

The Holy Spirit in the Pulpit: Attempting to Define Divine Unction

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Abstract

Unction or anointing is often referred to when speaking of the power of preaching. But unction is a difficult thing to define because it is described in such subjective ways. Part of the murkiness that surrounds the idea of divine unction is whether it can be defined biblically and how it can be attained. If unction is real, what are the biblical evidences for such an empowerment in the New Testament church?

Introduction

Paul made it very clear to his Corinthian readers that preaching is foolish (1 Cor 1:21). It is foolish in the eyes of the world because it lays aside all worldly ideas of control and manipulation and clings to the power of the cross to bring about lasting change in the hearts of those who believe. To the world, preaching a crucified Savior is foolish.

The fact is, one cannot fail to regard the Holy Spirit as the source of the power that accompanies authentic biblical preaching. Jesus commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the promised Helper had been sent from the Father and had clothed them with “power from on high” (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). Immediately following the outpouring of the Spirit on that small band of believers, the apostle Peter preached powerfully, with 3,000 souls coming to Christ that very hour as a result. That is gospel power! The New Testament church must have been refreshed as they read Luke’s account and were reminded of the Lord Jesus’ promise to give them the Holy Spirit along with His accompanying power (Acts 1:8), “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Likewise, the church of Thessalonica must have been comforted, remembering Paul’s tender pastoral work among them as he reminded them how he preached the Word of life to them not in his own power, but in the power given to him from God Himself (1 Thess 1:5), “Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”

Because of these passages and others, some have concluded that the power of the Holy Spirit still comes in such an extraordinary way for preachers of the Word called “unction.” This unction is nearly always described in subjective and emotive terms devoid of biblical reference or exegesis. But, is there danger in chasing a subjective phenomenon that is to accompany the work of the Spirit? This is not to say that feelings have no role in the Christian life. But what must be understood is that feelings should not drive our theology, instead our feelings must be conformed

to the Scriptures. The apostle John warned, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The activities of the Holy Spirit often are shrouded in mystery, and many errors have been taught in His name. One such area of the work of the Spirit that is especially clouded with mystical notions and uncertainty is the subject at hand.

In both the Old and New Testaments, the Spirit moved His servants to speak with divine authority. But how does God enable His ministers to preach with power? Does He ignore the heart and use only the intellect? Or does He bypass the usual methods of the mind, which involve in-depth study of His Word? Does there even need to be such a dichotomy? Some have charged that those who preach to the head miss the heart, making the church a place for scholars and not saints (although the opposite can be said as well). With the swelling influence of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave movements, some within the cessationist camp have overreacted to what they deem as abuses to the work of the Spirit that they have virtually ignored His influence in any meaningful way. As with any extreme, we must go to the testimony of the Word itself to test all these matters against the standard of divine truth. The Bible plainly says that we are to love the Lord our God with all of our *heart* and all our *soul* and all of our *mind* (Matt 22:37). Clearly, we are to depend upon both our God-given powers of intellect and the Spirit’s activity in our lives.

There is much confusion within the church as to the Spirit’s activity in the life of the believer, and woefully, it is not only the laity that follows unbiblical ideas. Many pastors are guilty of departing from the Scriptures in seeking to establish their personal understanding of the Spirit’s work in their pulpit ministry. However confident our feelings make us, the question is whether Scripture supports these claims. A pneumatology that is biblical to a point but then diverges from the Bible when intuition says differently is dangerous. So, what is one to make of the successful ministries of such Christian luminaries as Charles Spurgeon, R. A. Torrey, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, as well as controversial men such as Charles Finney, who heartily held to the idea of a special unction of the Spirit? Surely they would agree that if one’s doctrine cannot stand under the scrutiny of Scriptures one must “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Popular Notions of Divine Unction

Sitting with nine seminary students in a preaching lab, I asked this group of young, eager expositors, “How many of you believe in a thing called ‘unction?’” Eight of the nine raised their hands. Then one asked the key question: “How do *you* define ‘unction?’” The definition of this idea makes all the difference in the world. How one defines such a key theological word will require an examination of the biblical evidence to establish a proper understanding of what unction is. But before looking at the biblical texts that teach about anointing, it would be profitable to look at some of the definitions that have been given for the word “unction” or its equivalent, “anointing.”¹

