

Greg Heisler. *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007. 156 pages. \$17.99.

Since the publication of Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* in 1980, expository preaching has experienced a resurgence of interest among North American evangelicals. However, as Heisler insists, many preachers have ignored or underemphasized the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. As Associate Professor of Preaching and Speech at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (Wake Forest, NC), he seeks to redress this problem and to emphasize "the powerful combination of Word and Spirit working together as the catalyst of all transformational preaching" (xvi).

In the opening chapter, Heisler reviews several reasons why the Spirit has been neglected in preaching and urges preachers to "boldly invite the Spirit's gifts and ministries into the realm of our preaching" (16). In each of his nine chapters, he seeks to "overcome the false dichotomy between the Word and the Spirit and instead unite them as the powerful catalyst for Spirit-demonstrated preaching" (21). Intended for students and preachers, Heisler's book is permeated with biblical quotations and citations.

There are three strengths of *Spirit-Led Preaching* that are worthy of our attention. First, the author offers a helpful summary of current models of expository preaching as "text driven" (18) and follows this with his own approach, "Spirit-driven preaching" (19). Whereas the former focuses on the presentation of the biblical text, Heisler's model focuses on "the combustible power that ignites our preaching when the Spirit, the text, and the preacher all meet together in the sermon" (19). Unfortunately, his definition of Spirit-led, expository preaching is rather lengthy (over 80 words; 21). However, Heisler provides a much-needed reminder that despite our well-crafted eloquence and effort, "the ultimate persuasion is the Spirit's persuasion." (58).

Second, Heisler's consideration of "The Spirit and the Sermon's Preparation" (Chapter 7) identifies several ways to engage the Spirit in the process of preparing sermons. Text selection, prayerful study, spiritual insights, and the Spirit's help with "internalizing" the sermon are outlined. It is disappointing (and perhaps significant) that this chapter is only half the length of the following chapter, "The Spirit and the Sermon's Presentation."

Finally, in Chapter 9 Heisler recognizes that confusion and controversy surround the spiritual dynamic popularly known as "the anointing." He proposes instead the helpful term "empowerment" when speaking of Spirit-led preaching and identifies the freedom, vitality, power and sense of spiritual possession that characterizes the Spirit's empowerment in preaching.

Weaknesses are also evident in Heisler's work. Although he states in the preface that he intends "to recover the doctrine of pneumatology for our theology of preaching" (xvi), Heisler relegates his discussion of the Spirit to subjective and intuitive realms of personal experience and ignores the Spirit's rationalizing and relational presence as it comes to us in classical Trinitarian thinking. Thus, Heisler insists: "Learning the intangible and dynamic elements of preaching from the Holy Spirit is deeply intimate and personal... The subjective element is also present because we know the Spirit works through us individually and personally and has gifted us uniquely. This is why we cannot box the Spirit into a set formula, thereby making objective what God by design desires to be subjective" (78). There is little attention given to the Spirit's work of searching the depths of God and, simultaneously, the depths of human experience (see 1 Cor. 2:10-13; Rom. 8:26-27).

The only guard against subjectivity that Heisler offers is to seek “biblical interpretation that is anchored in authorial intent” (39). However, he neither recognizes the elusive nature of this (as source-, form-, redaction-, literary-, and other critical methods of biblical interpretation have demonstrated) nor acknowledges the preacher’s own biases, perspectives and experiences as integral to the work of biblical interpretation, spiritual discernment and preaching. Indeed, Heisler sometimes privileges the preacher’s understanding of Scripture over the Spirit’s influence: “I find this general principle to be true: the Spirit affirms what *the preacher first confirms* in the Word of God” (33, italics mine).

It is also significant that Heisler speaks frequently of the preacher’s “audience” but rarely of the congregation, and never of the congregation’s shared responsibility for interpreting Scripture, discerning the Spirit and proclaiming the gospel. Yet it is within the gathered community that the Spirit creates, according to T. F. Torrance, “not only reciprocity between Christ and ourselves, but a community of reciprocity among ourselves” (*The Trinitarian Faith*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997, p. 250). If, as Heisler insists, “all believers are Spirit filled and anointed in the biblical sense” (134) and the Spirit guides every believer into truth (citing Jn. 16:14, p. 135), then all people are response-able for understanding and witnessing to the gospel – not only the sixteen men who offer their endorsements of Heisler’s book in the opening pages but all men and women who are called by God and empowered by the Spirit to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ for others (Jn. 4:28-30; Mk. 16:7).

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