Divine Anointing: Ministering The Word In The Power Of The Spirit

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The subject of fresh oil, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, is something that has been on my heart for many years. I've probably asked the Lord for fresh oil, for the anointing of His Holy Spirit, more often than I have asked Him for any other single prayer request during my almost thirty years of full-time ministry.

In First Thessalonians 1:5, the Apostle Paul talks about the nature of his ministry to the Thessalonians. He says, *"Our Gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."* What would it be like to be under the ministry of a man who speaks not only with words but also in power, with the Holy Spirit and with full conviction? As God has called me to minister the Word to women, the anointing is something for which I long and pray. I am sharing here the fruit of my own meditation and grappling with this issue of the anointing of the Spirit.

There is a connection throughout Scripture between anointing and oil and the Holy Spirit. The prophets and priests and kings were anointed with oil, which was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. They were consecrated by this oil for their calling and empowered to serve the Lord. Exodus 28:41 says: *"You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests."* With that anointing invariably came the empowering and enduing of the power of the Holy Spirit for service. David was anointed to be the king by the prophet Samuel. First Samuel 16 tells us the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward (v. 13). The anointing with oil was a physical, visible symbol of an inward work of God as the Spirit of God came with might and power on God's servants.

Jesus Christ, the ultimate prophet, priest and king, is the Messiah, the Hebrew word that means "the anointed one." Looking forward to the anointed ministry of Christ, the Scripture tells us in Isaiah 61:1: *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor."*

Not only Old Testament believers and Christ Himself, but now we New Testament believers have been set apart as kings and priests unto the Lord. Second Corinthians 1 tells us that God has anointed us, that He has set His seal upon us and He has given us His Spirit in our hearts (v. 22). What a precious, gracious gift is the gift of the Holy Spirit! We are told, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses"* (Acts 1:8).

One theologian I read said of the anointing, "It refers to the penetration and the domination of the personality by the Spirit of God" – the Spirit of God penetrating us and dominating our personalities.

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Who Needs the Anointing?

We need the anointing of the Spirit for everything that God has called us to do as we serve Him. Those who preach and teach the Word need the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God in order to proclaim the Word of God, as well as the many of us who are engaged in ways of proclaiming the Word of God not so public, like in counseling, in discipleship and in evangelizing. In sharing the Gospel we all need the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God every time we open our mouth to serve the Lord, to touch or to speak into the life of someone else. For parenting from toddlers to grown children, we need the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. We need the anointing for every act of service – for serving on worship teams, for leading worship, for gifts of administration and helps and mercy. In all ways of serving the Lord we need the anointing, the fresh oil of the Holy Spirit of God. Spiritual results never come about as a result of natural means.

While the anointing of the Holy Spirit of God is one of the most essential ingredients in ministry, I also believe that in 21st century evangelicalism it is one of the most neglected and overlooked and lacking ingredients. Anointing has nothing to do with our natural abilities; it has everything to do with the supernatural infusion of the Holy Spirit. I have seen unmistakable evidence of the supernatural hand and breath of God on some who have only average or less than average gifts and abilities. How do you explain that? It is the anointing, the power of the Holy Spirit.

E. M. Bounds wrote: "The power of preaching lies in the divine anointing on the man. This is his consecration and qualification. Though he may have the tongue and wisdom of men and of angels, the power lies in the continuous anointing of the Spirit. The lips that do not glow with the kindling of this divine flame are impotent to speak for God. This unction, this anointing of the Spirit is the one divine enablement by which the preacher accomplishes the peculiar and saving ends of preaching. Without this unction there are no spiritual results accomplished. An anointed pulpit is the most powerful of God's institutions."

What Is Our Part?

The anointing is the work and gift of God. That being the case, what is our part? What can we do to cooperate with God in His giving that anointing of the Spirit in our lives? There are several elements that have a bearing on this matter of the anointing, and in my thinking they divide into two aspects. First, there is the anointed life, that is my personal preparation for the ministry of the Word, and then that God would grant anointed lips, the powerful proclamation of God's Word whether to multitudes or one on one.