As I hope to illustrate, definitions of unction vary widely and often contradict one another. This should point to the reality that these definitions are not drawn from biblical study but rather from subjective experience. For instance, Randy Mayeux in his *Leadership* article entitled “How Does Unction Function?” laid out his parameters for the unction of the Spirit:

I've found that some of my preconceptions about unction have to be tossed aside. For example, unction is not the product of my homiletic and human efforts. Unction is not necessarily present when I've preached on subjects that most interest me or on topics that most stretch me. Neither is it present when I've delivered the message flawlessly. Unction is not something I necessarily *feel*. Though there have been moments I have sensed the presence of God in ministry, I've known other times when it only became clear later that God had used the moment to His glory. So if unction cannot be predicted by what preachers do or how preachers feel, how do we know if and when it has occurred? We look at our people. Unction, I've come to see, occurs as much in the listeners as in the preachers. ... The anointing, the unction, is recognized because of its impact on the listener.²

It is important to note that Mayeux says that unction cannot be predicted and is not tied to how the preacher feels. If he is right, then a preacher may discover only later (or not at all) that he was anointed with power while preaching—the evidence of an anointing being dependent upon the *results of a sermon preached*.

W. E. Sangster also makes an attempt at defining unction, although his definition is less clear than Mayeux's and even contradicts it in places:

Unction is that mystic plus in preaching which no one else can define and no one (with any spiritual sensitivity at all) can mistake. Men have it, or they do not have it. It is a thing apart from good sermon outlines, helpful spiritual insights, wise understanding, or eloquent speech. It can use all of these media—and dispense with them. It is rare, indefinable, and unspeakably precious.³

Twice Sangster mentions that this unction cannot be defined; yet he points to its mystical qualities. He does not say how unction can be distinguished from mere charisma, but he believes that unction is so clear (despite its rarity) that any person can see it readily.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon likewise failed to give a clear definition of unction, although he heartily believed in its necessity for ministry:

What is [unction]? I wonder how long we might beat our brains before we could plainly put into words what is meant by *preaching with unction*; yet he who preaches knows its presence; and he who hears soon detects its absence.... Such is the mystery of spiritual anointing; we know, but we cannot tell to others what it is.... Some have tried to imitate unction by unnatural tones and whines; by turning up the whites of their eyes, and lifting their hands in a most ridiculous manner.... Unction is a thing which you cannot manufacture, and its counterfeits are worse than worthless.⁴

It seems that distinguishing the true work of the Spirit from the false was a problem in Spurgeon's time as it is today. Although he showed a disdain for the theatrical claims to unction, he failed to define what true unction actually is. It would seem that if he desired to put down

once and for all the false activity done in the name of the Spirit, Spurgeon would be capable of doing so from Scripture with utmost clarity, yet he did not.

How should one biblically view this mysterious thing called “anointing?” Is it in preaching results, as Mayeux says? Can it be felt? Can a person who has done little or no study preach with an anointing power, despite his lack of biblical saturation in the text? Thus far definitions have been contradictory and thin, so a definition with more substance is needed.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives probably the most detailed definition of what the unction of the Spirit is:

[Unction] is the Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner. It is an access of power. It is God given 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 a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes a channel through whom the Spirit works.⁵

Here, once again, what has been alluded to is made clear in Lloyd-Jones’s definition, an “‘access of power’—what he also called “divine afflatus” and described as “an ‘accession’ or ‘effusion of power.’ This affects the preacher, lifting him out of himself and giving him abilities which are not naturally his as he discourses.”⁶ Whereas the other definitions pointed to results and feelings as evidence of the anointing, Lloyd-Jones instead focused on the anointing as a work of the Spirit and His special work through preaching. This is not to say that he did not link the anointing power with feelings and results, but these are a secondary result of what the Spirit is doing through the preacher. When discussing the effects of such an anointing on the preacher, Lloyd-Jones answered in a similar way as others:

