

PREACHING IN THE  
**HOLY SPIRIT**



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## Preface

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It was a Thursday night in February of 1952, and I was approaching my eighteenth birthday. I left my house to walk the one-and-a-half miles to the main business area in the town of Stamford, Connecticut. In those days all the stores remained open until 9:00 p.m. on Thursdays. I knew that many of my high school buddies would be hanging around (“chilling out”) in front of the Liggette’s Drug Store on the main street. That spot was the place where I and several other recently converted young people were scheduled to meet and conduct our first open-air street meeting. Several old white-haired men of God who had been brought into our lives urged us to venture forth with our newfound faith in this way.

After lustily singing several hymns and choruses, the time came for me to step forward in that little semicircle of young people in order to give my testimony and to preach the gospel. With my recently acquired leather-bound New Testament with Psalms in hand, I stepped forward, opened my mouth, and

began to speak. Much to my surprise, although I was a natively timid and fearful young man, I was made conscious of the presence of dynamics that profoundly influenced what I said and how I said it on that memorable night. In a real sense, that night was my “coming-out party” in openly and boldly confessing my attachment to Christ before my peers. It was also my “spoiled-for-life party,” in that I experienced on that occasion what I now know to be the immediate agency and operations of the Holy Spirit in the act of preaching.

Now, fast-forward fifty years. It is October 2002. The place is no longer a street corner but the auditorium of Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey. The occasion is the annual pastors’ conference held each October in the church. In that setting I was privileged to preach two messages on the subject “Preaching in the Spirit.” Those messages were the ripened fruit of fifty years of scriptural investigation, constant study, and observation relative to this vital subject of what is involved in preaching in the Spirit. God was gracious in drawing near to us with a heightened sense of His presence as I delivered those two messages. A spirit of deep brokenness descended upon the men. Several mature men urged me to commit the substance of those sermons to the more accessible and permanent medium of the writ-



ten page. And now...you know the rest of the story. You are holding it in your hands.

I commend these pages to God for His blessings with the prayer that because the substance of those two sermons is now embalmed in printer's ink, there may be more preaching "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" (1 Peter 1:12).

November 2010

Albert N. Martin



## CHAPTER 1



# The Agency and Operations of the Spirit in Preaching

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To penetrate more deeply into my special concern on this topic, consider this expanded title in a style typical of the Puritans: “The Immediate Agency and Operations of the Holy Spirit in and on the Preacher in the Act of Preaching.” Two introductory matters will ease us into this vital theme: first, an exegesis of the language of my longer “Puritan” title; and second, an identification of several crucial presuppositions relative to the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in general. Having accomplished that, we will focus on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in and on the preacher himself in the act of preaching.

### **Defining the Topic**

First, what do I mean by this rather lengthy combination of words in the longer title? That is a fair question, and I would offer a straightforward answer. I seek to

address the agency and operations of the Holy Spirit with reference to the act of preaching itself.

I am not addressing the necessity and reality of the agency and operations of the Holy Spirit in our preparations for preaching. There are many ways in which we desperately need His agency and operations prior to our entering into the pulpit. For example, we must experience His work in our preparation as the spirit of wisdom and understanding in the selection of our sermonic materials (Isa. 11:2). We desperately need His guidance when we ask ourselves the question, "What shall I preach?" Further, as we sit at our desks in our studies, we must experience the Spirit's ministry as the spirit of illumination, enabling us to enter into the mind of God in any given text or theme of Scripture. When we pray at the beginning of the preparation of our sermons, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18), it is the Holy Spirit who brings God's answer to our minds and hearts. Further, we must experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our preparation as "the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech. 12:10), sustaining in us a prayerful disposition from the beginning to the end of our preparation. These ministries of the Spirit are most necessary and real in the experience of faithful preachers. But I bypass these aspects of His work in order to direct our attention more narrowly to the

agency and operations of the Holy Spirit in and on the preacher himself in the very act of preaching.

Again, I am not addressing the agency and operations of the Holy Spirit on the congregation in the act of preaching. Surely, we deeply desire that under our preaching, as it was under the preaching of Peter, the Holy Spirit would fall on all those who hear the Word (Acts 10:44). Rather, I will seek to demonstrate that His agency (His active power) and His operations (the effects of that power) are direct and immediate in and on the preacher in the act of preaching, in contrast to those operations that come through intervening agencies. This, then, is our topical bull's-eye. I trust that the terminology has helped to delimit the field of our concern with some measure of precision.

### **Important Presuppositions**

Second, in this introduction I want briefly to highlight several presuppositions concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit in general. These presuppositions are realities drawn from a scripturally based and historically orthodox doctrine of the Holy Spirit. I will not take the time to prove these things. I will only attempt to highlight them so that they may function as a kind of present quality control while we meditate and grapple with this

often neglected but crucially important dimension of His ministry.

First, I presuppose that the Holy Spirit is a person. When dealing with any aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whether His gifts or functions, we must always remember these are the operations, gifts, and functions of a person. This truth is particularly vital when considering preaching. An alarm goes off within me when I see expressions like “how to obtain the power of the Spirit in our ministries” or other references to what is called “Holy Spirit power.” Such language takes us perilously close to the words of Simon the sorcerer who said to Peter, “Give me also this power.” To such crass impersonalizing of the Holy Spirit and the idea that such power could be purchased, Peter responded, “Thy money perish with thee” (Acts 8:19–20). Our present concern is with the agency and operations of one person in relationship to another person, that second person being a preacher.

Second, I also presuppose that He is a divine person. He is God in the fullest sense. All that constitutes the essence of the Father’s deity and the Son’s deity can and must be equally attributed to the person of the Holy Spirit. Hence, all the reverence, all the submission, and all the love that flows out of Spirit-renewed hearts to the Father and to the Son

must also constantly flow out to this glorious divine person called the Holy Spirit.

My third presupposition is that He is also a sovereign, divine person. This fact is especially necessary when thinking of the agency and operations of the Spirit in conjunction with gifts of utterance. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit is nowhere more highlighted in Scripture than in the very setting of the Apostle Paul's treatment of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, where he says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (v. 1). We are told in verse 11, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally [individually] as he will." Therefore we must beware of any attempt to establish ironclad rules within which the Holy Spirit must be expected to operate and function. He does not work in and on the preacher in the act of preaching in any perfectly predictable pattern.

Having explained my lengthier title and identified these three fundamental presuppositions, we now take up our subject under three major headings: 1) its indispensable necessity, 2) its specific manifestations, and 3) its restrained or diminished measure.