An Anointed Life

An anointed life is the foundation for all of our message preparation and delivery. Preparation of our message is essential, but if I don't first have a life that is anointed and prepared to study and to seek the Lord and to minister the Word, then all of that proclamation will fall flat. It will not have the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

We read of how Ezra set his heart; he was intentional about studying the law of God, then

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teaching His statutes and rules in Israel. He set his heart to knowing it himself first – to do it, to live it out, to have a life message, and then to proclaim it.

Psalm 39:3 says, *"My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue."* How often do we speak with our tongues whether person to person or to whole groups, without that fire first having burned hot in our own hearts! If we would have an anointed life we have to let God speak to us before we speak His Word to others. We read about Moses who went into the place of meeting to speak with the Lord, and then he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever God had said to him in that meeting place or up on that mountain. At the end of First Samuel 3 and beginning of chapter 4 there is a progression that is precious and powerful. It says the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel. He revealed Himself by the Word of the Lord. The Lord spoke to Samuel and then the word of Samuel came to all Israel, and it says the Lord did not let one of His words fall to the ground. I have sought the Lord for that, that He would grant by His amazing grace that not one of the words that He gives in His calling to me would fall to the ground. It makes you careful with your words because you want to make sure that you've heard God speak, that you've listened to His Word before you speak it. How do you know this is going to happen? You get your word first from the Word of the Lord.

Ezekiel experienced this, and I have read Ezekiel's calling many times over the years and had a sense of God doing this work in my own heart when He said, *"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you…. Open your mouth and eat what I give you"* (Ezek. 2:8). Then God gave him a scroll with writing on it. There were words of lamentation and woe and judgment. They weren't just sweet words. God then said, *"Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel…. All My words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears. And go…to your people and speak to them"* (Ezek. 3:1, 10-11). The eating of the scroll is symbolic of taking the Word of God into our beings, digesting it, internalizing it until it burns within us as an inextinguishable flame or fire. The passion of God has to first fill us before we can expect to proclaim His Word with power.

Jesus said that He did not speak on His own authority: *"The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works"* (John 14:10). The Apostle John said, concerning the Word of life: *"…that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you"* (1 John 1:3). It occurred to me as I was meditating on the first five chapters of the book of Revelation that the Church of Jesus Christ would not have today that awesome revelation of who Jesus Christ is if John the beloved disciple had not first seen and heard and experienced that revelation himself. We cannot give to others what we have not received from God. We have to proclaim that which we have seen, heard and experienced for ourselves.

Many times over the years as I have prepared to minister the Word of God to others I've sung a hymn by Frances Havergall that I have written in the back of my Bible:

"Lord, speak to me, that I may speak in living echoes of Thy tone…. O teach me, Lord, that I may teach the precious things Thou dost impart; and wing my words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart."

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Then following on the heels of hearing from God, our lives must incarnate or illustrate or flesh out that which we proclaim to others. If the truth has not first changed us it is not likely to change anyone else as we deliver it. Going back to First Thessalonians 1:5-6, the Apostle Paul said, *"You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord." "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers"* (1 Thes. 2:10). Paul understood the importance of a life message. That's why he could say, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Many in our evangelical, Bible preaching churches, are failing to put orthodox teaching and preaching into practice. One of the causes is that they are not seeing incarnated and lived out in us the truths that we are proclaiming. Oswald Chambers said, "Before God's message can liberate other souls, the liberation must be real in you."

In a public life, whatever you are doing, people are watching. They scrutinize, they evaluate, and they sometimes misunderstand. I live in greater dread, in the most righteous sense of that word, and in holy fear of that day when every last vestige of my private life is laid open, bare and exposed before the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-searching eyes of a holy God. He sees and knows now what the crowds don't see – who I am behind the scenes, in the private places, in the secret places of my heart, in the secret hidden places of my thought life. I know that if my life does not incarnate even in the private places the truth that I am proclaiming, I will forfeit the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit in my public ministry.

Anointed Lips

God grant that we have not only an anointed life but anointed lips, that we might give powerful proclamations whether one on one, in small groups, or from the pulpit!