How does one know [the anointing]? It gives clarity of thought, clarity of speech, ease of utterance, a great sense of authority and confidence as you are preaching, an awareness of a power not your own thrilling through the whole of your being, and an indescribable sense of joy. You are a man “possessed,” you are taken hold of, and taken up. I like to put it like this—and I know of nothing on earth that is comparable to this feeling—that when this happens you have a feeling that you are not actually doing the preaching, you are looking on at yourself in amazement as this is happening. It is not your effort, you are just the instrument, the channel, the vehicle: the Spirit is using you, and you are looking on in great enjoyment and astonishment.⁷

Lloyd-Jones believed that unction affects not only the recipients of the message, but also the senses of the preacher in the preaching act. Lloyd-Jones (as Spurgeon before him) felt that the anointed preacher knows exactly when he is being carried along by the Spirit and that a man can say whether he is speaking with the Lord’s anointing.

If these definitions were laid side-by-side, it would be apparent that each acknowledges some mystery to the anointing of the Spirit—an other-worldliness. These definitions also point to the special sense of God doing His work through the preacher, as well as the power of God that gives either the message or the messenger an advantage over a preacher who is not anointed.

But along with these similarities are some stark differences. For some, the power is unknown, even unfelt, by the preacher. For others, the anointing is not only known by the listening audience, but also experienced powerfully by the preacher himself. Some definitions state that the anointing does not necessarily have any effect on the presentation of the sermon (whether stylistically or in improved speaking ability), while others claim that the anointing actually makes speech come with greater clarity and ease.

These dissimilarities should cause one to seek a *biblical definition* of these things. An astute reader would notice that the definitions given were mainly arguments from experience and not primarily biblical. Many of these men have included in their fuller writings biblical argumentation that for the existence of the anointing, but their experience-laden definitions have little or no exegetical support—possibly accounting for why they differ so widely and have such serious contradictions.

David Doran did a study comparing different views of the way that one attains the anointing of the Spirit, and he found that one common thread wove through all of them—the necessity of prayer.⁸ But as he also pointed out, the formula differed beyond this one aspect of prayer. R. A. Torrey had a seven-step method; David Martyn Lloyd-Jones seemingly had a five-point plan; and Charles Spurgeon offered biblical advice without outlining any particular methodology for attaining the necessary anointing of the Spirit.

Ronald E. Osmond⁹ and Robert G. Valci¹⁰, taking traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic views of a sacred anointing offer biblical examples of powerful preaching that they say prove that such an unction not only exists, but also is attainable and indispensable for ministry today. However, in their attempts to connect the anointing aspects of the Old Testament, both Osmond and Valci build upon little exegetical evidence that such an anointing is available to New Testament saints today.

Biblical Definitions of Unction

For all the discussions in books and articles about anointing, it is interesting that few refer to what the New Testament actually says about the word itself. This is mostly because the idea of anointing as a special empowerment by God is not directly connected with the word “anoint.” Of the major words used for this activity, this paper will discuss two of the words for anointing or those associated with the activity of anointing that are particularly pertinent to the point of the subject before us.

Christ as the Anointed One: Christos

Christos in the Septuagint and the New Testament is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Meshiach*.¹¹ The word *Christos* refers to the one who has been anointed for a special purpose. In the Old Testament, the three offices that God appointed to be anointed with oil were the priests, the king, and certain prophets.

The anointing prescribed by the LORD to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16:1 was one of three special anointing acts that set aside certain people for special acts of service to the LORD. It was specifically through the anointing of prophets, priests, and kings that the divine choice for service was endowed.¹² The act of anointing prophets in the Bible is rare, with 1 Kings 19:1-16 giving an example of the anointing of both kings and a prophet. Beginning in Exodus 40 with Aaron as high priest, each successive high priest seems to have been newly anointed, although we cannot be certain that Israel followed this mandate faithfully. Those who served after Aaron's sons had no need to be anointed in the same way, since Aaron's sons qualified all priests thereafter for service (Ex 40:15). Their initial anointing was sufficient for all the priests who would follow in their footsteps.

The oil of anointing was a special mixture of choice spices and olive oil and was used only for such a specific occasion. The "recipe" for this oil is found in Exodus 30:23-25, and its specific uses are included in verses 26-30. Although this section does not include the sanctioned use of this oil for kings or priests, the oil is described as "holy anointing oil" (v. 25), and thus may have been used for the rare and special occasions of anointing kings and priests, although this cannot be stated with certainty.

