful unity at Princeton, arising from the faculty’s Christlike spirit and common devotion to the truth of the Scriptures. The son and biographer of Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge (whose very name testifies of his father’s love for Professor Alexander), writes:

I have had a wide experience of professors and of pastors, and I am certain, I have never seen any three who together approached these three in absolute singleness of mind, in simplicity and godly sincerity, in utter unselfishness and devotion to the common cause, each in honor preferring one another. Truth and candor was the atmosphere they breathed, loyalty, brave and sweet, was the spirit of their lives.

Alexander established a pattern for the seminary that combined rigorous biblical studies in the original languages, vibrant preaching in hopes of seeing spiritual revival, faithful adherence to the Reformed theology of the Westminster Standards and Francis Turretin (1623–1687), defense of the truth of the faith with the tools of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and promotion of fervent piety and Christian experience. The original “Design of the



JOEL R. BEEKE is president and professor of systematic theology and homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Seminary” stated that the school aimed “to unite in those who shall sustain the ministerial office, religion and literature; that piety of the heart, which is the fruit only of the renewing and sanctifying grace of God, with solid learning; believing that religion without learning, or learning without religion, in the ministers of the gospel, must ultimately prove injurious to the church.”

Alexander and his colleagues at Princeton Theological Seminary trained men in Reformed theology and engaged in the theological controversies of the day, such as the debate over the “New Divinity” advocated by Charles Finney (1792–1875). However, Alexander also wrote books to teach basic Bible truths, to call children to conversion, to provide readings for family devotions, and to illuminate the Christian’s experience of sin and grace—some of which are still being reprinted, read, and cherished today. James Garretson writes, “Alexander labored relentlessly to impress the importance of the presence and practice of piety on the generation in which he lived.”

In the promotion of piety in the church, Alexander plowed, planted, cultivated, and harvested the fields of God with the tool of preaching. He was known for the priority he gave to sermon preparation and for his effective simplicity of style. He taught his seminary students to avoid “historical, philosophical, or political discussions,” and instead to preach through the “whole system of theology,” especially the “greatest truths,” our moral “duties,” “Christian experience, afflictions and temptations,” and answers for “awakened souls”—all with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and His saving work. For Alexander this meant that the preacher must proclaim God’s Word in a discriminatory

A LIVING, SPIRIT-WORKED FAITH EMBRACES CHRIST, RECEIVING THE WHOLE CHRIST WITH THE WHOLE MAN.

fashion, distinguishing saving faith from a dead faith that lacks the saving fruit of the Spirit's imprint.

To get a taste of Alexander's emphasis on discriminatory, Spirit-based preaching, we will look at a sermon that he delivered in April 1791 before the Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia, to obtain his license to preach. Though it was preached very early in his career, later in life he recalled, "The view taken of the subject is not materially different from that which I should now take."

Alexander Preaching Living Faith versus Dead Faith

Alexander opens his sermon by recognizing that the Scriptures teach that many people in professing Christian nations possess a kind of faith "which it is evident is not that faith which works by love (Gal 5:6) and purifies the heart (Acts 15:9)." Therefore, he aims "to distinguish clearly between a living and a dead faith." This he does by showing the difference between the *causes* of these two kinds of faith, the *natures* they possess, and the *effects* they produce.

First, the *cause* of a living faith is the Holy Spirit: "A living faith is produced by the Spirit of God, for in Scripture it is called 'the faith of the operations of God's Spirit' (Col 2:12). It is also said to be the gift of God (Eph 2:8), and Christ is expressly declared to be the author of it (Heb 12:2). But a dead faith is produced merely by the exertions of human nature without the assistance of the Spirit of God." The true believer knows that he cannot produce saving faith in himself, for the Holy Spirit has convinced him of his sin and unbelief (John 16:8). Nothing short of the power of the Creator of the universe can cause the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to shine in the sinner's heart (2 Cor 4:6). But the man with a dead faith thinks he has the power to believe in Christ. Indeed, he may think he has always believed in Christ because he was raised in the church and always assented to the truths he was taught.

Second, the *nature* of a living, Spirit-worked faith is "a firm and realizing belief of the truths of revelation" that "is firmly seated in the heart and influences the will and affections in such a manner as to become a ruling principle of action." By contrast, a dead faith is "nothing more than an empty notion or speculative opinion" that "only swims in the brain and produces no real effect upon the heart." A living, Spirit-worked faith is a spiritual sight by which the believer "views eternal and invisible things as solemn realities," but a dead faith is a mere idea.