First, we must cultivate and communicate a reverential awe for the Word of God. The Scripture talks about trembling at God's Word (Isa. 66:5). I am gripped over and over again with what an awesome responsibility it is to hold God's Word in my hands, to handle the Word of God and to speak the Word of God into other people's lives. Augustine said, "When the Scripture speaks, God speaks." We have to cultivate this sense of awe over God's words as compared to our own words. The very fact that God would speak to us ought to grip us! If it grips us it will grip listeners. We can't expect people to be stirred by the truth any more deeply than it has stirred our own hearts.

Secondly, we need to confidently trust the power of God's Word, the power of the truth. Jesus said, *"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life"* (John 6:63). It is not our words that give life. There's such a tendency in the consumer-driven culture in which we live to rely on natural gifts and to applaud in others natural gifts and abilities – communication skills, the packaging, the creativity, the innovation, the powerpoint presentation. I'm not opposed to those things, but they are just tools, and they are useless and empty and vapid and vain apart from our confidence in the Word of God and the power of His Word.

Don't underestimate the power of the truth unadorned to bring life. It is the Word of God that brought the world into being and that holds the world together. It is the Word of God that heals, that convicts, that converts, that sanctifies. I think today, maybe because we don't know God or God's Word, we are so prone to lean on the arm of flesh. We lean on the packaging, on the

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pretty things rather than saying this Word is powerful. It is sharper than any two-edged sword. It can cut through the hearts and discern between soul and spirit, and joints and marrow (Heb. 4:12). It exposes the hearts of men and women. Have confidence in the power of God's Word and His truth.

When I get up to minister the Word of God to women, sometimes I go with an overwhelming sense of my own inadequacy and weakness. I say, "O Lord, I am clay. Loaves and fishes are the best I have to offer You, but take Your Word and wing it into the hearts of Your people." I truly believe in the power of the Word of God to change lives. Day after day I get emails from those who listen to our radio program who pour out their hearts and share things they would not in some cases share with their closest friends, things they have not told their pastor, things they have not told their family members. They write to us, these anonymous people, and share the issues and the needs in their lives. If I did not believe in the power of the truth to make all things new, to right those things that are wrong, to straighten out what is crooked, I would get another vocation. It is the Word of God that has the power to change lives. God's Word is like a fire, like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (Jer. 20:9; 23:29).

Thirdly, if we would have anointed lips, we must constantly, unendingly, consciously, intentionally, be pointing people to Christ and His cross. It is all about Jesus. It is the Gospel. Paul said, *"What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants"* (2 Cor. 4:5). *"I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"* (1 Cor. 2:2). He is the power of God to salvation, to sanctification, to redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, and everything in between and from first to last (Rev. 1:8). All of Scripture points to Jesus.

One of the great joys and challenges of my ministry to women is finding Christ everywhere in the Scripture. I am always looking for Him, looking for the Gospel. It is always an exhilarating experience to me as I come across Christ in the Scripture, and I am able to give Him and the Gospel to people whatever I'm teaching. We need to warn against false teachers and against false doctrine, but we've got to lift up Jesus!

Charles Spurgeon in a message on the miracle of the earthquake that took place after the death of Christ had this to say: "We say of ourselves, 'How shall we ever move the world?' The apostles did not ask that question. They had confidence in the Gospel which they preached. The apostles believed in shaking the world with the simple preaching of the Gospel. I entreat you to believe the same." There's no new message needed today; it is the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

Fourthly, if we would have anointed lips, we must communicate with fervency, earnestness, and conviction. If we don't believe that what we are saying is crucial, why should our listeners? I ask myself often today as I listen to the Word of God being taught and proclaimed, where is the passion? They were astonished at Jesus' teaching for He taught them as one who had authority and not as the scribes (Matt. 7:28-29). If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God (1 Pet. 4:11). *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord,"* Paul said, *"we persuade men…." "For the love of Christ compels us…." "We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God"* (2 Cor. 5:11, 14, 20). The Apostle Paul was not interested in laying more information on the people. It was a pleading, an appealing to be

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reconciled to God. Paul said, *"My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you…"* (Gal. 4:19). There was earnestness and conviction.