In the New Testament, the expectation of the Anointed One, *the Christos*, is anticipated early in the life of Jesus. In Luke 2:11, the angel that appeared to the shepherds in the field declared that the Savior who was born was "Christ the Lord." Closely following the birth of the Anointed One was the great expectation of the coming of the Messiah by Simeon (Luke 2:26), who was told by the Holy Spirit that, "he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Even those who were hostile to the coming of the Christ knew of His coming. Matthew 2:4 shows that Herod sought to ascertain from the chief priests and the scribes "where the Christ was to be born." All three of these examples point out the nature of the anointing or the special choosing of the One who was the hope of Israel and the world. Though there had been many "anointed ones" in the Old Testament, this was *the Anointed One*. As Isaiah 9:6 prophesied, "for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Christians and Anointing: Chrio

In the New Testament, the word *chrio* is infrequent (found only five times—Luke 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21; Heb 1:9), and *chrisma* is likewise rare, occurring only three times—and all in the book of 1 John (2:20, 27 [2x]).

Of the five occurrences of *chrio*, the three Lukan uses all refer to the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power. This anointing occurred at Jesus baptism, which is the focal point of Luke 3. Luke 4 begins with Jesus, "full of the Spirit" (v. 1), being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested. The Hebrews 1:9 reference is a quote from Isaiah 61:3 and likewise refers to the anointing of Jesus. Any attempts to connect Christ's special anointing as the Messiah to His preaching as normative and exemplary for the Apostles and all anointed preachers to follow them lacks exegetical proof.¹³ Christ's anointing was unique and unrepeatable as the "Son of the Most High," the One who would inherit the throne of David, ruling over the house of Jacob forever, and of whose kingdom there would be no end (Luke 1:32-33). Christ does share His authority

and power with His Apostles and His disciples (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), but the New Testament writers never use the language of anointing to refer to this transfer and sharing of power. There can be no doubt that the power of Christ is shared with his disciples (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), but the question before us is whether that power is rightly called unction, and if there is a special anointing, where is this power identified as such?

The last use of *chrío* occurs in Second Corinthians 1:21. In the context of that text, Paul described the work of God in the life of the Corinthian believers. He described the faithfulness of God that would never disappoint them. In verse 21, Paul referred to the great work of salvation that God had done in their lives. Paul wrote of the Corinthian believers having been established with him, Timothy, and Silvanus in Jesus Christ (v. 19). In a similar manner, they all were anointed, sealed, and given the Spirit (vv. 21-22). The context strongly suggests that the anointing of believers is the reception of the Holy Spirit at their conversion. As has been shown above, anointing in the Old Testament and in reference to Jesus Christ was an act of God choosing for Himself a vessel for His work—a commissioning. The Corinthian believers were told in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that they were unified in Christ through being baptized into one body through the one Spirit. Paul was establishing the connection between his own salvation and the salvation of the Corinthians.¹⁴ This passage does not lend credence to the popular notion of unction, but rather speaks of a universal anointing given to all Christians who have been chosen by God's decree for salvation and to carry out His work as He has established it.

Christians and Anointing: Chrisma

The Apostle John's use of *chrisma* in his first epistle (2:20, 27) occurs only three times in chapter two. In the context, John writes regarding the coming of antichrists—those who came in among the flock of God and who eventually left the church. This is evidence that these antichrists were not God's children (1John 2:19).

In 1 John 2:20, John is contrasting the antichrists that the church was experiencing with the true children of God: "But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge." The anointing here is what distinguishes a true follower of God from a person who has made a false profession. This anointing would include the reception and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which all true believers have (Rom 8:9). John gives these believers the assurance that since they have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, they have no need for the secret things of the false teachers. The Spirit within them supplies them with all knowledge. John reiterates this in verse 27:

But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything—and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you—abide in him.

