

CALVINISM AND NEO-CALVINISM

By Dub McClish

Introduction

“Calvinism” is not a single doctrine or even a few scattered, unrelated doctrines. It is a system of theology embracing several significant doctrines. These dogmas are all tightly woven together in a logical and interdependent fashion. However, the entire system is fatally flawed because it is based upon an egregious misconception of both the nature of God and the nature of man.

“Calvinism” derives its name from its principal advocate and spokesman, John Calvin, the sixteenth-century French/Swiss reformer. I was well-familiar with this man’s name many years before I knew there was such a man. My paternal great-grandfather named my grandfather “John Calvin McClish,” I assume after the reformer. Calvin’s theological system yet permeates Protestant theology some four and one-half centuries after his death, strongly influencing to one degree or another the creedal underpinnings of practically every modern religious denomination outside of Romanism.

The fiercest struggle Thomas and Alexander Campbell and other restorers faced in the nineteenth century, as they studied their way out of the dark and confusing caverns of error, was not Roman Catholicism or skepticism. The mightiest foe of the restorers was deeply rooted Calvinism, which held practically all of the Protestant denominational adherents in its thrall. A. Campbell wrote much in both *The Christian Baptist* and *The Millennial Harbinger* to refute Calvin’s errors. Though published late in the century (1874), T.W. Brents’s monumental work, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, contains several chapters directly addressing the five points of Calvin’s system. Those fighting in the trenches of spiritual warfare today still must do battle with its disciples almost daily, though likely few of these disciples have any awareness of whose doctrine they actually seek to defend.

Neo-Calvinism does not refer to a revival of the original theology of Calvin, for, as indicated above, it is still thriving and needs no revival. Rather, this term refers to a new strain of the old theology—Calvinism with a new twist. Technically this term applies to a movement in Protestantism that redefines Calvinism. However, the more common connotation of *Neo-Calvinism* in the church of Christ refers to doctrines certain erroneous brethren are advocating that parallel Calvinistic teaching.

A Brief History Of Calvinism

John Calvin

From all historical accounts we must conclude that John Calvin was one of the truly brilliant intellects of his age—perhaps of any age. He was born in a French village in 1509 (eight years before Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the Wittenberg cathedral door). At an early age, John's father decided his son should be a priest, and at the age of fourteen he was sent to the famous Sorbonne in Paris to begin his studies. By the age of eighteen, though still loyal to his Catholic heritage, he abandoned his priesthood aspirations and began studying law at Orleans. He there made such rapid and remarkable progress that he was promoted from student to teacher before he was twenty.

Calvin returned to Paris at the age of twenty-two to study theology, by which time he had zealously embraced the doctrine of the Reformers. In 1533 he wrote a sermon, to be preached by a friend, which strongly propounded Protestant principles. Although he did not deliver it, this sermon proved to be Calvin's version of Luther's "Ninety-five Theses." It provoked a wave of persecution in Roman Catholic France. Both Calvin and his friend had to flee the city for their lives. Calvin eventually had to seek refuge outside of France, as Francis I, the French monarch, employed the Jesuits to rid his nation of all "heretics." In 1541 he settled in Geneva where he spent the balance of his life as somewhat of a "Protestant Pope," wielding both political and ecclesiastical power with little or no restriction, and with a great amount of severity. Calvin died in 1564 at the age of fifty-five.

John Calvin wrote many volumes, including numerous commentaries. His best-known and most influential work was *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he first published in 1536 at the remarkable age of only twenty-six. His original edition consisted of six chapters, requiring five hundred pages. He continued working on it for several years, so that by the time he ceased it had grown to four volumes and eighty chapters. In his *Institutes* he systematized his theology, which, for the most part, indeed reflected the theology of the burgeoning Reformation churches.

Calvinism Codified

Luther and his disciples did not swallow all of Calvin's doctrinal system as set forth in his *Institutes*, and they were not the only ones who thus reacted. In the early part of the seventeenth century a great religious conflict involving Calvin's theology raged in the Netherlands. Holland, as had some other Western European nations, recognized the Reformed (i.e., Calvinistic) Church as the state church, which recognition blended theological and civil law.

However, an able and prominent Dutch theologian, James Arminius, rejected Calvin's doctrine, and by the time of his death in 1609, he had gathered a substantial following to agree with him. The next year his followers (i.e., "Arminians") summarized the principal points of his teachings in five statements (which they styled a "Remonstrance"—the Arminians were thus also called "Remonstrants") and petitioned the appropriate authorities to revise the Confession of the Dutch Church, which at the time was totally Calvinistic, to conform to their understanding of Scripture.

The controversy raged on for more than a decade in the face of several futile attempts at settlement. Finally, to deal with the crisis, a national Synod was called in the city of Dordt, which had its first session on November 13, 1618. While the controversy related primarily to Holland, it had spread beyond the Dutch borders. The outcome of the Synod would certainly have implications for other nations in which Calvinism was influential. Consequently, though it was actually a Dutch Synod, Reformed theologians from other European nations were invited. The Synod of Dordt, composed of eighty-four religious delegates and eighteen civil authorities, met in 154 sessions, adjourning May 9, 1619.¹

The Calvinistic bias of the Synod should not be ignored. This bias may be seen from the fact that only three of the Dutch delegates were Arminians, and, thereupon being bound by stringent rules not bound on the others, they soon withdrew as delegates. The Synod's bias is further demonstrated by the fact that, in spite of the debate of the issues (and the Scriptures that were discussed relative to them over a five month period), the Dutch delegates still clung firmly to their Calvinistic dogma. Open-minded men would have recognized the Truth and abandoned Calvin's errors in a much shorter time. The final decision rendered by the Synod was, shall we say, predestined before it began. The Dutch delegates thoroughly denounced the Arminian doctrines and vigorously denied the petitions of the plaintiffs. The Synod excommunicated them as a whole and employed the civil authorities to execute fines, banishments, and imprisonments for various ones of them.

The foreign delegates were by no means in full agreement with the decisions of Dordt. The English and Brandenburg delegates at first merely countenanced the edicts. At least one English citizen who attended (though as an observer rather than a delegate) was converted from Calvinism by the proceedings. The English Church later rejected the Synod's findings, and King James I (sponsor of the Bible translation named for him) forbade the preaching of Calvinistic predestination in his realm. The delegates from Bremen also rejected the Synod's decrees soon after its concluding session.

In preparing their "Remonstrance," the Arminians had drawn up a five-point doctrinal summary, as follows:

1. God's Predestination of the elect is based on His foreknowledge of those who would and those would not believe.
2. Christ died for all, though His death would be effectual only for believers.
3. Men are so depraved that they cannot have saving faith or do any good work except by God's grace enabling them to be born again.
4. Men may resist and reject God's grace.
5. Men, though once they accept God's grace, may fall from grace and be lost.

Those who are familiar with the salient points of Calvin's theology recognize immediately that each of these points—except number three—directly contradicts a major plank of Calvinism's platform. I cannot agree with all that Arminius and his followers championed, for the Bible contradicts **every** principal point of Calvinism. However, I certainly agree that Calvin's system needed to be challenged, and we can only admire the courage of those men in doing so.

In response to the five points of the Arminian Remonstrance, the Synod of Dordt codified John Calvin's doctrine into a five-point summary. In doing so, the Synod transformed John Calvin into a flower gardener who was consumed with cultivating a single, very appropriately Dutch, flower—a "tulip," as popularly described below:

T — Total Hereditary Depravity: All men are conceived and born sinners, incapable of doing good or believing in or turning to God on their own.

U — Unconditional Election: God chose (predestined) before Creation the very persons whom He would save unconditionally.

L — Limited Atonement: The death of Christ was not for all men, but for the elect only.

I — Irresistible Grace: Sinners upon whom God arbitrarily chooses to bestow His grace (because they are elect) are powerless to resist it.

P — Perseverance of the Saints: The elect, who have arbitrarily and without choice received God's grace, cannot so apostatize as to be lost in Hell.

Many now, like the seventeenth-century Arminians, do not find either the appearance or the odor of this flower attractive.