Leonard Ravenhill in that classic, *Why Revival Tarries*, says, "A title undeniably true of the Church today would be *'We Wrestle Not!'* We will display our gifts, natural or spiritual; we air our views, political or spiritual; we will preach a sermon or write a book or correct a brother in doctrine. But who will storm hell's stronghold? Who will say the devil nay? Who will deny himself good food or good company or good rest that hell may gaze upon him wrestling, embarrassing demons, liberating captives, depopulating hell, and leaving in answer to his travail, a stream of blood-washed souls?" There must be earnestness and conviction.

Fifth, God calls us to confront the hearts and the wills of our hearers. The goal is transformation, not just information. We don't want our listeners just to know more about God; we want that knowledge to transform the way they live. You see this element of conviction in the New Testament. They were *"pricked in their heart"* after Peter preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37). After Stephen preached they were *"cut to the heart"* (Acts 7:54). How much do we see today of people being convicted, bowed down with conviction? You can read in revival history that it is always there, this overwhelming sense of the presence of God and deep, humbling conviction of sin. I know it is a work of the Spirit and we cannot manufacture that. But I think it is very important to have proclamation that includes exposition of the Word of God. If the Word of God isn't there, there is no power. It is a matter of illustration of the Scripture, practical application and then confrontation of the will. Ask the questions that convict the conscience, pointed, probing questions that they can't escape. What are they to do about this? Ask, "How is your life measuring up to this truth? What are you going to do about what you just heard?"

Oswald Chambers said, "What the world needs is not a little bit of love, but a surgical operation. The calling of a New Testament worker is to uncover sin and to reveal Jesus Christ as Savior. We have to probe straight down as deeply as God has probed us, to be keen in sensing the Scriptures which bring the truth straight home and to apply them fearlessly." That means the willingness to be prophets of God, to speak the truth even when it is not palatable or when it meets resistance, or when it means a message of warning or judgment. It means the freedom from the fear of man or the love of the praise of men, getting free from the need of the approval of the people to whom we're speaking.

Then sixthly, call for a response. Do not stop short of teaching and preaching for a response, not just for information but for transformation. Every time we are exposed to the truth of God's Word, personal response is required. If we don't, James says, we'll be like the deceived person who looks at his face in a mirror and goes away and says, "Oh, that doesn't look so good," but then he doesn't do anything about it (Jas. 1:22-29). We've inoculated people against the truth penetrating and piercing their hearts because we have laid on them layer upon layer of content, but we have not called them to repent and believe and obey the Gospel. To press for obedience takes time.

And then number seven – consciously seek and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Cry out to God, "God, please give me fresh oil!"

It is a great heaviness to my heart that in so many of our theologically orthodox circles – and I

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say this carefully because I know there are some wonderful exceptions – there is little room left for the mysterious, supernatural, fresh work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. None of those would deny the work of the Holy Spirit. They teach on the Holy Spirit, but when it comes to that mysterious work of the Spirit anointing the life and lips of the proclaimer and of the listener, there's a fear, and it is to our huge loss. The Spirit is as the wind that moves as it will; you cannot put Him in a box. We need to cry out to God for this fresh oil, for the power of the Holy Spirit because the power is not in the words that we speak; it is not in our natural eloquence; it is not in our impressive or contemporary methods. It is not by might; it is not by our power; it is by the Holy Spirit of God, says the Lord of hosts! (Zech. 4:6).

Recall the passage of Second Kings 6 where the woman had the son who was a miracle son and then he died. She went out to find Elisha, knowing that the prophet, the man of God, could do something about this. What a man of God Elisha must have been for her to believe that though this child was dead he could do something! And Elisha sent his servant Gehazi ahead with his staff. Can you imagine Gehazi saying, "I've got Elisha's staff! I've seen it do amazing things before and now I have the staff!" He ran ahead of Elisha and laid that staff on the lifeless body and what happened? Absolutely nothing, because staffs don't bring life. The life is not in people or in church staffs, or ministry staffs, or in curricula or in books or programs.