This was what Jesus Himself taught the disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Of this anointing Hiebert writes:

In spite of any special claims for themselves that the heretics have advanced, John assures his readers that they truly possess the needed spiritual equipment to resist these antichrists.... It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that establishes believers in their faith and enables them to understand God's truth.¹⁵

The anointing or unction of the Spirit as described by John 2:27 is that inner illumination of biblical truth that cannot be attained by those who are still in the darkness. It does not mean that there is no need for pastors or teachers. It also does not mean that believers have any claim to some esoteric truth by virtue of having the Spirit living in them. John was combating this very issue in incipient Gnosticism. His words were of comfort and assurance that although the antichrists claimed to have secret truth from God, believers need not fear missing out on anything. They had, as we have, the Holy Spirit living within them, illuminating their minds so that they could understand the Word of God.

The blurring of the work of the Spirit seems to be a common feature among those who write about the Spirit's work in the act of preaching. Illumination is frequently referred to as unction,¹⁶ with no biblical proof, and there is often a connection made between the filling (*pimplemi* and *pleroo*) of the Spirit and the empowering of the Spirit in unction. Although there is insufficient space in this paper to address the large amount of exegetical data that needs to be covered in order to show why this is not a viable option, it is enough to say that the "filling" texts are not sufficient to prove an existence of the New Testament gift of unction.¹⁷

The Empowering of the Spirit

Lest there be any doubt, this author does believe that the Spirit empowers God's people today. There are at least three conclusions that can be drawn from the biblical evidence we have examined.

First, all who are believers have been baptized by Christ with the Spirit into the body of Christ—the church universal. This universal inclusion into the church unifies believers in a supernatural way that connects every believer like nothing else can. The old walls that once divided have been broken down (Eph 2:11-22). Christians enjoy unity in the power of the Spirit. Although it would have been a wonderful gift of God to include a special anointing that pertained only to preachers of the gospel and no one else, the Scriptures speak of no such gift. All believers are baptized into the body of Christ through the Spirit. He indwells all believers. He fills all believers. He empowers all believers. He seals all believers. He leads and directs all believers through the Word of God. That is the unifying nature of His baptism.

Second, all Christians are baptized into the body of Christ and are indwelt by the one Spirit; these realities are universal to all believers and are not the result of any special attainment through prayer, fasting, or special work of man. Christians receive the promise of the Spirit in the same manner as they receive eternal life—through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:14).

Thirdly, the idea of a special anointing has no Scriptural merit. Nowhere does the Bible command ministers to seek God's unction for empowering the preaching of the Word. There is no mention of such a need for pastors or teachers anywhere in Paul's Pastoral Epistles. To chase

such an unction is to seek what God has not commanded nor clearly laid out as available in His Word. If there were truly an anointing for preaching, why would God make it so difficult to even find it in the biblical text?

We who are especially careful to defend the work of Christ and the character of God—who demand precision in the teaching and preaching of the Word of God—ought to likewise have a burning zeal to see the work and operations of the Holy Spirit taught and explained with the same exactness and care. The Puritan John Owen sounds the alarm for us:

The deceits and abuses which have abounded in all ages of the Church, under pretence of the name and work of the Holy Spirit, make the study of what we are taught concerning them exceedingly necessary. Had not these things been excellent in themselves, and so acknowledged by all Christians, they would not have been so often counterfeited. Men do not adorn themselves with rags, or boast of what is under general and just contempt. According to the value of things, so are they liable to abuse; and the more excellent any thing is, the more pernicious is the abuse of it. In all the world there is nothing so vile, as that which pretends to be God, and is not; nor is any thing else capable of so pernicious an abuse.¹⁸

Therefore, we must make sure that our beliefs about the person and work of the Holy Spirit are thoroughly biblical and sound. If your reason for believing something begins with, “But I felt...” then its time to sit down with your Bible in hand and search the Scriptures to see if those things are true.

The Empowering of the Spirit (Conclusion)

The attraction of such a thing as divine anointing for preachers is not hard to understand. Nobody wants to be ineffective and unused by God. The real need for the day is a return to Spirit-dependent pastors preaching messages that are rooted in the Word of God.

Although theologically trained in his youth (Acts 22:3), the Apostle Paul was fully dependent upon the power of God working through Him:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1Cor 2:1-5).