The Augustinian Seedbed

Ironically, John Calvin did not originate most of the doctrines of the theological system that bears his name. He merely revived, refined, and popularized them from a much earlier predecessor. In the early part of the fifth century, a learned man named Pelagius attracted considerable attention by some doctrines he was teaching in Jerusalem. The principal thing for which he contended was that men, of their own free wills, have the capacity to believe or disbelieve, to sin or not to sin, and that they can so exercise their free wills for doing good without a supernatural bestowal of grace. Among other things, he insisted that the sin of Adam was not imputed to his posterity and that every baby was born with the same innocence Adam

possessed before he sinned. While he taught some other doctrines unsubstantiated by Scripture, his main thrust was absolutely Scriptural.

Augustine, bishop of Hippo in northern Africa, became his chief antagonist, both writing and preaching against Pelagius, until he finally succeeded in persuading both the civil authorities and the bishop of Rome to rule against him as a heretic. They decreed that all who held his views were to be banished and their goods confiscated. With this, Pelagius passed from prominence in that era.

Augustine's assault against Pelagianism caused him to give careful and distinct expression to his convictions concerning the nature of God and man, sin, grace, and salvation. He argued that man's nature had been utterly corrupted by Adamic sin, so much so that no one on his own has the ability to obey God. Accordingly, an act of Divine grace is necessary before any sinner can believe and be saved. However, this grace is bestowed only on those individuals whom God predestined in eternity. One's initial faith, therefore, comes not from the exercise of his free will (as Pelagius correctly taught), but from "grace" freely and unconditionally bestowed by God upon the elect alone. One does not have to labor to see that Augustine crystallized what we today call "Calvinism" twelve hundred years before John Calvin developed those doctrines into his system of theology.

It is almost amusing to observe Calvinistic defenders boldly, and without proof, alleging that Augustine in the fifth century merely restated apostolic doctrine in his opposition to Pelagius. This apparently helps them convince themselves that, since Calvin took up Augustinian doctrine, Calvin was also propounding what the apostles taught. Thus Ben Warburton—with straight face, we assume—states that Augustine was "...the champion of that teaching which had been handed down from the days of the apostles..."ⁱⁱ Such claims are mere hot air from a historical perspective, as McClintock and Strong indicate:

Before the time of Augustine (fourth century), the unanimous doctrine of the church fathers, so far as scientifically developed at all, was, that the **Divine decrees**, as to the fate of individual men, **were conditioned upon their faith and obedience**, as foreseen in the Divine mind. **Augustine**, in his controversy with Pelagius, with a view to enhance the glory of grace, **was the first to teach**, unequivocally, that the **salvation** of the elect **depends upon the bare will of God, and that his decree to save those whom he chooses to save is unconditioned** (emph. DM).ⁱⁱⁱ

With the same implication, church historian Williston Walker states concerning Pelagius:

Instead of being an innovator, **his teaching in many ways represented older views than those of Augustine**. With the East generally, and in agreement with many in the West, he held to the freedom of the human will. "If I ought, I can," well expresses his position.... He,

therefore, denied any original sin inherited from Adam, and affirmed that all men now have the power not to sin (emph. DM).^{iv}

Genuine Bible scholars, not wearing Calvinistic blinders, do not need the word of church historians to understand that Augustine's doctrines did not originate with the inspired men. However, it does no harm to have respected historians corroborate this fact. We shall later examine Warburton's brash claim in light of what the Lord and the apostles themselves taught relative to Calvin's scheme, and therefore also to Augustine's.

Just as Calvin borrowed Augustine's doctrinal assumptions, it was inevitable that students of history and doctrine would suggest that Arminius based his objections to Calvin upon the doctrines of Pelagius. However, this does not follow for two reasons: (1) The sequence of the opposing doctrines is reversed in the two cases. Pelagius taught his doctrines of innocence at birth, the exercise of free will, and the ability of men to obey God first, and then Augustine reacted in opposition to them. With Calvin and Arminius, the reverse occurred. (2) Except for Arminius' implication in his five points that men have free wills, there is little in his doctrine in common with that of Pelagius.

A modified form of the doctrines taught by Pelagius arose soon after he was banished. Several men wrote works that advocated Pelagius' insistence on the free will of man to obey God, but that in other ways compromised with Augustinian arguments. This movement was named "Semi-Pelagianism," and is suggested by some Calvinists as an influence upon Arminius.^v The problem with Calvinists in this regard is their blind refusal to see that Arminius had full Scriptural warrant for much, if not most, of his doctrine, as did Pelagius before him, and Calvin had practically none.

A Brief Refutation of Calvinism

Careful students of the Word of God know that the doctrines set forth in the five points above are not only **not found in the Scriptures**, but that **they are positively anti-Scriptural**. Let us now take up each of these five points in turn and consider briefly their contradiction of Scripture.

Total Hereditary Depravity

As a result of Adam's sin, Calvinism avers that every baby enters this world a sinner—totally depraved—and that every human being is utterly disposed to evil, unable even to **desire** to do good and to be saved without being "quickenened and renewed" by some direct and special enabling work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches just the opposite:

1. Not what some ancestor did, but one's own violation or transgression of God's law causes one to be guilty of sin (1 John 3:4, KJV).^{vi} Sons do not inherit the guilt of the sins of their

fathers: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father” (Eze. 18:20). Each of us will be called to account for our own sins: “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that **each one** may receive the things done in the body, according to what **he hath done**, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10, emph. DM). Adam alone will answer for his sins.

2. Jesus said: “Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 18:3). Since not even young children are evil and depraved, it stands to reason that infants are not. If infants are depraved and children of the devil from birth, then the Lord was teaching that depraved and damned souls will populate Heaven.
3. According to Hebrews 12:9, It is impossible for babies to inherit sin from their parents: “Furthermore, we had the **fathers of our flesh** to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the **Father of spirits**, and live?” (emph. DM; cf. Ecc. 12:7; Zec. 12:1). We receive only our **physical bodies** from our **fleshly parents**, and consequently may inherit physical diseases, weaknesses, or even strengths thereby. Sin has to do with spiritual, rather than physical impurity and depravity. The “inner man,” the spirit of each of us, is the locus of either moral purity or depravity, and the very part of man Calvinism says is totally depraved from birth. But how can this be since **God**, who is above and free from any sin or imperfection, fashions, forms, and **gives to each of us our spirits**? If babies enter this world depraved and wholly evil, it is therefore due to an act of God rather than of Adam.
4. Men have free will, by which they can make choices and to which God appeals to them to hear, believe, obey, and serve Him. In the parable of the sower, Jesus described some of the soil into which His Word fell as “the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). First, these folk of honest and good heart had the same freedom of will to receive or reject the Word as did the other types of “soil” in the parable, but chose to receive it and act upon it. Second, these whom the Lord describes are apparently ordinary people in the world who know Him not, yet they were not depraved, but possessed **honest** and **good** hearts. Third, these souls had the ability to hear the Word and act upon it of their own volition. Every invitation God has issued to men through the centuries to believe in and obey Him is an implicit declaration of the ability of men thus to choose. Every choice of this kind that God places before us is likewise an implicit declaration of the free will God has given to us.
5. Even in the days of miracles, sinners did not require any special, direct, miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts to become children of God. This fact is quite evident in the

events of Pentecost. Peter preached to sinners the Gospel of a crucified, risen, and exalted Savior, Jesus Christ, and Luke records their response: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Note that it was not necessary for the Holy Spirit directly and mysteriously to “zap” this throng of people before they could even desire to be saved, on account of their “total depravity” and capability of only evil (as Calvinism insists). Rather, as men created by God with free wills and the ability to choose, the **Word** of the Holy Spirit “pricked” their hearts and created within them both faith in the Christ and the desire to be saved. Furthermore, when Peter told them to repent and be baptized in order to be saved, about three thousand of them “gladly received” (KJV) that message in Gospel obedience, again simply as an exercise of their own free wills, rather than as a special, direct working of the Spirit upon them (v. 41).

