

Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the Sacred Anointing and the Call to Preach

Direct Answer

For Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the **sacred anointing**—also called *unction*—was a special, sovereign empowerment of the Holy Spirit that comes upon a prepared preacher and carries his biblical message beyond merely human explanation, argument, and eloquence. It does not replace study, sound doctrine, natural ability, or careful preparation; it takes hold of those things and makes the preacher a living instrument through whom hearers sense the authority and presence of God.^{[1][2]}

What sets a called preacher apart from a regular Christian is therefore not superior worth, holiness, intelligence, or personality. It is a **divine summons to herald God’s Word**, accompanied by a God-given capacity for preaching, an inward compulsion, concern for souls, a humbling sense of inadequacy, and the church’s outward recognition of the call.^{[3][4]}

Calling and Anointing

Lloyd-Jones distinguished two related realities:

Reality	Meaning	Duration
The call to preach	God’s summons and gifting that sets a person apart for the public proclamation of Scripture	A basic vocation or office, tested and recognized by the church ^[^3]
The anointing for preaching	The Spirit’s special power upon the preacher in the actual work of proclamation	Sovereign and occasional; it may vary from sermon to sermon ^{[5][2]}

A person can be genuinely called and faithfully prepared yet preach on a particular occasion without an extraordinary sense of unction. Conversely, an unusual experience of power by itself does not establish a lifelong call; the call must be tested by character, doctrine, gifting, and the church’s confirmation.^{[2][3]}

The Sacred Anointing

Lloyd-Jones described unction as something that **comes upon** the preacher rather than something he manufactures. It gives unusual clarity of thought and expression, ease and freedom of utterance, assurance, authority, and a sense that the preacher is being carried or used as a channel by power beyond himself.^{[1][2]}

The congregation also recognizes its effects. Hearers become gripped by the truth, serious about eternal realities, convicted of sin, humbled, strengthened, and hungry for more of God’s Word; the aim is not admiration of the speaker but a felt awareness of God.^{[6][2]}

This was not, for Lloyd-Jones, emotional excitement, theatrical delivery, forceful personality, polished rhetoric, or mere doctrinal correctness. A sermon may be accurate and skillful while lacking spiritual power; preparation supplies the material, but only the Spirit can give the proclamation its divine efficacy.^{[7][8]}^[^2]

Nor did anointing mean sinless character or advanced sanctification. Lloyd-Jones distinguished the Spirit's power for witness and service from the Spirit's progressive work of making the believer holy, though the two should never be carelessly separated in Christian life.^[^5]

Marks of the Call

Lloyd-Jones identified several converging signs rather than one private feeling:

- **An inward pressure:** The call is something God does to a person, not simply a profession the person selects.^{[4][3]}
- **An enduring compulsion:** The prospective preacher finds that the burden persists and that no other work finally satisfies in the same way.^{[9][10]}
- **Concern for people:** He becomes deeply troubled by people's lost condition and longs to bring them the truth of Christ.^{[3][4]}
- **Fear and inadequacy:** Because he grasps the gravity of speaking God's message to souls, he approaches the pulpit with trembling rather than easy self-confidence.^{[9][4]}
- **Appropriate gifts:** He possesses the spiritual, intellectual, and verbal capacity to understand Scripture and communicate it publicly; education can cultivate that gift but cannot create it.^{[5][3]}
- **Godly character:** The church should see spiritual maturity, stability, wisdom, patience, knowledge of people, and a credible Christian life.^[^3]
- **External confirmation:** The congregation must recognize and attest the call; private certainty is not sufficient by itself.^{[4][3]}

Lloyd-Jones's compressed description was that the chief things are love for God, love for souls, knowledge of the truth, and the Holy Spirit within the preacher.^{[11][3]}

Every Christian and the Preacher

Every Christian is called to bear witness—to speak naturally and personally about Christ. Lloyd-Jones nevertheless distinguished ordinary witness from preaching in the strict sense: preaching is the authoritative, public **heralding** of God's message by one whom God calls and the church recognizes.^{[5][4]}

The preacher is not a higher class of Christian. He is an ordinary, weak human being—an “earthen vessel”—entrusted with an extraordinary commission and dependent upon extraordinary divine help. His distinction is functional and vocational, not a claim to greater dignity before God.^[^2]

A Necessary Qualification

Lloyd-Jones's language about "the" preacher reflects his own ecclesial setting and historical usage. Churches differ today over who may hold the preaching office, but the theological structure of his argument remains clear: **self-appointment is insufficient, gifting must be tested, character matters, the church confirms the call, and the Spirit—not technique—creates spiritual power.**^{[4][3]}

His position can be summarized this way: **calling sets the preacher apart for the work; preparation equips him for the work; anointing empowers him in the work; and the resulting glory belongs to God rather than the speaker.**

References

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