A living, Spirit-worked faith embraces Christ, receiving the whole Christ with the whole man: "Living faith always appropriates him, chooses him as a Savior suitable to itself, receives him as its portion, trusts and depends on him alone for salvation, resigns itself up to him to be governed and directed agreeable to his will, and is pleased and delighted with him above all other things." But "natural men are unable to discern the beauty and excellency of Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through him" and therefore "never can choose and rest upon him as their Savior." A dead faith always leads a soul to trust in something in itself.

Third, the *effect* of Spirit-worked faith "is by far the most important and necessary part of the distinction between a living and a dead faith, for it is by the fruits alone we can determine our faith to be of the operation of the Spirit of God, or that it is in its nature saving." Alexander, recognizing that he could write an entire book listing every Christian grace as a distinguishing mark of a living faith from a dead one, selects some central fruit on which to focus: love, humility, and holiness. In this section, we hear echoes of Edwards' *Religious Affections*. Let's consider what Alexander teaches about love as a fruit of a living, Spirit-worked faith.

A living, Spirit-worked faith produces love for God: "Faith works by love and purifies the heart" (Gal 5:6; Acts 15:9). Love "is the very essence of religion, and without

which the Apostle says, the exercise of all gifts, and the performance of all duties would profit nothing (1 Cor 13:1–3).” A dead faith may prompt men to love God because they believe He will be good to them, but this is no better a love than wicked men have for their friends (Matt 5:46). They love a god of their own imagination, as when men think that God is all mercy and no justice. Such a love is “nothing more than self-love.”

Only a living, Spirit-worked faith comes with a “perception” of “the excellency of the nature of God” and “the beauty of holiness.” This perception enables men to exercise “true love to God,” that is, to “love him for his excellence.” The love-awakening sight of God’s loveliness comes through the gospel: “the moral character of God as it is seen in the face of Jesus Christ is the proper object and end of this affection.” Evidences of such love appear in love for all that bear God’s moral image. The believer has a special love for the people “begotten” of God (1 John 5:1), his brothers and sisters in Christ, “because they are holy and have the image of God.” He also loves the law of God, “which is holy, just, and good, and is a transcript of [God’s] moral character.” He delights in God’s law after the inner man (Rom 7:22) and keeps God’s commandments out of love for Him (John 14:21; 1 John 5:3).

A living, Spirit-worked faith also produces benevolent love for one’s neighbor (Mark 12:31). This includes “that important and self-denying duty of loving our enemies, of bearing injuries, of doing good to them that hate us and blessing and praying for them that curse us.” The true be-

liever especially desires mankind to “obtain the favor and friendship of God,” because he knows that the “happiness of this world” is a tiny thing compared to eternity. He is willing to sacrifice himself like Christ (2 Cor 8:9) and Paul (Rom 9:3), not just for his friends but also for his enemies.

The person with a dead faith “confines his love and good wishes to his own party” and bitterly rejects “all who differ from him.” Though virtually all men pretend to love mankind, their “hearts are so contracted that they will not even put forth their hands to assist them when they are in want in this life.” But pure religion that is undefiled before God consists in visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction (James 1:27).

Conclusion

Alexander’s emphasis on living, Spirit-worked faith, together with a discriminatory proclamation that separates that faith from a superfluous dead faith, is all too rare today. Here we see discriminating preaching done with biblical wisdom, helping people to examine themselves to see whether Christ is in them by the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit. We also see how Alexander sketched a portrait of experiential, practical Christianity consisting of faith and love. A theologian by vocation, Alexander never lost his passion for preaching Christ and the necessity of living, Spirit-worked faith in Him, and he imparted that passion to generations of men who graduated from Princeton Seminary. ♦