Unconditional Election

Calvinism depicts God as an arbitrary tyrant who whimsically chose (predestined) before Creation the very **individuals** whom He would save eternally. These alone not only can, but **must**, be saved, not because of their faith or obedience, but “just because” God chanced to pick them as recipients of His mysterious “grace.” All the rest of humanity (the non-elect) has the sad misfortune of having been created by God **for the specific purpose** of being sentenced to Hell so that He can delight in making them suffer for their sins. Man is totally passive and can do nothing whatsoever toward his own salvation. Each person’s election (or non-election) is completely apart from anything he may or may not think, desire, believe, say, or do—it is **absolutely unconditional**.^{vii}

Calvin and his followers especially like to claim Paul as their champion in their efforts to justify their doctrine, most often quoting from his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians. However, accurate exegesis of the teaching of the apostle, as well as that of the remainder of Scripture, reveals the Calvinistic concept of election to be utterly foreign to God’s revealed will.

Without doubt, Paul (and other inspired writers) taught that God elected, foreordained, predestined (these three terms are basically interchangeable) some men unto eternal salvation and others unto damnation. Two passages will suffice to represent many others:

For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified;... Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth” (Rom. 8:29–30, 33).

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:4-5).

Calvin's fundamental error in interpreting these passages is in applying them, without warrant, to the election of **individuals** to eternal salvation or damnation. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he stated:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death (emph. DM).viii

That God elected some individuals **for special tasks** through the ages is unarguable (e.g., Noah, Abram, Jacob, King Saul, David, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, John the Baptizer, Saul of Tarsus, the apostles, et al). However, such acts of "election" pertained to various purposes or tasks relating to earthly works that God, in His providence, needed to be done. **Such individual "elections" did not relate to the eternal salvation of the individuals chosen.** This fact is manifest from the stated purpose or purposes of these respective "elections." It is further evident from the fact that some of those thus chosen were Pagans when they were elected for their tasks and died as Pagans (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar [1 Chr. 6:15; Jer. 27:6, 8], Cyrus [2 Chr. 36:22–23; Isa. 44:28; 45:1]).

What about the choosing/electing Paul mentions in Romans 8:29ff? Does Paul say that the foreordination and calling of God's elect were done on a personal, one-by-one basis, without any conditions laid upon those called? All that the passage states is that God foreordained, called, justified, and glorified His elect. He simply states the **fact** of it, not the **particulars** at all. He could not have been teaching Calvinistic unconditional personal election without engaging in the most blatant self-contradictions, as demonstrated in the following facts:

1. The very theme of Paul in Romans is that men are justified on the basis (condition) of their faith in the Christ (1:16; 3:22, 26; 5:1; et al.), rather than unconditionally and arbitrarily.
2. Moreover, Paul argued in Romans that the faith that justifies is an obedient faith (1:6; 16:26). Justification (election) is thus dependent upon man's obedient response to God's grace, rather than upon Divine caprice.
3. Paul clearly taught that a saving, obedient faith involved obedience to a "form [i.e., pattern] of teaching" (6:17–18), which involves "dying to sin" (i.e., repentance) and is consummated by a burial in and resurrection from baptism to the new life of salvation (vv. 1–5). This further emphasizes the fact that election/salvation is not arbitrary, but conditional.
4. Rather than teaching that only the individuals specifically and arbitrarily foreordained to election could be saved, Paul taught that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to **everyone** that believeth" (1:16; emph. DM). He argued that, just as death came upon all

through Adam, so through Christ salvation is made available to **all men** (5:17–18, emph. DM). God’s plan of mercy is available to **all** (11:32, emph. DM).

Again, undeniably, in Ephesians 1:4–11, Paul taught that God chose and foreordained, before the foundation of the world, those who would be His adopted sons (vv. 4–5). Verse 11 continues the theme by saying the elect were “foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” However, again, the apostle merely states the **fact** of God’s election of men, not the particulars involving the **method** or **means** of it. Notice that Paul does not affirm **unconditional individual** foreordination and election, the **arbitrary** exercise of God’s will, or salvation **exclusively** for predetermined chosen **individuals** anywhere in these (or any other, for that matter), passages.

The apostle could hardly have been teaching any of these essential planks of the Calvinistic platform without contradicting his aforementioned statements in Romans. Likewise, several statements elsewhere in Ephesians make it clear that Paul was not a Calvinist.

1. Man’s foreordination/election/redemption, rather than being unconditional, came/comes through his hearing the Word of Truth and believing in the Christ (1:13).
2. Man’s election to salvation, rather than being an arbitrary, incomprehensible exercise of Divine Will, was/is according to Divine purpose, which He has revealed to us through the Gospel of our salvation (1:9, 11, 13).
3. Election/salvation is not merely for specific individuals chosen by Divine fiat and excluding any others who exercise their own wills to serve God. Instead, Paul was commissioned to preach the plan of God for man’s redemption not only to the Gentiles, but “**to make all men see**” it (3:9, emph. DM).

Besides the foregoing passages from Romans and Ephesians, numerous other statements from Paul (and other inspired writers) contradict the Augustinian/Calvinistic heresies on the way God elects men to salvation. By way of summary, every statement from him that mentions (1) the ability of men to respond of their own free will to the Gospel, (2) any condition which is required of men for them to be saved (e.g., confessed faith in the Christ, repentance, baptism, faithfulness) or (3) that the Gospel invites all men to partake of salvation, is a falsification of Calvin’s errors concerning election.

It is fundamental to understanding Paul’s (and thus the Bible’s) teaching concerning election to see that said election is **corporate rather than individual**. Here Calvin made one of his most egregious blunders. He not only deduced that God’s election of men to salvation was of particular individuals, but **he made this deduction a fundamental thesis of his entire system**.

The Bible teaches that it was His church, **as a body** (not scattered individuals randomly chosen), that God foreordained before the foundation of the world to the election of eternal salvation. He is the Savior of the body, the church (Eph. 5:23). The eternal Divine purpose mentioned in the context of foreordination and election in Ephesians 1:9, 11 is consummated in the **church** (3:10–11), rather than in isolated, randomly and unconditionally selected individuals. Thus, individuals are the elect of God **only as they become members of His Son's church** (His elect body). God elects individuals to salvation only **incidentally** and **contingently as and when they obey the Lord, and He adds them to His church** (Acts 2:38–41, 47).

Limited Atonement

The Canons of Dordt expressed the doctrine of the limited atonement (aka, “particular redemption”) as follows: “God willed that Christ, through the blood of the cross should out of every people, tribe, nation and language, **efficaciously** redeem all those, and those **only**, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father.”^x

As Calvinist Warburton states: “It will be seen at once that this doctrine is the natural corollary and strictly logical outcome of the doctrine of election or predestination.”^x (This statement [and this doctrine] well illustrates the manner in which one false doctrine begets another, incidentally.) That Christ died for all men and that all men have the opportunity to be saved through the benefits of His shed blood is one of the most clearly stated doctrines in the New Testament, as the following passages amply attest (all emph. DM):

On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, that **taketh away the sin of the world!** (John 1:29).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life (3:16).

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** unto myself (12:32).

So then as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto **all men** to justification of life (Rom. 5:18).

Who [God] would have **all men to be saved**, and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself **a ransom for all**; the testimony to be borne in its own times (1 Tim. 2:4–6).

For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation **to all men** (Tit. 2:11).

But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for **every man** (Heb. 2:9).

And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for **the whole world** (1 John 2:2).

And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of **the world** (4:14).

