



THE  
PREACH  
BOOK  
CLUB

*Preaching with Spiritual Fire: Calvin's understanding of Word and Spirit in preaching*

Ralph Cunnington, *Christian Focus* (2015)

**Summary**

The nature of the relationship between the Spirit of God and the Word of God has been debated among believers for centuries. Is the Spirit present wherever and whenever the Word is preached?

Ralph Cunnington explores this and in particular the narrow historical theological question of what the Protestant Reformers, in particular John Calvin, actually taught on this topic. With careful and incisive scholarship, and writing that is both clear and cogent, we travel through this question.

Listen to Preach Editor Jo Swinney in conversation with Ralph Cunnington in our podcast [here](#).

**Reviews**

This is a fascinating historical look at a subject of vital importance for preachers. It stimulated me to think, then think again, about the relationship of word and Spirit.

Lee Gatiss, Director of Church Society, and Adjunct Lecturer in Church History, Wales Evangelical School of Theology

... this short, readable and relevant book will be a great help to preachers, equipping them to navigate these contemporary

controversies and providing them with a proper theological understanding of their vital work.

**John Stevens, National Director, Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches**

This is a book that all who preach and teach God's word should read. Being confident that the Spirit of God is at work when the Word of God is taught will make us work hard in our preparation and will make us more dependent on God in our prayers.

**Justin Mote, Associate Minister St Andrew's Church and Director of the North West Ministry Training Course**

The first book-length treatment of an important issue that has been simmering just under the surface of British Evangelicalism for a number of years ... I hope this will not lead to a full-blown controversy, but to a closer examination of the Scriptures.

**Sinclair B Ferguson, Associate Preacher, St Peter's Free Church, Dundee**

### Discussion Questions

1. What do people in your church expect to happen when the Bible is preached? What drives that expectation: theology, experience, teaching, church culture?
2. Is the Spirit always present whenever the Word is preached? What sort of qualification would you want to add to your answer?
3. How did the Radical Reformers, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin differ in their understanding of the relationship between Word and Spirit in preaching?
4. Do you agree with Cunningham that there is a close relationship between our understanding of Word and Spirit in the sacraments and our understanding of Word and Spirit in preaching? Does this apply to other areas of church life, e.g. sung worship?
5. How does the conclusion of this book affect: (i) how you prepare sermons and Bible teaching (ii) how you pray (iii) how you prepare

yourself for sermons 6. Does the position argued for in this book exclude the possibility of the Spirit working in different ways at different times in the preaching of the Word? Should we still pray for revival and for the Spirit to accompany the preached Word with power?