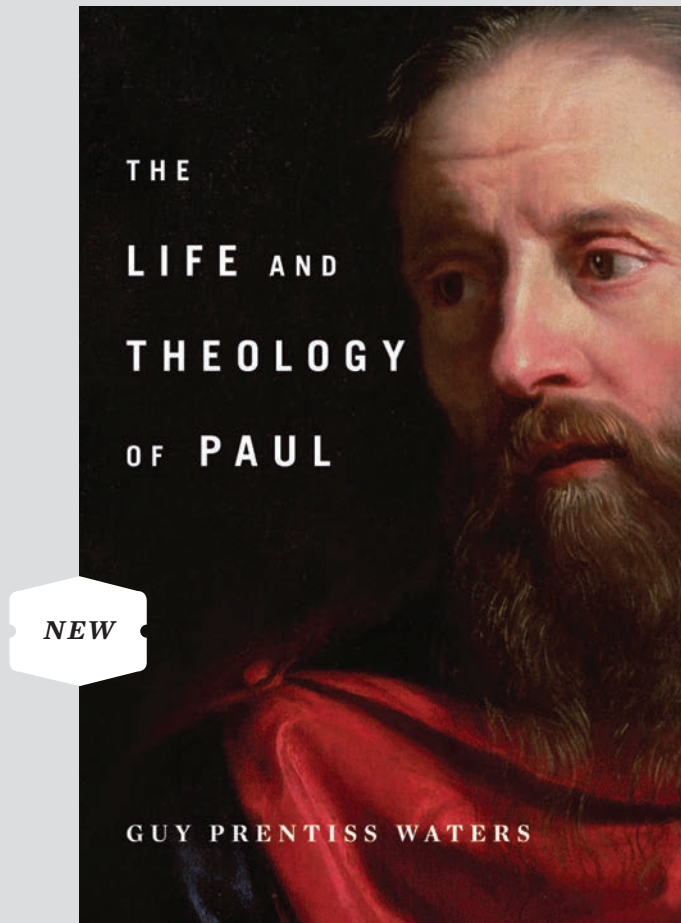
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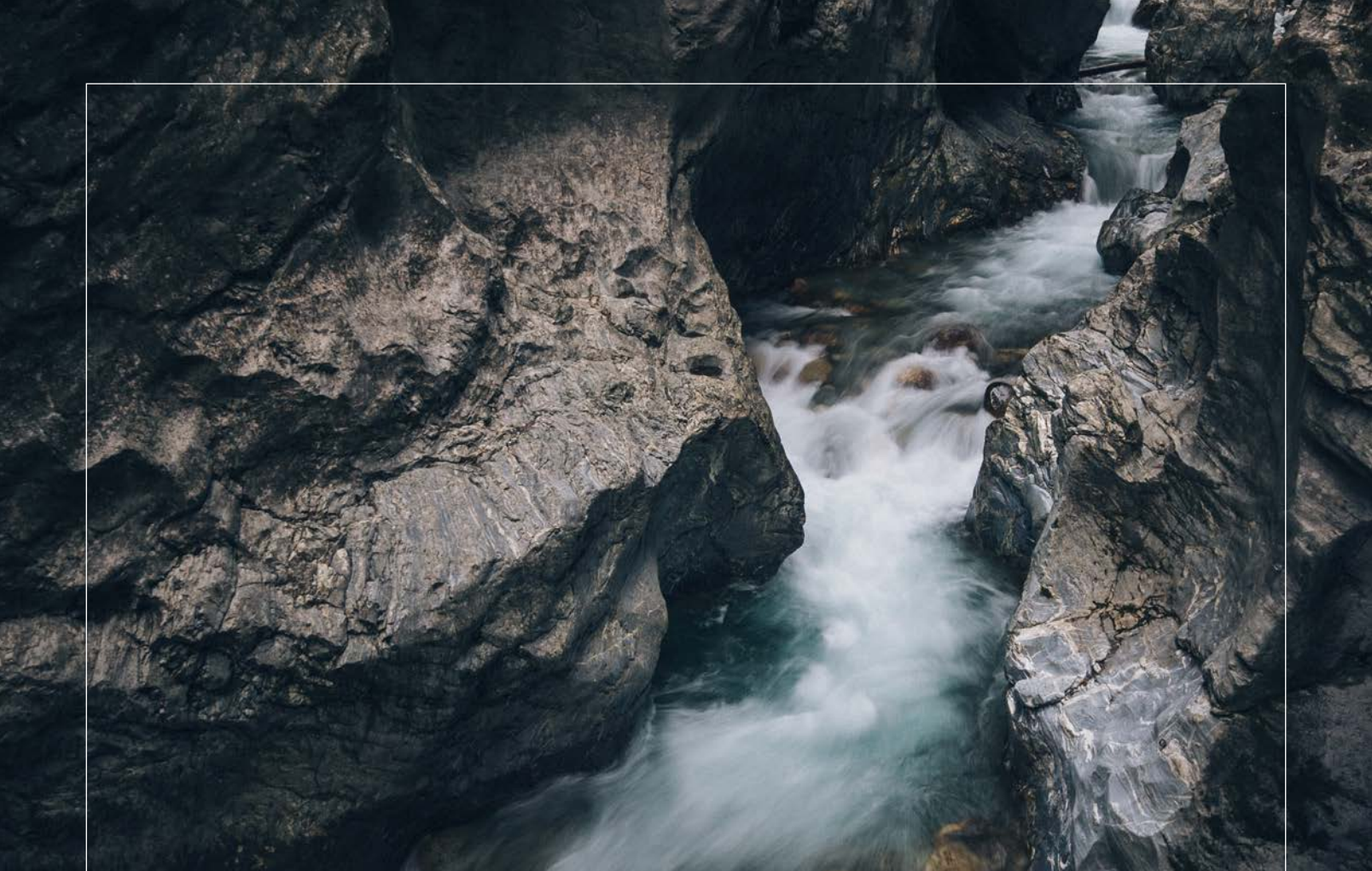
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