Only those with greater loyalty to a doctrinal system than to God's Son can make anything of these simple, straightforward declarations but that He died for all men. Calvinists, in their warped view of the "sovereignty of God," argue that such teaching demands either (1) universal salvation (since God would have all men to be saved) or (2) God's inability to accomplish that which He wills. They correctly reject universalism (perhaps more so because of their election error, rather than on the basis of plain Scriptural teaching). Since they erroneously argue a fatalistic, unconditional view of God's sovereignty, they deny the second alternative above. Admitting no other possibilities, they conclude that Christ died only for the elect and for none others. The simple truth of the matter, however, is that Christ died for **all men potentially**, but His blood does not **actually** cleanse anyone of sin until said sinner turns to Christ in faith and obedience. When one—**anyone**—believes and is baptized according to the Scriptures, he is saved by the perfect sacrificial blood of **the** "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (Mark 16:16; John 1:29). **The scope of the atonement of Christ is limited only by the choices men make in response to it.**

Irresistible Grace

This fourth point of the Calvinistic system (which some call "invincible grace") strikes squarely at the ability of man even to possess, much less to exercise, free will in spiritual matters. It flows, as other points of Calvinism, logically from the errors that precede it:

1. **If** a man has not the ability, because of alleged total depravity, to believe and obey the Gospel of his own free will, and
2. **If** God has unconditionally elected and predestined that man to salvation, apart from any exercise of his free will, and
3. **If** Christ died specifically and only for that very man and the few others among the foreordained elect,
4. **Then** it must follow that when God calls a sinner by the urgings of the Holy Spirit in his heart, the sinner is powerless to resist. Thus, the bestowal of God's grace upon the sinner is irresistible per Calvinism.

The reader may remember that, in the view of Augustine, the great error of Pelagius in the fifth century was his insistence that all men have the freedom of the human will, either to accept or reject Christ and the Gospel. The Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace denies men this ability and makes them little more than robots or puppets with no say whatsoever in their eternal destinies. Contrariwise, the Bible, almost everywhere and from almost its opening page, denies this wicked man-made dogma.

Did not Eve exercise her own will when tempted by the serpent, and did not Adam do the same when tempted by Eve? Could they have chosen not to eat of the forbidden fruit? Let

the Calvinist argue that theirs was a special case because sin was not known and humankind was not yet depraved. What of the countless others of whom the Bible tells us they had the commands of God set before them and God gave them the right to accept or reject them?

Shank correctly asks concerning Genesis 6:3: "If the men of Noah's generation were foreordained to damnation, as Calvin believed, in what sense did the Spirit strive with them, since they were but fulfilling their foreordained role in refusing the testimony of Noah?"^{xi} Was Moses joking when he told Israel: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse: **therefore choose life**, that thou mayest live, thou and thy seed" (Deu. 30:19, emph. DM)? Was Joshua merely taunting his people, when he challenged: "**Choose** you this day whom ye will serve" (Jos. 24:15, emph. DM)?

Men could choose not to follow Jesus when they heard His demands: "And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Were there only three thousand on Pentecost who heard and embraced the first Gospel sermon, or were there other thousands who heard the same message, but resisted and rejected it (Acts 2:41)? If it is admitted that even one Jew on Pentecost heard the Gospel message, but rejected it, the entire concept of irresistible grace is thereby proved false.

If God's grace is irresistible, how are we to understand Stephen's charge to the obstinate Jews who murdered him: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always **resist the Holy Spirit**: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51, emph. DM)? Since, according to Calvin's creed, God conveys His grace to the elect by an inner quickening and renewal of the Holy Spirit, to resist the Holy Spirit is tantamount to resisting the grace itself.

Obviously, neither Paul nor Barnabas had ever heard of Calvin's "irresistible grace" dogma when they addressed the Jews (alien sinners, mind you) in Pisidian Antioch: "And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. **Seeing ye thrust it from you**, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46, emph. DM).

Since Paul begged the Corinthians to "receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1), the implication is clear that they had the ability to do so. Paul stated: "I do not make void the grace of God: for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought" (Gal. 2:21). He is saying that should he seek righteousness through the law (as the Galatians apparently were doing), he would make void the Gospel of grace whereby men may be made righteous. Seeking salvation through the law therefore constituted resisting God's grace. The Hebrew saints were

plainly warned of the grievous consequences of doing “despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29). Even the cleverest Calvinist cannot deny the plain words and meaning of this passage and maintain any integrity.

There is not a case in the entire Bible in which God has forced His will or His grace on anyone—alien sinner or saint. The “irresistible grace” foolishness would never have been imagined had Calvin not first erred in his concepts of the sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, and unconditional election. As with the other points of Calvinism, men must put the Bible on the torture rack to make it appear to advance any semblance of the doctrine of irresistible grace.

Perseverance of the Saints^{xii}

The *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the USA* states the Calvinistic claim relating to apostasy as follows:

They of whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the sate of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.^{xiii}

This doctrine is also popularly known as “once saved, always saved,” “the impossibility of apostasy,” and the doctrine of “eternal security.” According to the credal statement above, the elect, upon whom God has arbitrarily and without choice on their part imposed His grace, cannot so sin or apostatize as to be lost eternally in Hell. This doctrine is the logical descendant of the Calvinistic dogmas of predestination and election. Since God, by His **sovereign and immutable** will, predestined those certain individuals whom He elected to salvation, they are incapable of being lost, even as the non-elect have no ability on their own to turn to God so as to be saved. We should observe in passing that, as with other major points of Calvin’s system, this one likewise denies mankind of any free will.

Calvinism sees the reality of sin in the elect and makes allowances for sins and imperfections in them, but not eternally fatal sins. Those who are apparently among the elect, but who totally fall away, are just that—only **apparently** among the elect. Thus, Calvinists are wont to distinguish between mere “professors” and actual “possessors” of salvation and between “nominal” and “real” saints. In Calvinism’s doctrinal labyrinth one who totally apostatizes could never, by definition, have been more than a “professor” or a “nominal” saint.

The Bible is so full of material exposing the ridiculous doctrine of “perseverance” that it is difficult to know where to begin citation of it. We may begin by observing that much of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament—indeed, we may as well include the entire Bible—is utterly superfluous if this doctrine is true. If one is of the elect, it was not because of anything he learned from the Bible, but because, entirely apart from anything he believed, said, or did, he won Heaven’s inscrutable “salvation lottery.” Moreover, if, as one elected of God for salvation, he can do nothing that will cause him to be lost, neither the warnings nor the promises of Scripture will make his salvation more or less secure.

The foregoing simple statements are sufficient to expose the folly of the doctrine for reasonable students. Nevertheless, we will turn our attention to a few of the many passages that further demonstrate its fallacy.

Paul specifically addressed **entire epistles** to Christians who had so apostatized as to place their souls in jeopardy. Paul’s letters to the Galatian churches and to the Hebrew Christians particularly fall into this category.^{xv} The recipients of both of these epistles were on the verge of renouncing the Christ in favor of Moses in a great spiritual anti-climax. Some other epistles share in this reclamation purpose to a lesser extent as well (e.g., I Cor., Col., I Tim., 2 Tim., Tit.). If it is not possible for men, once among the elect, to lose their eternal reward, these letters (at least those portions of them that warn of apostasy) occupy space needlessly in our New Testaments.

In Romans 16:17–18 Paul warned of those in the church who would cause “occasions of stumbling” and would “beguile the hearts of the innocent” by teaching things “contrary to the doctrine” which the faithful had learned. If the Roman brethren could not apostatize so as to be lost, what would it matter if they “stumbled” or were “beguiled” by imbibing false doctrine? Clearly, Paul addresses these people as faithful (“real,” not “nominal” or merely “professing”) saints and expressed concern that they might be lost.

In I Corinthians 9:27 Paul wrote: “But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.” Was Paul merely a “professor” or was he a “possessor” of salvation? Assuming that all agree he was as strong in the faith as a mere mortal can be, what does he mean by the word, *rejected*? (Paul used this same word in 2 Cor. 13:5 [there rendered *reprobate*] to warn Christians against apostasy. He used it in 2 Tim. 3:8 in reference to some who had departed from the faith.) Even Paul could have so apostatized as to be condemned and rejected of God at last.

To these may be added numerous explicit warnings that are utterly meaningless if it is impossible for faithful children of God to be lost.

1. Why should one "...take heed lest he fall" if it is impossible for him to fall (1 Cor. 10:12)?
2. Why should Christians "...give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them" if Christians are so eternally secure that they cannot drift away so as to be lost (Heb. 2:1–3)?
3. What need is there for the urgent warning that brethren should "...take heed,...lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God," if God will prevent us from experiencing such a fall (Heb. 3:12–15)?