Paul could have, at least theoretically, proclaimed the testimony of God with lofty speech and worldly wisdom (*sophia*), but that would have obscured the message of the cross. Instead, Paul exchanged a self-centered dependence upon rhetorical theatrics for a Christ-centered dependence upon the Spirit’s work through His Word. The Corinthian church had been influenced by the Greek philosophers and rhetorical techniques of the day, and they looked upon Paul’s speeches as something to be despised (*exoutheneo*; 2Cor 10:10). From his response to their aggressive

attacks and accusations in 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11, we get a flavor for what Paul was going through. Being constantly compared to the so-called super-apostles (who were not ashamed to use the methods of the day) must have weighed heavy upon the apostle's heart.

But Paul's weakness was his greatest strength. His human frailty, as ours, was an asset to his ministry. His weakness caused him to be more dependent upon the strength of the Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 that his preaching (consisting of his delivery *and* message) were not meant to bring him glory. Paul preached in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The proof of the Spirit's power was shown in the testimony about Christ that made itself apparent in the salvation of the Corinthian believers (1Cor 1:6). He compared the true power that comes from the gospel (1Cor 1:18) to the worldly, man-pleasing message that catered to the masses in order to gain personal acclaim.¹⁹ Paul told his readers that he had determined that in his preaching to them, he would "know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1Cor 2:2). This does not mean that we preach only the basic gospel message. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians goes beyond the gospel message to give the believers instructions that show them how their salvation affects every aspect of their life. This means that we must demonstrate the power that is inherent in the Word and the Spirit, otherwise the "faith" that is produced in our hearers will be based upon the faulty and soul-damning wisdom of men.

In the area of the preacher's anointing, would it not be better to speak of the power of the Spirit through His Word than to speak of the power of the preacher as if he could somehow be powerfully used apart from the Word? John MacArthur "illuminates" our thinking about this when he puts the spotlight upon the Word: "Powerful preaching occurs only when a Spirit-illuminated man of God expounds clearly and compellingly God's Spirit-inspired revelation in Scripture to a Spirit-illuminated congregation."²⁰

This helps us to account for the mixed bag of experiences that are reported by many who say that they feel that they are under the unction of the Holy Spirit. What preacher hasn't felt that they preached in a powerful way only to come down from the pulpit with little or no response to the message from his congregation? Then, there are those times when we are sure that the sermon was an embarrassing flop. We conclude in an almost apologetic tone that we have done so poorly, only to have several people respond to the message not only with comments of encouragement, but with heartfelt responses in obedience! Is this necessarily because we have been faithful to spend many hours in our study or polishing our delivery? To say that it is such is to snatch the glory from the Holy Spirit. John Owen in his work on the Holy Spirit remarked,

All the things mentioned as wrought instrumentally by the word, are effects of the power of the Spirit of God. The word itself, barely proposed to the minds of men, will not so affect them. To confirm this, only consider the preaching of the prophets of old (Isa. 49:4; Jer. 15:30; Ezek. 33:31), of Jesus Christ himself (Jon 8:59), and of the apostles (Acts 13:41, 45-6). And among us, many sit all their days under the preaching of the gospel, and feel none of the effects; while others, their associates in hearing, are really affected, convinced, and converted. It is therefore the ministration of the Spirit, in and by the word, which produces all or any of these effects.²¹

When the Holy Spirit illuminates His Word, the lost are convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8)²² that may or may not lead to their eventual salvation (Rom 10:17). The believer is illuminated to understand the Word of God so that it can be studied, obeyed and taught (Ezra 7:10); bring conviction of sin (Heb 4:12); give direction (Ps 119:105) along with countless other benefits.

The goal of evangelistic preaching should not be to attain an “unction” in order to see souls come to Christ. This is a false standard to place upon the messenger. This sort of lop-sided view of the work of the Spirit minimizes the power of the Word of God as well as the need for that illumination to occur in the preacher in his study and his preaching and then, as he preaches, in the hearts of those who hear him. It also takes the focus off of Christ.

