



SPIRIT EMPOWERED PREACHING

Involving The Holy Spirit in
Your Ministry



ARTURO G. AZURDIA III



MENTOR





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© Arturo G. Azurdia III
ISBN 1-85792-413-4
ISBN 978-1-85792-413-8
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



First Published in 1998,
reprinted in 2003, 2006 and 2007
in the
Mentor imprint
by
Christian Focus Publications
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Great Britain

www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Alister MacInnes

Printed by CPD, Wales

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DEDICATION

To Lori, my beloved wife,
and to Katherine and Jonathan, gracious gifts of God

May God use us all
for the greater glory of Jesus Christ





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been said, ‘An expert is a person who has read a great deal in a particular field of study. A scholar is a person who has read everything in a particular field of study.’

By these definitions I am certainly no scholar. For that matter, neither am I an expert. I am, without shame, a local church pastor of average gifts. My life, however, has been steadily improved by people used of God to benefit me in unimaginable ways.

The realization of this fact has become all the more poignant to me throughout this project. To the following I would like to express my deepest appreciation and affection:

To Arturo and Joy Azurdia, my father and mother, who have been the foremost instruments of God’s gracious providence in my life.

To Frank Griffith, my dear friend, whose Spirit empowered preaching wonderfully benefitted the saints at Christ Community Church during my sabbatical.

To Steve Fernandez, a true Barnabas, whose faithful encouragement has been a gift from God during some of the darkest moments in my ministry.

To Dr. John Armstrong, who through his own ministry of proclamation first opened my eyes to Spirit empowered preaching. He is both an authentic Christian and a true reformer, an exceedingly rare combination.

To the faculty at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, particularly Dr. Joseph Pipa (now president of Greenville Theological Seminary), who powerfully reinforced my commitment to the theology of preaching, and Dr. Edmund Clowney, whose influence not only effected my preaching but altered my Christian life. He convinced me that the Scriptures are to be read Christocentrically.







Foreword

The work of preaching absorbs the interest and passion of God-called men virtually every waking moment of every day. Sometimes it even awakens us in the night with an ever deepening realization of the humbling question, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, 'To me the work of preaching is the highest and greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.' How could any God-called herald not agree? And yet how can any who preaches regularly not be deeply aware of how infrequently he knows 'the sweet piercing of the Spirit' by the preached Word into the hearts of his people?

Preaching, in our time, has clearly undergone significant change. Often the preacher, even the evangelical preacher, is not more than a dispenser of new data (biblical or otherwise), or a motivator and spiritual counselor for spiritually starved and confused people. What is most obviously missing is 'the burden'. There is no 'woe' to be felt in the preacher's tone or spirit. And where there is no true burden, or woe, there is no true or lasting blessing!

What is needed in the West, now more than ever, is biblical reformation and God-sent revival. Art Azurdia's excellent book, *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, profoundly addresses the need for reformation and revival in the pulpit. He takes the teachable reader through the important biblical texts, always pointing him to 'preaching Christ and him crucified' as the true theme of the whole Bible. He shows what is needed to accomplish this work and he warmly urges us to get power from God as well as material to deliver.

I can't begin to number the times I have heard sermons and said to myself, 'What my brother says is true but so what?' Or, 'Does this man really believe his message?'

Art Azurdia will convince you, if your mind and heart is open to God, to get power as well as material. He will not disdain the hard work of study, especially of exegesis, but he will convince you that having done all of this work you must still deal with God for grace and power in the Spirit. If your people would hear God, not just you



the preacher, you must bring more to the act of preaching than orthodoxy.

What has ‘unction’ or ‘anointing’ to do with preaching? How are we to ‘ask the Father for the Spirit’ (Luke 11:13) in terms of preaching? Is there an access of Holy Spirit power that truly falls upon the preacher and hearer which demonstrates, beyond question, that God is speaking and his people know it? Art Azurdia believes that there most certainly is and will show you why, with Scriptural argumentation. If he is right, and I believe he is, then this could be one of the most important books to come along in many years for the reformation of the church in our time.

I pray this fine book will have an ever increasing effect upon those called to preach. My prayer is that God will give it a wide audience and life changing fruitfulness for years to come. I intend to read it again and again and to widely recommend it to pastors the world over.