A host of additional passages (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:20–22; 3:17; 1 John 1:7–10; et al.) state similar warnings, but these cited are more than ample to prove the case for those who will accept what the Bible teaches.

Admittedly, several passages give assurance that one who has his heart set on eternal life will be able, by the grace of God, so to live as to realize that glorious ambition. Neither the devil nor any man has enough power **forcibly** to snatch us out of the hand of God (John 10:28–29). Paul echoes this theme in several statements in Romans 8 (viz., vv. 31, 35, 37–39). Further, God (in His mercy and grace) will not allow His children to be tempted or tried beyond their capacity to endure, but will provide a "way of escape" (I Cor. 10:13). However, the numerous warnings of apostasy give abundant evidence that **we can, by our own wills, remove ourselves** from the security of "God's hand." Trial and temptation will overwhelm and destroy the saint who fails to utilize the God-given escape route. While Paul does not teach that Christians certainly **will** apostatize so as to be lost, he most certainly teaches (as do the Scriptures throughout) that one **can** so fall.

The monstrous and awful danger of the perseverance doctrine is seen with but little contemplation. This doctrine is a strong **disincentive** for any servant of God to serve Him diligently. To one who counts himself among the elect, this error is an inherent encouragement to sin. I have known of those who were members of churches who taught this deadly doctrine to excuse their chronic absence from the assemblies of their denomination by saying that it mattered not since they could not be lost anyway. I have also talked with some who were members of churches subscribing to this doctrine who denied that their denomination taught it because, even to them, it was so obviously absurd and unscriptural.

Neo-Calvinism

Although there is an obscure Protestant philosophy dating from about a century ago called "Neo-Calvinism," this is not the general connotation of this term among the Lord's people nowadays. By referring to "Neo-Calvinism," we describe various ones with whom we may have

once been in fellowship, but who have for sometime been slouching toward some of the tenets of strict Reformation Calvinism.

Our brethren have likely engaged adherents of Calvinism in hundreds of public oral debates over the past two centuries. The number of books, tracts, and articles published and the number of sermons preached demonstrating the fallacies of this harsh and ungodly theology is incalculable. The numerical growth of the kingdom could for decades be charted almost in direct proportion to the public exposure of this heresy. In striving to advance primitive Christianity, our spiritual ancestors and contemporaries have fought the deadly system of Augustinian/Calvinistic error more consistently, energetically, and successfully than any other theological systems over the past almost two centuries. They/we have done so because they/we correctly perceived that:

1. Calvinism held and holds the multitude of Protestant denominational devotees in its grip through the creeds and church manuals in which it was firmly imbedded.
2. This system of theology is diametrically opposed to New Testament doctrine on every major point, distorting the nature of both God and man and mutilating the scheme of redemption through Christ in the Gospel.

It is indeed ironic that certain journalists, preachers, and professors have now arisen among us who have decided that Augustine and Calvin knew more about the Gospel, at least in some respects, than Paul, the apostle of Christ.

Calvinistic Errors on Grace

Perhaps the first Calvinistic leanings came on the subject of **grace**. These were seen as early as 1932 when K.C. Moser began advocating the Calvinistic dichotomy between grace and law, averring that they are mutually exclusive.^{xv} In the early 1960s, some began to charge that Gospel preachers had overemphasized the **plan** of Christ (the conditions of pardon, the pattern for the church, the positive and negative commands of the law of Christ, etc.) while under-emphasizing the **Man**, Christ Himself (His perfect life of good works, His traits of kindness, willingness to suffer for righteousness' sake, empathy for those who suffered, etc.). Of course, they did not say much about His repeated debates with the Pharisees and Sadducees and the forthright and sometimes scathing language He used in His rebukes of them). This charge was a "straw man" that, in the very nature of the case, was subjective and unprovable.

In about the same time frame we began to hear from some that Gospel preachers had been too harsh, negative, condemnatory, dogmatic, and self-righteous in their preaching and teaching efforts. A steady drumbeat of the aforementioned charges (emanating from certain journals, preachers, and college classrooms) prepared an opening for the next charge: "In spite

of years of negative, legalistic, 'guilt-trip' preaching, I discovered **grace!**^{xvi} "I spent too many years of my Christian life not knowing what **grace** was. The only thing I knew for sure was that 'we' didn't believe in it."^{xvii}

The next logical step was for some to begin over-emphasizing grace while simultaneously disparaging law, commands, obedience, and works. Some have taken up the theme of "salvation by grace alone" after the manner of Calvinism (and doubtless because of Calvinistic influences, whether consciously or unconsciously). The late Glen Owen, elder for several years at the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, stated as early as 1982: "Nobody has any right to preach anything other than the Gospel of pure grace. We are saved by grace plus nothing. You are saved by faith period. There is nothing you can do to be saved."^{xviii}

Consider the following illustrative statements made by Rubel Shelly In 1990 and 1991:

It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation.^{xix}

My salvation is on grace alone. Not by anything I've added to it. He didn't do 98% of it and I have to add 2%.... And, no, I'm not going to debate anybody on the theory of whether salvation is by grace or by grace alone; because the Bible just makes that too plain.^{xx}

Our salvation arises entirely and only from grace...not by one act of duty, not by one deed of obedience, not by one righteous act we do. It is entirely of grace through faith.^{xxi}

My salvation is based on grace alone.... I'm not saved because I believe or because I repented or because I was baptized or because I.... There is only one "because of" in the plan of salvation. I'm going to heaven because Jesus paid my sin debt.^{xxii}

While it is true that God "initiated salvation" for all men in the sense that He sent the Savior for our sakes, He then made it the sinner's responsibility to respond in faith and obedience. The statements above, however, evince an unmistakable reflection of Calvin's insistence that God initiates and provides the sinner's salvation exclusively to each **individual**, with no human effort or inclination on his part. Remember that Calvin's system mandates that God's grace is utterly unconditional from the viewpoint of man's activity. It is not merely an allegation, but a fact, that Shelly is teaching salvation by grace alone apart from human effort or work.

But Shelly is not alone in such bold declarations. Read on. Denny Boultinghouse, editor of *Image* magazine before it merged with *Wineskins* (at the time edited by Rubel Shelly), must have heard and been greatly influenced by Shelly's speech at the July 1991 Jubilee: He wrote the following in an editorial a few months later: "To say that we are saved by Christ's work **plus** our work is to suggest that the work of Christ at the cross was inadequate. To say that God does 99% and we do 1% undermines what Christ did at the cross."^{xxiii} (So, he took sorry notes and blew Shelly's percentages; we are all human.) Before Randy Mayeux a few years ago

made his clean break with the Lord's church (which Shelly and others would do if they still possessed even a remnant of integrity), he stated: "You are saved by grace alone." "There is no human part to salvation."^{xxiv} Jim Hackney preached the following in the Midtown Church of Christ pulpit, Fort Worth, Texas: "We are saved by grace plus nothing.... God does it all!" and "We keep trying to place conditions on receiving it."^{xxv}

Bill Love spouted unadulterated "grace only" Calvinism in the following statements: "Salvation is not a human achievement but the free gift of God.... Can you see that there is absolutely nothing you can do to heal our alienation?" He goes on to say that "...what man should do for salvation [is] secondary."^{xxvi}

These are samples of many such statements that have become a prevailing theme of liberals in the church. It needs to be clearly understood that this Neo-Calvinistic emphasis on grace is not only a new emphasis **in amount**, but also, more importantly, **in kind**, when compared with Scripture. They would like for us to think that these are ideas they have recently discovered in the New Testament. Hardly so. These fellows, in their anti-works, grace-only dictum, are merely parroting the Augustine-Calvin platform of unconditional election. It is old, all right, but not nearly old enough to be from God's revelation on the subject of His grace. If they are consistent they will sooner or later have to dispense with faith, repentance, confession, and baptism as unnecessary and ineffective deeds on the part of men who seek salvation. Max Lucado^{xxvii} and Carroll D. Osburn^{xxviii} gave up the necessity of baptism several years ago.