Those who are serious about seeing revival happen in their churches need to remember that the concern of the Spirit is not to point to Himself, but rather to concentrate the attention of the world on the glorify of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said of the Spirit:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Do we truly desire to preach evangelistically and powerfully so that we are seeing people turn from the darkness to the marvelous light of the gospel? The answer is found in preaching Christ, and Him crucified (1Cor 2:2), remembering that God saves whomsoever He wills. This is neither groundbreaking nor new, but for those who would say that the Church has lost her power in the pulpit, I say it is because she has lost her first love, and that she and her ministers ought to return to Him (Rev 2:4-5). Until Christ is preached, there will be no power and hearts will not change.

When Christ is exalted and the message of the cross is declared from the pulpit with prayer, passion, and precision, there *is* power. Power because the preacher is not depending upon his own strength. Power because the preacher believes what he is preaching is the fragrance of life to life, and death to death (2Cor 2:16). Power because the preacher has labored in the study and has come away having encountered the risen Lord in the pages of the living Word. When this type of preacher steps behind the pulpit, God moves through the Spirit using some or all of these means to accomplish His purpose—and sometimes the presence of the Spirit *is* felt. But if not, it is not as though the Word of God has failed, for it always accomplishes its purpose (Isa 55:11). As ministers of the Word of God, we should seek the smile of God in fulfilling our ministry, not the sense of His presence that sometimes accompanies the experience of His pleasure. To do so will only leave us hungering after the gift and not the Giver.

¹“Unction” comes from the Latin *unctio* meaning to anoint with oil. “Anoint” refers to the activity of smearing with an unguent, such as a salve or ointment. These terms have their roots in the ceremonial process (particularly in the Old Testament) of distinguishing a person for the office of prophet (1 Kin 19:16), priest (Ex 29), or king (1 Sam 16:13), as well as objects set apart

for service as God's specially chosen vessels (Ex 30:25-29). For this paper I will treat "anoint" and "unction" as synonymous.

² Randy Mayeux, "How Does Unction Function?" in *Leadership Journal* 91 (Summer, 1991), 40-41.

³ W. E. Sangster, *Power in Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 106.

⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students Four Volumes in One* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 1:1:49-50.

⁵ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 305.

⁶ Tony Sargent, *The Sacred Anointing: The Preaching of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994), 58.

⁷ Lloyd-Jones, 324.

⁸ David M. Doran, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Preaching," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 3 (Fall 1998): 103-21.

⁹ Ronald E. Osmond, "A Study and Evaluation of the Anointing of the Holy Spirit in Relation to Preaching the Word of God: A Pentecostal Perspective," Unpublished M.Min. Thesis (Langley, B.C., Canada: Northwest Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992).

¹⁰ Roger G. Valci, "What is the Function of Unction? Exploring the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Speaker and the Audience During the Act of Preparation and Preaching," Unpublished D.Min. Thesis (South Hamilton, MA.: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009).

¹¹ K. H. Rengstorf, "Χριστός" in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, ed. by Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 334-43.

¹² Robert Culver, "Anoint, Anointed," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), 1:116. See also John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 304-5.

¹³ Osmond, 34.

¹⁴ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 110-12; John F. MacArthur Jr., *Second Corinthians* in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 45.

¹⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, S. C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 112.

¹⁶ Osmond, 28, 30, 46, 47, 50; Valci, 8, 112, 131, 142, 151.

¹⁷ Richard Paul Bargas, *The Holy Spirit in the Pulpit: The Legitimacy of Divine Unction*, Unpublished D.Min. Dissertation (Sun Valley, Ca.: The Master's Seminary, 2007); Richard Gary Fairman, *An Exegesis of "Filling" Texts Which Refer to the Doctrine of Filling*. Unpublished Th.D. Dissertation (Winona Lake, In.: Grace Theological Seminary, 1986).

¹⁸ John Owen, *The Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power: Exposition of the Spirit's Name, Nature, Personality, Dispensation, Operations and Effects*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publishers, 1954), 47.

¹⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 91-2.

²⁰ John MacArthur Jr., "The Spirit of God and Expository Preaching," in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Mayhue (Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1992), 103.

²¹ Owen, 167.

²² On the implications of John 16:8 regarding the doctrine of illumination, see Carl A. Hargrove, “The Role of the Holy Spirit as Convictor and Supporter in Preaching” (Th.M. Thesis, The Master’s Seminary, 2006).

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