

An Interview with Albert N. Martin about his book *Preaching in the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011, 67 pp., paperback.

Interviewed by Brian G. Najapfour

Thank you so much for your willingness to be interviewed about your much needed book on preaching in the Holy Spirit. As a pastor, I found this volume a blessing to my soul.

Here are some of my questions for you about your work:

- 1. In the preface of your book, you mention that you were only about 18 years old when you started preaching the gospel (vii). Obviously, at that time you were not yet an ordained preacher of the gospel. How would you then respond to people who say that the ministry of preaching is only for ordained ministers?**

It is indeed true that I make reference in the preface of my book to my experience of street preaching when I was not quite yet 18 years of age. However, I did not engage in that act of witness bearing with any thought that I was a proven gift of the ascended Christ to serve within his church as a pastor and teacher. Rather, at the encouragement of some older mature Christian men, I and several others were simply doing what is recorded in Acts chapter 2.

According to Acts 1:12, 14, and Acts 2:1-4, when the Spirit of God came upon the 120 in the upper room, they were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak...” This description applies to all 120 – including the women who were in that company. Therefore, when Peter explains to the multitudes what has happened, he directs their attention to the promise in the book of Joel concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit. In that passage we are told that as a result of the coming of the Holy Spirit both “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” That is, they would all speak forth the saving truth of God. There is no indication that one needs formal ecclesiastical ordination to engage in this witness bearing to God’s saving action in Christ. Prophesying (preaching) and teaching by women are clearly out of bounds in the context of the gathered church under its God appointed male leadership. However, the kind of witness bearing “to the mighty works of God” recorded in Acts 2, describes a totally different activity and setting. I placed my experience of street preaching at age 18 in the context of this biblical perspective.

Likewise, Acts 8:1 along with Acts 11:19-21 clearly indicates that the “non-ordained believers” who were scattered upon the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, spoke forth the truth of God’s word in all of the places to which they were scattered by God’s providence. It is clear that these “non-ordained preachers” were even instrumental in the establishment of the church in Antioch.

In the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, there is a very helpful statement in Chapter 26, paragraph 11 addressing this very concern. It reads as follows:

Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches, to be instant in preaching the Word, *by way of office*, yet the work of preaching the word is not so peculiarly confined to them, but that others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, *and approved then called by the church*, may and ought to perform it (my emphasis).

Even though I was very deficient in my understanding of biblical ecclesiology at that age, we were not engaged in a “free lance” activity. In the Mission Hall which I and my friends attended, there were two old men who functioned as our de facto elders. They were the ones who both encouraged our street preaching, our preaching in the Mission Hall, and carefully monitored the content and the manner of our preaching and our Christian lives.

- 2. As a follow up for the previous question, how do you define preaching? Also, how is preaching different from teaching and exhorting? I once asked a seminary student, “Are you preaching this Sunday?” He replied, “No, I’m only exhorting.” He added, “I cannot preach yet because I’m not yet an ordained minister. I can only exhort the congregation.”**

While I would not spill blood to defend the following brief definition of preaching, I would define it as follows: Preaching consists of the exposition and application of the Word of God written, an activity to be carried out in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Biblically speaking, I do not believe we can make an ironclad distinction between preaching, teaching, and exhorting. Biblical preaching will involve careful teaching. It must also involve application by way of exhortation, whether with an emphasis upon consolation, encouragement and comfort, or in the way of warning, reproof, and passionate entreaty. This statement is clearly buttressed by 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Timothy 4:2. In the former of these two texts, asserting that the Scriptures are nothing less than God-breathed literature, the apostle goes on and states the purpose for which the Scriptures are given. He describes that purpose by saying that Scripture is also profitable for “teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” This clearly defined purpose must find an unmistakable expression in the preaching of these God-breathed documents. Likewise, in the latter text, after charging Timothy to “Preach the word” Paul goes on to tell him how he is to fulfill that imperative. He is to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

The distinction you mentioned between preaching and exhortation, a distinction quite strictly enforced in some ecclesiastical circles, may be a helpful expedient. In such circles, where there is a commitment to maintain a biblical standard for those who would become the official teachers and preachers in the Church of Christ, this distinction may

be a workable distinction. However, I believe it may inadvertently convey a very debilitating framework of thought. I would ask the question, how can someone scripturally exhort if he has not taught those things which form the basis of biblical exhortation. Proclamation and explanation of the grand indicatives of God's grace are the foundation for the exhortations and the admonitions which flow out of, and are based upon, those grand indicatives. Surely, there must be a better way to ensure a jealous concern for the maintenance of that distinction between those who have been formally acknowledged to be a gift of Christ to his church, and those who have not received that recognition.

