Adapted from Spirit empowered preaching - Involving the Holy Spirit in your ministry by Arturo G. Arzudia III (Christian Focus).

The Scriptures repeatedly display a tight connection between the coming of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent proclamation of the Word of God. This connection is seen frequently in the Old Testament.

In Numbers 11, as a fulfilment of God’s promise to Moses, the Holy Spirit is given to the seventy elders of Israel, with the attendant manifestation of their prophesying. Jealous for the unique position of Moses, Joshua emphatically pleads with his mentor to restrain the seventy elders.

The response of Moses is telling: ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!’ (Numbers 11:29). The implied connection between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent communication of the prophetic word is evident. Numbers 24 records the coming of the Spirit upon Balaam with the result that the word of the Lord is made known through him. In his final song, King David declares, ‘The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue’ (2 Samuel 23:2).

In 2 Chronicles 24:20 this relationship of the Spirit to the proclaimed word is cited again: ‘Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said ..."’. The prophet Ezekiel writes, ‘Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said, "Say, Thus says the Lord ..." ’ (11:5). Several other references could be cited which reveal the relationship between the coming of the Holy Spirit and the consequent proclamation of the word of God. It can be argued that a predominant ministry of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures is his coming upon men for the purpose of making known the word of God.

Prophetic speaking
The New Testament continues to reveal a connection between the coming of the Spirit of God and the proclamation of the Word of God. A specific phrase in Luke/Acts appears eight times and always in relationship to a prophetic kind of speaking. The verb used in each of these occurrences is pimplçmi — in an aoristic tense and with a passive voice. Hence, each usage of the phrase can be rendered: ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ or ‘having been filled with the Holy Spirit’. In each of these eight occurrences the filling of the Spirit is presented as an event, a sovereign and spontaneous act of God related to the proclamation of truth. Let us consider some of these passages.

The first appears in relationship to the birth announcement of John the Baptist to his father: ‘the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son ... he will be great in the sight of the Lord ... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb’ (Luke 1:13-15). Gabriel continues by indicating that this ‘filling’ is directly connected to the specific ministry given to John: ‘And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah...’ (Luke 1:16-17). John’s prophetic ministry of repentance, like unto that of Elijah, necessitated the filling of the Spirit of God. Here is a direct parallel to what was seen repeatedly in the Old Testament — the coming of the Holy Spirit upon men for the purpose of proclaiming God’s Word.

Pentecost

A further usage of this phrase relates to the Day of Pentecost: ‘And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance’ (Acts 2:2-4).

Issuing forth as a consequence of the filling of the Spirit is a supernatural kind of speaking. Luke, however, does not have unintelligible ‘languages’ in view. Rather, these ‘tongues’ were quite understandable and their content specifically focused — the crowd asked, ‘how is it that we each hear them in our own language ... speaking of the mighty deeds of God?’ (Acts 2:6-11). Luke uses the expression again in Acts 4:8 (‘Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...’). But the attentive reader will ask the obvious question: ‘Was not Peter filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4? What, then, is this?’

Access of power

While it must be affirmed that all Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit permanently (cf. John 14:16; Romans 8:9), and all believers experience the effects of the Spirit’s presence in their lives to a greater or lesser degree (cf. Galatians 5:16-24), there is another work of the Spirit directly related to the proclamation of the Word of God — a unique filling of the Holy Spirit which amounts to an access of his power. This is a spontaneous work of God attending the declaration of his Word which is given sovereignly and selectively. Later in chapter 4 Luke employs this phrase again. When Peter and John are released by the Jewish leadership and return to their fellow disciples, ‘the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness’ (Acts 4:31). As before, these believers were Christians in the full New Testament sense — they had
received the indwelling Spirit of God. And yet, they are suddenly ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’, with the result that the word of God is spoken with great boldness. And so we could continue.

Demonstration of the Spirit

What, then, is this ‘Spirit-filling’? An examination of the eight uses of the expression reveal it to be a sudden and sovereign operation of the Spirit of God upon a man so that his proclamation of Jesus Christ might be attended by holy power. This, then, appears to be the emphasis of Paul’s words when he says to the Corinthians: ‘And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power’ (1 Corinthians 2:4). The Spirit, by the means of his power, through the words of a preacher, establishes, verifies, and confirms the gospel in the heart of the listener so that he must respond to the truth he hears. Paul conveys the same idea elsewhere — ‘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 Thessalonians 1:5). Peter similarly speaks of ‘those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven’ (1 Peter 1:12).

The smile of God

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones refers to this work of the Spirit as ‘the smile of God’ upon the preacher. To be sure, there are occasions when the preacher himself is conscious of this attending power in the act of preaching. More often than not, however, it is the congregation that recognises the voice of the Spirit of God. Large congregations often sit and hear a message from God while perhaps not a single individual among them feels that the message is addressed to himself, or that he has any personal concern in it. But it is not so when God speaks with his still, small voice. Everyone to whom God thus speaks, whether he be alone, or in the midst of a large assembly, feels that he is spoken to — that he is called, as it were, by name. The message comes home to him and says as Nathan said to David, ‘Thou art the man’. Hence, while multitudes are around him, he sits as if he were alone.

Quiettiness

It may be surprising for some to discover that when the Spirit of God powerfully attends the preaching of the word, one of the common indicators is a heightened sense of quiet — not shouts and ecstasies but rather an unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases. The incessant movement of people is overcome by a dramatic stillness. And suddenly, though the features of the preacher’s face and the timbre of his voice are still identifiably his, the words coming forth from his mouthseem to have been sent from heaven itself.

It is not enough to possess the proper message. Nor is it enough to embrace the proper method. Gospel preachers desperately need the divinely appointed means: the clothing with power from on high.

O God, on the basis of the merits of your Son, give us this!

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