Calvinistic Errors on the Holy Spirit

Some brethren have increasingly vocalized Calvinistic concepts of **the work of the Holy Spirit** in recent years. These spring, whether consciously or unconsciously, from implicit denials of the ability of men to obey the will of God so as to be saved, **without extra help from God**, in addition to what He furnishes us through His Word and through Providence. The foundation upon which this assumed inability rests is the Augustinian-Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity flowing from the universal inheritance of the sin of Adam. In their view, the "mere" Word of God cannot break this awful imbedded evil!

The major Calvinistic application of this assumption requires a special operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the **sinner** to quicken and regenerate him so that, as one of the elect, he may have the inclination and the ability to turn to God. Without this work of the Holy Spirit (by which God identifies his foreordained elect people), men cannot do any good thing that matters and are helpless in their absolute depravity. So, sinners must be "touched" by the Holy Spirit and be subjects of "particular influences" and "particular movements."^{xxix} Calvin concludes, "It

thus appears that none can enter the kingdom of God save those whose minds have been renewed by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit.”^{xxx}

However, Calvin does not stop with the Spirit’s necessary extra help in regeneration. He moves it right on to cover sanctification: “Nor does Scripture say our minds are illuminated in a single day, so as afterwards to see of themselves.... [The saints are] in need of direction every moment.”^{xxxi} The one to give that continued direction, of course, is the Holy Spirit. In Calvin’s view, Paul’s exhortation, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that **your labor is not vain in the Lord**” (1 Cor. 15:58, emph. DM), is utterly meaningless. In the Calvinistic world the human spirit is unable to respond to Divine obligations without some major assistance. “Man cannot; God can” is the Calvinistic slogan. In spite of Paul’s explicit declarations, Calvin and his disciples aver that something more than the Spirit’s Word is necessary to furnish us completely unto every good work here and to give us an eternal inheritance (2 Tim. 3:16–17; Acts. 20:32).

With hardly an exception, brethren have always rejected Calvin’s heresy of inherited guilt and total depravity. However, some are just one step away from it. Their view of the Christian and sin is that a **Christian** cannot fully obey and serve God without **extra help from God** in addition to what He furnishes through His Word and through Providence. They teach that, without this direct work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian, he will lack sufficient strength in the hour of temptation (Eph. 3:16), will not be able fully to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and will be deprived of wisdom he could otherwise possess (Jam. 1:5). Notice how closely these contentions parallel what Calvin himself wrote, as quoted above. While most deny their belief in any miraculous activity, they cannot deny that, if the Spirit is providing direct help for the Christian, it is certainly apart from any natural or ordinary means of doing so.

The view these brethren have adopted as described above is also similar to John Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification. We should not be surprised, since Wesley built his system of Methodism on the dual cornerstones of Calvin’s total hereditary depravity and perseverance of the saints dogmas. Wesley taught:

In the normal Christian the principle of holiness, beginning with the new birth, gradually expands and strengthens as the believer grows in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, till by a final, all-surrendering act of faith in Christ, it reaches an instantaneous completion through the act of the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier.”^{xxxi}

The Nazarene Church is likely the most truly Wesleyan religious body remaining. Its Church Manual defines *sanctification* as follows:

We believe that entire sanctification is that act of God, subsequent to regeneration, by which **believers are made free from original sin or depravity**, and are brought into a state of

entire devotement to God, unto the holy obedience of love made perfect. It is wrought by **the baptism of the Holy Spirit**, and comprehends in one experience the cleansing of the heart from sin, the abiding and **indwelling experience of the Holy Spirit**, empowering the believer to life and service (emph. DM).^{xxxiii}

Note that the operation of the Spirit here is upon **believers**. A part of the purpose of the alleged operation is to enable saints to attain “entire... holy obedience.” They identify it as “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” which, by His indwelling, He cleanses one of sin and spiritually empowers him.

Holy Spirit Errors from Liberals

As early as 1976, the late E.R. Harper became so concerned over Calvinistic influences in the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, that he wrote a book exposing them (*Harper on the Holy Spirit Issues in the Twentieth Century*).^{xxxiv} He was hearing these things from the pulpit (first by John Allen Chalk, then by Lynn Anderson who followed Chalk) and from two ladies in the congregation (Jo Bass and Nell Jolly). He wrote the following on the first page of his book:

You might ask a thousand people in the church today, “What is Calvinism? What is its danger? What is there about it that is destructive to the soul of man?” I feel that one out a hundred today, under thirty-five, would be rather confused as to what Calvinism really is. They would not know its relationship to the “nature of man at his birth.” Yet **Calvinism** [emph. DM] is the “background” out of, and from which, all this Holy Spirit issue in the church today was born.... Every phase of the “direct, immediate, **miraculous** operation of the Holy Spirit’s person upon the Biblical heart of man” connects at some point to the **Calvinistic concept** [emph. DM] of the “nature of man at birth”; namely that “man was either born, or has reached a condition in life, where man **cannot** obey God,” and God is therefore forced to “do it for man.” “Man cannot”; “God, by the Holy Spirit, will”! **This is the issue...** (his emph., except where noted).^{xxxv}

The majority of the Highland elders did not heed the warnings of brother Harper. The church divided over this and other errors, and this once-great sentinel of Truth has been totally lost to the cause of Christ for over a quarter of a century. Note especially the strong connection Harper makes between the direct operation of the Holy Spirit doctrine and Calvinism. If he was concerned more than three decades ago about this doctrine in such liberals as Chalk and Anderson (both of whom were my schoolmates at Freed-Hardeman College in the mid-1950s, incidentally), how much more concerned would he be could he hear brethren in our day, some with long-standing reputations for soundness, teaching the same things?

As we would expect, other liberals have come along and advocated that the Holy Spirit directly provides various spiritual needs for the Christian. Terry Rush of the Memorial Church of Christ in Tulsa, Oklahoma (a co-sponsor of the Tulsa Workshop from its inception) is among them: “The church is on the threshold of unconquerable increase if we can only acknowledge that we are filled with the Holy God in Spirit form. When we become open to God’s will, we will

discover so much of the Word that will fill us with faith.” Rush then goes to Ephesians 3:14–16, relating these verses to the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22–23. He continues: “It is not **our effort**, but our willingness to share habitation with God in this body, that **makes us productive**” (emph. DM). He says that the Spirit must bear the fruit of love in us because we are unable to do so ourselves. He further makes this telling statement: “The Holy Spirit is the total power of the disciple. Without him, we are a dead carcass. With him, we gain strength—invisible, **direct** strength—to do kingdom work” (emph. DM). Finally, note: “The power that dwells in us is not our own, it is from God. Ephesians 3:20 does not say **we** are able according to the power that works within us. It says **he** is able according to the power that works within us” (emph. in orig.).^{xxxvi}

Rubel Shelly taught the same doctrine at the 1993 Nashville “Jubilee”: While disavowing “special gifts and endowments,” he made statements that can have no meaning other than a belief that the Spirit works in an immediate way, supplementary to His Word, to give Christians direct help. He stated that “there really is a spiritual transformation in your life and all that he attributes over and over and over again to the Holy Spirit who becomes the new, inner dynamic within the child of God.” He further spoke of the Holy Spirit as “empowering, enabling, making possible a holiness that cannot be achieved through human efforts and striving.”^{xxxvii} Numerous other men and women in the church are on record with similar statements.^{xxxviii}

Holy Spirit Errors from Mac Deaver

As sad as the foregoing statements make us, we are made even sadder when otherwise faithful brethren begin teaching this same doctrine. As late as December 1993, Mac Deaver not only did not hold any such views of the work of the Holy Spirit, but he stated that **he could not have fellowship** with those who teach them. Here are his words (his emph., except where noted):

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit **indwells** the Christian, but it also teaches that He **guides/directs** the Christian through the word (cf. Eph. 2:22; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). **Here we stand**; and in opposition to any and all who deny this view.