3. In a paragraph, what is preaching in the Holy Spirit? How can a pastor know that he is preaching in the Spirit? Likewise, how can the congregation know that their pastor is preaching in the Spirit?

According to my present understanding, preaching in the Holy Spirit is preaching in which there is an immediate operation of the Holy Spirit in and upon the preacher imparting to his preaching divine authority and spiritual energy. While we must be careful of succumbing to an excessive spiritual subjectivity in seeking to assess whether or not we are preaching in the spirit, the Scriptures clearly teach that preaching in the spirit is a felt and conscious spiritual experience in the preacher himself. Unless we are prepared to prove exegetically and theologically that the following statements of the apostle Paul were peculiar to his apostolic office, I do not know that we can come to any other conclusion than the one I have just stated. In 1 Corinthians 2:4 the apostle writes "and my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power:" Here he clearly asserts that when preaching to the Corinthians he was experientially conscious that he was preaching in the Spirit. Again, he writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 these words: "our gospel came not only to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance;" It was Paul's recognition of his need for the Holy Spirit's presence and assistance in his preaching that led him to request that the Ephesian congregation pray for him to the end "that utterance may be given unto me in opening my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak "(Ephesians 6:19-20).

The second part of your question is more difficult to answer. However, I believe Scripture does give us some materials to set forth at least several things that spiritually minded people will recognize as "preaching in the spirit." First of all, there is the matter of the sense of divine authority which is always conveyed when a man is preaching in the spirit. It was this particular quality which is highlighted by Matthew at the conclusion of the sermon on the Mount. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes "(Matthew 7:28-29). Then, describing the effects of the Spirit empowered preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, Luke informs us that under such preaching men and women were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37). Then, when the two men on the road to Emmaus were reflecting upon their experience under the expository

ministry of the Lord Jesus, they did so with these words: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures? (Luke 24:32). When spiritually discerning people come to the preaching of the Word of God with eager and hungry hearts, if a man is preaching in the spirit, such people will be conscious of a peculiar authority, a conscience penetrating power, and a heart-warming reality under his ministry.

4. What books can you recommend to preachers who would like to learn more about preaching in the Holy Spirit?

Some of the books that I have found helpful relative to the subject of preaching in the Spirit are as follows:

1. *Power in the Pulpit*, by Gardiner Spring
2. *Thoughts on Preaching*, by J. W. Alexander
3. *Lectures to My Students*, by Charles Spurgeon—chapter 14
4. *The Relevance of Preaching*, by Pierre Marcel
5. *The Christian Ministry*, by Charles Bridges – the chapter entitled “The Spirit of Scriptural Preaching”
6. *Spirit Empowered Preaching*, by Arturo G. Azurdia III

Of course, as with all human authors, I do not endorse everything that is found in these books. However, the discerning reader will find in these books I have mentioned much to be of help in seeking to understand and experience what it means to “preach in the spirit.”

5. What projects are you currently working on?

As some of you readers may know, it was my privilege for 20 years to teach all of the courses in Pastoral Theology in the Trinity ministerial Academy in Montville, New Jersey. Since the closing of the Academy in 1998, there has been constant and growing pressure upon me to put those lectures into a permanent DVD format. Under the auspices of Trinity Baptist Church, I have nearly completed that project. God willing, this coming April I will be delivering the lectures of the final of eight units. In preparation for those lectures I am in the process of converting all of my old handwritten manuscripts into computer-generated text, and composing an outline/syllabus of some 60 pages. The lectures are being professionally recorded and produced and marketed in boxed sets, with each unit containing a CD with an electronic copy of the syllabus, and all of the quotations, many of them from the old masters in Israel. Those lectures are available from The Trinity Book Service (973-334-3143)

In addition to working on this project, I have several writing projects in the pipeline. A manuscript of my book entitled “Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout – Symptoms, Causes, and Cures” has been accepted for publication by Focus Publications in the UK. A booklet entitled “The Christian Wedding in a Changing World – Validating and

Illustrating the Gospel in our Weddings has been accepted for publication by Chapel Library and by Pillar and Ground Publications and is in its final stages of editing. Another manuscript has recently been submitted to Cruciform Press. It deals with the subject of the stewardship we as Christians are required to exercise in the care of our bodies.

Finally, I am working on another book on the subject of “The Fear of God.” Decades ago I preached a series of sermons on that subject, a series which continues to be used of God in the lives of many. These sermons have been transcribed and undergone some radical editing. I am continuing that work of editing, hoping that in the next couple of months the manuscript will be ready to submit to a publishing house.

I would like to close out this interview by thanking you, Brian, for the opportunity to engage with you concerning matters that are very dear to my heart. May God bless you and your ongoing labors connected with this blog.