

The Spirit Qualifies

“... and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.”

1 Samuel 16:13b

We saw already that if we want to do justice to the work of the Holy Spirit, we may not limit it to the Spirit's work of renewing the hearts and lives of God's children. In our text we see yet another aspect of the comprehensive work of the Holy Spirit come to the fore: the Holy Spirit also *qualifies* men *for office*, and enables them to fulfill the mandate they have received from God.

In many places in the Old Testament we come across this aspect of the work of the Spirit: the anointing. Office-bearers in Israel were mostly anointed with oil. This anointing was a ceremony with a penetrating message. First of all, the anointing spoke of divine election to the office. He who received the anointing would know: I have been called to this high office by the LORD him self. The words of Hebrews 5:4 applied to everyone who had been anointed, “No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God...” The anointing underlined that one did not owe the office to oneself, one's ancestry or excellence but to God who chooses.

In the second place the anointing also testified to divine equipment for the office. In the Old Testament oil is a symbol of the working of the Holy Spirit. That an office-bearer was anointed with oil was a proclamation that he could count on the special help of the Spirit. Of himself the office-bearer was unable to properly fulfill the task to which God had called him. He was strengthened and encouraged by God's promise: the Spirit will give you everything needed to do your work as an office-bearer. He who calls you is faithful, he will also do it!

So we read in the Old Testament that priests (cf. Ex 40:15, 16), prophets (cf. 1 Kings 19:16), and kings (cf. 1 Sam 10:1) were anointed to their office.

To what extent God qualified men to their office, we learn from Israel's judges. They took action to deliver the people and performed amazing deeds to which the Holy Spirit enabled them. The Spirit of the LORD “came upon” Othniel. That is why he was able to deliver Israel out of their distress and go to war against the mighty king of Aram (cf. Judg 3:10). The Spirit of the LORD “came upon” Gideon. Therefore he could muster an army and march against the Midianites (cf. Judg 6:34). Especially in the history of Samson as judge we read repeatedly that it was the Spirit who enabled him to perform exceptional deeds (cf. Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14).

The same applied to Israel's prophets. It was the Spirit of God who controlled them and made them speak. The Spirit “rested” upon them and thus they spoke their prophetic word (cf. Nu 11:25). The Spirit “came upon him in power” (cf. 1 Sam 10:10); the Spirit of the LORD “fell upon” them (cf. Ezek 11:5). The prophet is the man who is “filled” with the Spirit (cf. Mic 3:8). In and through him the Spirit of the LORD speaks (cf. 2 Sam 23:2). The prophetic word is the word of the Spirit (cf. Isa 30:1, 2). Therefore we can read in Nehemiah 9:30: “For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets.”

It is remarkable that the Old Testament uses different words for this equipping by the Holy Spirit for the work of the office-bearers. It should also strike us that office-bearers who were continually equipped for their office by the Holy Spirit, sometimes all at once were “seized” by the Holy Spirit (cf. Judg 6:34; 1 Sam 11:6). All this accentuates all the more that it was the

Spirit who equipped Israel's office-bearers. Their amazing deeds were in reality the work of the *Spirit* who intervened to deliver and liberate the people.

We have to read our text in light of the above. God calls David to the office of king. The young man David is given an enormous responsibility. But right from the start he receives the special help of the Holy Spirit: the call to office goes hand in hand with the qualification to office!

1 Samuel 16 has rightly been typified as the great turning point. From now on Saul is on his way out and David on his way in. In the rest of 1 Samuel we see two messiahs, the two anointed ones. Saul sinks deeper and deeper in unfaithfulness and disobedience to the LORD while David through God's grace rises higher and higher on the way to the throne of Israel.

The LORD's doing is marvelous when he calls David to the office. Jesse's seven sons are passed over by the LORD. Even the impressive Eliab is not considered a candidate. The old Samuel has to learn that the Lord now goes a way completely different from the way he called Saul. Not the outward appearance and stature are decisive (cf. 1 Sam 9:2; 10:23), but God's sovereign election. His election seeks what is weak and lowly, despised in the eyes of the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:27). The LORD sets to work in this way because he wants to reveal his power and make his work shine radiantly.

The LORD chooses the young man whom no one gave a thought, that unknown shepherd boy. Later the LORD will expressly remind David of his lowly birth in order to throw full light on his grace to David: "I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone." (2 Sam 7:8, 9.) David should not be conceited: what he is, he is by God's electing grace only. It is the LORD who exalted a shepherd boy out of the house of Jesse.

Our text testifies how much David owes his kingship to the LORD. "...and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power." We may also translate: "from that day on the Spirit of God worked mightily in him." No, it was not the Spirit of regeneration and renewal but the Spirit who qualifies and equips to the office.

David already served the LORD (cf. 1 Sam 16:7b). Now that he is called to the office of king, he receives the Spirit who is active in equipping him for that office.

Later, David was privileged to accomplish great things. He united the tribes of Israel, defeated many foreign enemies, and worked energetically to establish the service of the LORD. In short, he proved himself the truly theocratic king of whom Psalm 72 sings. Our text explains all this. It was the miracle of the Spirit of the LORD who equipped David continually and enabled him to do all this.

This equipping to office by the Spirit will later be most gloriously revealed in David's great Son, the *Messiah*. What judges, prophets and kings in Israel experienced, reaches its fulfillment in him. On him the Spirit of the LORD will *rest* - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (cf. Isa 11:2). And because this great Son of David has the Spirit without limit, he can be the fully theocratic King according to Psalm 72.

From our text we may learn that it is *the Spirit of God* who equips man for office. When men are called to office in Christ's church they are not left to their own powers. The Spirit is also the Spirit who qualifies to office. He will give everything they need for their service in the congregation. Therefore we rightly pray at the ordination of office-bearers, "Grant them more and more the gifts they need - wisdom, courage, discretion, and mercy - so that each of them may fulfill his office as it is pleasing to Thee."

This Spirit who equips for office is the Spirit whom the great Son of David obtained for his people by fulfilling his office perfectly!

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