In a recent meeting of brethren...who are seriously concerned about doing what they can to prevent rupture in fellowship—it was stressed forcefully (after many hours of careful, prayerful study) that as long as we agree that **the Holy Spirit convicts, leads, directs, and edifies only through the Word of God**, whatever other differences there may be on the subject ought not to have the least effect on the question of our fellowship (emph. DM).^{xxxix}

I especially call attention to his statement, ...*the Holy Spirit...edifies only through the Word of God*. It is also noteworthy that Mac’s father, the late Roy C. Deaver, then editor of *Biblical Notes*, and the late Thomas B. Warren, *Biblical Notes* then consulting editor, apparently had no objection to Mac’s statement or they would not have allowed its publication—on the front page of said paper, no less.

However, sometime before August 15, 1994, Mac Deaver changed his mind about the “edifies” part of the Spirit’s work.^{xi} On that date he and Marion Fox began a debate on the “mode” of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the Christian. In answer to a question in the course of the debate, Deaver said that the “Spirit personally enabling one to have the mind of the Spirit is a supra-literary work of the Spirit,” and cited Ephesians 3:16–17. He also stated that “some fruit of the Spirit is personally produced by the indwelling Spirit in a supra-literary way.” He further declared: “The Holy Spirit personally strengthens in addition to the word. Yes, I am willing to contend for that.... I am willing to be known to advocate that.”^{xii} With these statements, “the cat was out of the bag” that he believed that the Spirit provides edification/strength directly in addition to the edification one receives through the Word of God, the Spirit’s “sword” (Eph. 6:17). He had at some point, since his December 1993 statement, adopted a doctrine that he then said he **must oppose** and **could not fellowship**.

These statements predictably sent up red flags, provoking questions in several brethren. In response to letters, principally from Jerry Moffitt, seeking a full explanation of what Deaver meant by these statements, he at first refused to answer questions relating to his “supra-literary” statements. However, in a letter to Moffitt, November 21, 1995, he decided to do so, a salient portion of which answers follow:

Anyone who wants to debate the **personal effect of the Spirit on the heart of a Christian** had better think twice before he begins because of what else he is going to have to deny on the basis of the absence of detailed explanation. When we **pray for strength**, we are not necessarily praying for **more study time or for more information**....

As far as literature [sic], they [the Scriptures, DM] are sufficient to convict and convert. As far as sanctifying faithful brethren continually [sic], they are sufficient to **inform as to how this is done**, but evidently **God provided something additional** for faithful brethren to help them remain faithful. Perhaps...this is one of the spiritual blessings that brethren (not the world) enjoy (Eph. 1:3, emph. DM).

Moffitt asked,

After the Scriptures were completed, is [sic] not conviction, conversion, and sanctification accomplished by Scripture motives alone, directly working on the honest and good human heart which can understand Scripture when presented with it, and which requires no further activity on the Word of the heart by the Spirit?

Deaver answered:

Evidently not, as far as the help given faithful Christians [sic]. The Holy Spirit strengthens (Eph. 3:17 [I think he means v. 16, DM] and produces fruit (Gal. 5:22–23; Rom. 5:5). As to how he does this personally, I know not.

He further stated:

I think that after a person becomes a Christian, the **Spirit then personally** (in conjunction with that person's faithful compliance with Scriptural requirement) **produces fruit to the degree impossible** for a person **without the Spirit** to produce (Gal. 5: 22–23; Eph. 3:17).... I do not know [how the Spirit aids, DM] except to say that **by the personal indwelling** the Christian is enabled...to reach a **level of spiritual strength otherwise not possible**, and God wanted this level of spiritual strength reached by brethren (emph. DM).

Kevin Townsend of San Antonio, Texas, asked Deaver some questions in an e-mail message on May 5, 1997. In answer to the *yes/no* question, "The Holy Spirit may directly lead a Christian in a non-informational way. Yes/no," Deaver replied:

Yes, but only if you use *lead* to mean 'strengthen' and to 'provide wisdom' (Eph. 3:16–17; Jam. 1:5), but always in conjunction with the word. If, however, you mean by *lead* to provide such things as "whispers" and "nudges" then the answer is No.

He has admitted that he has no way of knowing **when** the Holy Spirit directly gives him wisdom, provides extra strength, or boosts his production of spiritual fruit.

Based on such statements as these, Jerry Moffitt sought over a two-year period an opportunity to debate both brethren Roy C. and Mac Deaver. The senior Deaver flatly refused and turned all correspondence and inquiries over to his son, Mac. He vacillated between agreeing to a debate and rejecting the challenge, but all the while was writing and/or publishing articles in *Biblical Notes Quarterly* (the editorship of which he had inherited), advocating his new doctrine. He was able to persuade the once faithful Bill Lockwood to debate him on the "direct-operation" issue January 5–9, 1998. He affirmed: "The Word of God teaches that the Holy Spirit directly helps (in conjunction with the Word and never separate and apart from it) the inward man of the faithful child of God." As Deaver defined his terms at the beginning, he described what he meant by *directly*:

It is as direct as the influence of a demon upon a human spirit possessed by it; It is as direct as the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the human spirit of an inspired man; It is as direct as the influence of the human spirit upon the human body in which it dwells.^{xiii}

A second debate was arranged on this subject, this time between Jerry Moffitt and Mac Deaver, and took place November 12–16, 2000, during the Annual Denton Lectures in Denton, Texas. Deaver affirmed the following revealing proposition: "The Bible teaches that, in addition to His sanctifying influence through His Word, the Holy Spirit operates directly to sanctify the heart of the faithful Christian." A major part of Deaver's argument was that "the Word alone in a heart cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit" and since "the saint must produce the fruit of the Spirit, **then** the Holy Spirit must directly affect a saint's heart." The mere fact that a brother, long known for his considerable ability to defend the faith, would affirm such a proposition is all but incredible. As already documented, seven years before this debate he was ready to deny this very proposition.

Reactions to Mac Deaver's Doctrine

As do all false teachers, Deaver strives mightily to convince us that his doctrine is not new or novel (which it is not, of course, among Calvinists, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, and assorted other denominationalists). He tries to make the case that a host of brethren all the way back to Alexander Campbell have always believed what he is teaching about the Spirit's work. He can find numerous liberals and heretics of the past and present, whom he cannot otherwise fellowship (e.g., Shelly, Rush, et al., as cited above), who agree with him on his Holy Spirit tangent. He can even find a few (both past and present) who are not liberals who agree with him, but these are few indeed compared to those who are scared to death of this doctrine and its implications.^{xliii}

Perhaps the most damaging category of brethren relating to Deaver's Holy Spirit doctrine is composed of those who say, "We don't agree with Mac Deaver's doctrine, but we don't think it's a 'fellowship issue'." These brethren, intentionally or not, are aiding and abetting a brother who is teaching an exceedingly dangerous doctrine that he seems determined to force on the church. This doctrine is bad enough in its infant stage. We should have nightmares in living color about the monster it will become if allowed to develop to maturity.

Deaver is wrong if he assumes that only those who oppose his errors are those who believe in the "representative" rather than the actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For example, he has tried (or at least has let others try) to justify his doctrine by claiming that it merely represents the same views held and taught by the late and lamented Gus Nichols. He should be ashamed of himself for so doing. It is well known that brother Nichols believed in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, he had no sympathy for any doctrine that suggested the indwelling Spirit gives direct assistance beyond the Word either to sinner or Saint, which he makes abundantly and frequently clear in his book, *Lectures on the Holy Spirit*.^{xliii}

With Nichols, the late Roy Lanier, Sr., likewise believed in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Lanier was a Bible scholar in every sense of the term, as was Nichols. Lanier's statement below is generally representative of practically all who agree with him on the indwelling:

I subscribe to the idea that the Holy Spirit does His work of **converting and sanctifying** the sinner through the use of **the Word of God, and that is the only means** He uses....

I get the operation of the Spirit both before and after baptism. The Holy Spirit operates before baptism to convict men of sin and to bring them to baptism into Christ, which operation He performs through His instrument, the Word of God. **After baptism He continues to work to sanctify those whom he has converted. And He does this work of sanctification through His Word...** (emph. DM).^{xliii}

Speaking of Deaver's Holy Spirit error, Terry Hightower (who also believes the Spirit personally indwells the Christian, as do I) wrote: "Still, must we label this a **dangerous and fatal false doctrine**? Yes, and here I stand!" (echoing Deaver's own pronouncement in December 1993, as quoted earlier).^{xlvi} I say with brother Hightower, "Here I stand, also." In the final analysis, no doctrinal issue turns on the number or identity of those who oppose or who agree with it, but on whether or not the Bible teaches it. However, if Deaver wants to claim that certain brethren (and in large numbers) agree with him, he should be prepared for his claim to be challenged.