John H. Armstrong

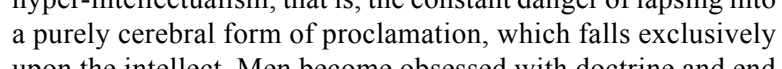




INTRODUCTION

Careful, meditative, and painstaking exegesis must be the foundation for an expository ministry. All doctrine and theology with its attendant application must be the result of a literal, grammatical, historical, contextual, redemptive comprehension of the sacred text. Any attempt at preaching apart from this *a priori* commitment is to undercut the very substance of proclamation.

Having affirmed this, however, we must also acknowledge the potential liability to which we who approach Holy Writ in this fashion are particularly susceptible. Consider the insight of one prominent British preacher:



One of the great perils that face preachers ... is the problem of hyper-intellectualism, that is, the constant danger of lapsing into a purely cerebral form of proclamation, which falls exclusively upon the intellect. Men become obsessed with doctrine and end up as brain-oriented preachers. There is consequently a fearful impoverishment in their hearers emotionally, devotionally, and practically. Such pastors are men of books and not men of people; they know the doctrines, but they know nothing of the emotional side of religion. They set little store upon experience or upon constant fellowship and interaction with almighty God. It is one thing to explain the truth of Christianity to men and women; it is another thing to feel the overwhelming power of the sheer loveliness and enthrallment of Jesus Christ and to communicate that dynamically to the whole person who listens so that there is a change of such dimensions that he loves Him with all his heart and soul and mind and strength.¹

What kind of preaching is it that causes men and women ‘to feel the overwhelming power of the sheer loveliness and enthrallment of Jesus Christ’ ... that compels a person to love the Lord Jesus ‘with all his heart and soul and mind and strength?’ It is preaching that emerges from diligent exegesis, to be sure. But more than that, it is preaching



that is infused with a power, *a vitality*, that infinitely exceeds the scope of human strength. It is a vitality that can only be attributed to the divine; a vitality that originates from heaven itself.

It is my deep conviction that the greatest deficiency in contemporary expositional ministry is powerlessness; in other words, preaching that is devoid of the vitality of the Holy Spirit. The Puritans of old referred to it simply as ‘that certain unction’. Others have spoken of it as ‘the anointing’. Whether or not these terms most appropriately reflect the biblical theology of Spirit-empowered preaching is not of concern at this moment. That they capture the *sine qua non* of authentic preaching as revealed in the biblical record is undeniable.

Stated more explicitly, it is

... the Holy Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner. It is an access of power. It is God giving power, an 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 endeavours of man to a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works.²

Allow me to ask you, fellow preacher: do you deeply desire this experience when you ascend into the pulpit? Do you beseech heaven to dispatch a Spirit-vitalized word when you stand before the people of God? Sadly, it would appear that for a great many today this is a dimension of preaching that is altogether ignored. Though studies on the subject of preaching proliferate, right techniques are promoted as the guarantee of effectiveness while dependence upon the Holy Spirit is given token consideration, if mentioned at all. A cursory view of contemporary homiletic literature quickly establishes this analysis.

To be sure, certain techniques are essential to effective preaching, particularly the exegetical techniques needed to discern the Spirit-intended meaning of a preaching portion. However, apart from the quickening power of the Holy Spirit in the act of proclamation, even the best and most essential technique falls miserably short of transforming those to whom we preach. J. I. Packer writes:

The churches of the West are currently in confusion about the way to make preaching spiritually significant for the modern congregation, and are treating the problem as primarily one of devising appropriate techniques. Technique is, of course, necessary in preaching But the Puritans themselves would be the first to insist that there is more to significant preaching than mere technique, even applicatory technique.³

Packer then concludes by quoting Richard Baxter: ‘All our work must be done spiritually, as men possessed of the Holy Ghost.’⁴

In a nutshell, here is the thesis for which I am contending: the efficacious empowerment of the Spirit of God is indispensable to the ministry of proclamation. But surely this must be followed by an obvious question. If this thesis is biblically justifiable why then is the ignorance, or even worse, the disregard of the ministry of the Spirit in relationship to preaching so widespread in our time?

Many compelling answers could be offered. Nevertheless, one appears to be preeminent above all others. The neglect of the ministry of the Spirit in the work of preaching has emerged as a result of a failure to see the full-orbed implications of the nature of sinful humanity. Stated more directly, one’s understanding of human depravity will determine the extent to which dependence is placed upon the sovereign Spirit of God.