Elisha came into that death scene and he laid his life on that lifeless body – head to head, hand to hand, arm to arm, body to body, leg to leg. Elisha prayed, and God breathed the breath of God into Elisha and through Elisha into that lifeless body, and the child came back to life. It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God as we lay our lives – not programs, not our notes, not our CDs, nor our illustrations – we lay *ourselves* on these lifeless bodies. We cry out to God and we say, "O Lord, anoint with the power of Your Spirit! Cause these dry bones to live again, to become a great army!"

God in His mysterious, gracious, wonderful, marvelous way stirred over the earth and spoke into being this world from that dark, formless void. He spoke and it was! He brought life and light. And so He does today as we offer ourselves. He fills us; He anoints us; He enables us; He empowers us to go out and be instruments of life.

Paul said, *"My speech and my message were not in [impressive] plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:4-5). I have had with the Lord more times than I can count that conversation that Mary of Nazareth had with the angel in Luke 1 when He told her of her calling, and she said, *"How will this be?"* (v. 34). I have looked into the face of the Lord so many times as I've sensed His calling in my life and I've said, "Lord, how can this be? I don't have what You are asking me to give." But then there is this wonderful verse where the angel says, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you"* (v. 35). That is anointed ministry under the power and the shadow of the Almighty. We are weak, we are inadequate; we are poor at best. But we have this limitless supply of the grace, the Spirit of God available to meet our needs, and it never runs out. We keep coming back and saying, "More, more! Fresh oil, fresh oil! Give me, God, fresh oil!"

E. M. Bounds wrote: "Nothing short of the baptism of the Holy Ghost qualifies the preacher. He needs power, power to raise the spiritually dead, power to deliver from the slavery of Satan,

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power to bring the brightness of noonday to the midnight of sin and hell. The power of learning, the power of eloquence and the power of the brain will not qualify for this work."

We need to pray for the Holy Spirit to illumine and to inflame our hearts, to anoint our lips and to prepare the soil of the hearts of our listeners, to open their eyes, to give sight to the blind, to give understanding, to make application, to bend wills, to grant the gift of repentance and faith and to preserve and protect the seed that has been sown in their hearts.

Will We Go on with or without the Anointing?

We don't ever say we can do without God, but how much of what we are doing are we doing ourselves, that which can be explained apart from God? Are we going to go on without the anointing of God's Spirit? Oh, that we would look to God for divine anointing, divine provision, divine intervention, the outpouring of His Spirit in whatever sphere of ministry He has called us, and believing God for a great harvest that can never be explained apart from God! The world and the Church do not need to see what *we* can do. They've seen what *we* can do. They need to see what only *God* can do.

A longtime friend who is a pastor sent me an email a couple of years ago and it really spoke to me. In fact, I forward this email back to myself every time I am getting ready to speak or have some form of public ministry. I want to be reminded of this charge. He said, "I carry a burden for the unction of God to rest on you. Don't ever take it for granted. It is the power that cuts through to the heart of the matter. Such unction comes by God's grace, but through a high price. That price is worth it in light of the need and eternity. Don't let your ministry grow stale. Don't let it become a program or formula. Realize that it is always Christ who is the answer and the need of women and men alike. Take people to Christ. See every program, every page of every book you write, every interview, every conversation as an opportunity to lead people into His presence for that is what we need. The evaluation of everything in your ministry should be, 'Was God there? Did people encounter the God of the universe? Was He pleased to come? Did I recede so that He could be clearly seen and experienced?'"

My cry is, "O God, fresh oil, the anointing, the power of Your Holy Spirit, the fullness, the floods of living water that You promised would flow through us and from us if we are filled with Your Holy Spirit!" It was the heart of Moses who said, "O God, if Your presence doesn't go with us, we cannot go on." I don't want to be satisfied with business as usual, with explainable lives and ministry, lives that can be lived without God. O God, for fresh oil, for the anointing of Your Spirit! And then by faith, having cried out for fresh oil, may we receive it and believe God for it. Amen.

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