Consider for a moment the biblical record regarding the nature of man: ‘The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?’ (Jer. 17:9). Paul states that unbelievers walk ‘in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart’ (Eph. 4:17-18). The unregenerate are by definition ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ (Eph. 2:1), possessing hearts that have been blinded by ‘the god of this world’ (2 Cor. 4:4).

No human eloquence or rhetoric can convince men dead in sin of the truth of God. The unquickened heart is impenetrable. Spurgeon says:

I shall not attempt to teach a tiger the virtues of vegetarianism; but I shall as hopefully attempt that task as I would try to convince an



unregenerate man of the truths revealed by God concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come. These spiritual truths are repugnant to carnal men, and the carnal mind cannot receive the things of God. Gospel truth is diametrically opposed to fallen nature; and if I have not a power much stronger than that which lies in moral suasion, or in my own explanations and arguments, I have undertaken a task in which I am sure of defeat . . . Except the Lord endow us with power from on high, our labour must be in vain, and our hopes must end in disappointment.⁵

Simply stated, to attempt a preaching ministry apart from an active dependence upon the vitality of the Spirit of God is to blatantly disregard our biblical anthropology. We affirm that the opening of the heart is a divine prerogative (Luke 24:45), the monergistic work of God (Acts 16:14). The most gifted preacher is impotent to inaugurate a saving experience apart from a gracious work of the omnipotent Spirit. Therefore, any effective ministry of exposition must include both a resolute commitment to the practice of diligent exegesis and a thorough going dependence upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now we must ask, ‘Do the scriptures speak specifically to this issue of vitality in preaching?’ Absolutely. There exists within the pages of biblical revelation a definitive theology of Spirit-empowered preaching, as we will discover. For the moment, however, I urge you to reflect upon the commission of the original preachers of the gospel:

‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’ (Luke 24:46-48).

Consider these men. They were afforded the finest preparation for ministry ever experienced. They had communed with God incarnate for three years, benefiting from His constant instruction and observing innumerable displays of seemingly limitless power. Three of them were firsthand witnesses of His manifest glory at the Mount of Transfiguration. All of them had observed His crucifixion, and most

importantly, His power over death in resurrection. If ever a man had been equipped for preaching the gospel, these men were. No theological institution could ever hope to duplicate the privileges granted them. Yet the omniscient Christ knew that if left to themselves these privileged men would meet with nothing but failure and antagonism. Therefore, to meet the demands of a commission impossible to accomplish in human strength, He promised a source of power that would infinitely transcend human potency:

‘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’ (Luke 24:49).

Luke later records:

‘... but you shall 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).

Of course, the unfolding of the book of Acts reveals the fulfilment of this promise, perhaps most graphically displayed on the Day of Pentecost when a Spirit-empowered Peter preached a simple exposition of a few Old Testament texts. What occurred? Truth was united with fire and consequently three thousand people were added to the Kingdom of God.

Twenty centuries later, the baton of the Great Commission has been handed to us. The circumstances we face are almost identical to those of the disciples. The message is the same. The nature of unconverted man is as it has always been. Perhaps the only substantial difference is that we are not the men the disciples were. For all of our educational opportunities, we have not been given the inestimable privilege of learning directly from Jesus. The conclusion, then, is obvious: if they were men in need of the vitality of the Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel, we, at the very least, are equally needy. It is, at last, the epitome of foolishness to attempt to carry out the exposition of the gospel devoid of the vitality of God the Spirit.

A Presbyterian minister of a previous generation made this penetrating statement with which I conclude:

The great want of today is a holier ministry. We do not need more stalwart polemics, more mighty apologists, or preachers who compass a wide range of natural knowledge, important though these be. But we need men of God who bring the atmosphere of heaven with them to the pulpit and speak from the borders of another world.⁶

Notes

1. Geoffrey Thomas, 'Powerful Preaching', *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), p. 369.

2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 305.

3. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 289.

4. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (repr. ed., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 120.

5. Charles Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (repr. ed., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), p. 322.

6. This is an anonymous quote read by Iain Murray in a tape-recorded sermon entitled 'The Problems of Contemporary Evangelism'.