Mac Deaver's Claims and My Responses

From these foregoing statements and other things he has written we understand that Mac Deaver:

1. Denies any miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit (e.g., whispers or nudges) related to his doctrine
2. Denies that his **direct** operation of the Holy Spirit doctrine is Calvinistic
3. Denies that the alien sinner needs **more than** the written Word in order to be saved
4. Denies that the saint can be strong enough through the power of the written Word to be saved at last, without additional **direct** help from the Spirit
5. Claims that the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit implies **direct** help for the Christian in addition to that furnished by the Word
6. Claims that the Holy Spirit strengthens saints **directly** and in addition to strength received from His Word (Eph. 3:16)
7. Claims that only by means of **direct** help, beyond that provided by the Word, the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23)
8. Claims that through the personal indwelling of the Spirit, God will **directly** grant wisdom to His children who ask for it (Jam. 1:5)
9. Admits that he does not know either **how or when** the Holy Spirit provides these "supra-literary" blessings
10. Claims that his Holy Spirit views are those held by many respectable brethren through the years

Let us now address each of these claims:

1. Granting that Deaver is not claiming any **miraculous** activity on the part of the Spirit, at the very best, what he is claiming is **mystical** activity. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* defines *mystical* as follows: "Having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence; of, relating to, or resulting from an individual's **direct communion with God** or ultimate reality" (emph. DM). One is sorely tempted

to speculate that Mac may have been looking at this definition when he formulated his post-1994 doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit, for they fit like hand in glove.

His “direct operation” claims might make more sense if he claimed he got some “hunches,” “whispers” and/or “nudges.” Admitted ignorance of any recognition or sensing of this special immediate help renders the help, even granted that the Spirit gives it, utterly impractical and actually defeats its purpose. The Bible clearly indicates that, when the Holy Spirit operated on men directly so as to cause them to speak by inspiration, speak in tongues, and such like, the one being affected was quite conscious of it.^{xlvii}

2. Deaver denies being a Calvinist and recoils at the suggestion that he is. For whatever it is worth, in my judgment he is not a Calvinist in the full sense of the term, but he has adopted a doctrine (as earlier documented) that is Calvinistic (and that also smacks of Wesleyanism and Pentecostalism). If he does not want to be called a “Calvinist” let him quit flirting with Calvinistic doctrine.

3. He is right, of course, that the alien sinner needs nothing more than the Word of God to learn the Truth and obey it to the salvation of his soul from sin. The affirmation of Alexander Campbell in his sixteen-day debate with Presbyterian N.L. Rice in 1843 was that “in conviction, conversion, and sanctification the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word.” Our brethren have almost universally held this ground, not because Campbell held it, but because it is what the Bible teaches. Until 1994, Deaver agreed with all three elements of this affirmation, not just the first two.

Unlike those who champion Calvinism, he understands that the alien sinner does not need any special, additional help in any direct way to understand what he must do to be saved and to do it. He simply needs to exercise his own free will in an obedient response to the call of the Gospel (2 The. 2:14). Thus, correctly, Deaver still believes that the Gospel is powerful enough to save the alien sinner (Rom 1:16).

4. He is just as **wrong** about the weakness of the Word to save the **saint** as he is **right** about its power to save the **sinner**. He no longer subscribes to the third part of Campbell’s affirmation: “In...sanctification the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word.” Why does he claim the Gospel is less powerful to save **after** baptism than before? Why is the Word insufficient for sanctification? Where is the consistency (let alone Scriptural basis) in alleging that God gives no special help of the Spirit to one who has been enslaved to error and sin for perhaps decades, but that, now free from such darkness, he must have special help to continue to please God? Is not God made a respecter of persons by this weird doctrine? Would not the

alien sinner need (and deserve) at least as much, if not more direct help than the one who has been made free and has become the servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17–18)?

The crucial, pivotal question here is whether or not by “merely” obeying the written Word of God—with no mystical immediate help of the Spirit—one can so live as to reach the Heavenly portals at last. Deaver apparently believes one cannot. Remember Calvin’s motto: “Man cannot; God can.” As noted, Deaver argues that the Holy Word of God is insufficient to provide enough strength, spiritual fruit, or wisdom to enable one to reach Heaven. The Holy Spirit must “pitch in” and help us beyond what the Word is able to do. Paul Mac Deaver therefore disagrees with Paul the apostle:

And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16–17, KJV).

5. Mac Deaver has no proof—only assertions—that the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian implies direct action upon the heart/mind of the Christian. (He claims that their belief in this implication explains the reason why his father and Tom Warren never openly taught the “direct operation” doctrine. They never saw the need to because they assumed (wrongly, DM) the direct action was a given if the Spirit indwells personally.) However, as seen above, other brethren (e.g., Gus Nichols, Roy Lanier, Sr.), who are equally capable exegetes and scholars, who have agreed with the Deavers and Warren on the means of the Spirit’s indwelling, nevertheless utterly reject any perceived “implication” in this regard.

William Woodson, who succeeded Warren in the Bible Department Chair at Freed-Hardeman University several years ago, believes firmly in the personal indwelling of the Spirit. However, of the doctrine Deaver is now teaching, he wrote the following—just one month after (likely coincidentally) he made his “red flag” statements in the Deaver-Fox debate:

The doctrine that the Holy Spirit **acts directly** on an unsaved person to save him and **on the Christian to transform him and on the church to refresh and edify it, is false to the Bible**. It should not be taught; and those who teach it should stop it (emph. DM).^{xlviii}

Terry Hightower has written correctly: “Now this newly-surfacing group of brethren rightly proves that the Word of God (Acts 2:41) **and** the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 4:6) **dwelling** in the Christian, and then somehow just as improperly conclude that they have proved that the Spirit **operates on us directly**.”^{xlix}

6. The principal passage on which Deaver bases his claims that the Holy Spirit strengthens saints directly is Ephesians 3:16: “That he [the Father] would grant you, according

to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man.” Concerning this verse, Weylan Deaver (Mac Deaver’s son), has written:

But you will condemn and disfellowship at the suggestion the Holy Spirit can strengthen the Christian directly, even though Ephesians 3:16 affirms our position WORD-FOR-WORD.... If Dad is wrong, then he is guilty of nothing more than taking the apostle Paul at his word....¹

The major problem with this assertion is that the key word, *directly*, is nowhere to be found in Paul’s statement. No Bible-respecting brother will deny that the Spirit strengthens our “inner man,” but it is raw eisegesis to import the word *directly* into this passage.

Jesus said of the Spirit in His farewell discourse to the apostles: “And he, when he is come, will **convict the world** in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8, emph. DM). The Calvinist reads this promise of the Lord and inserts the word *directly* just before the phrase, *convict the world*. He thereby argues that the Holy Spirit must **directly** (rather than through a medium or agent) convict the sinner in order for him even to believe. A Calvinist, when challenged on his error, could just as well claim:

But you will condemn and disfellowship at the suggestion the Holy Spirit can convict the sinner of sin directly, even though John 16:8 affirms our position WORD-FOR-WORD.... If we are wrong, then we are guilty of nothing more than taking the Lord at his word.

The error in both cases results from violating one of the fundamental rules of Bible hermeneutics: The remote as well as the immediate Bible context must be consulted in arriving at the meaning of any given statement of Scripture: “The sum of thy word is truth” (Psa. 119:160a). In this case, the Deavers abandoned this fundamental hermeneutical principle, which they know so well.

The Spirit **through His Word**—not directly—convinced sinners on Pentecost of the identity of the One they had crucified and convicted them of their sins: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). It was the Word of God that pierced their hard hearts. So it was and ever will be with any sinner who is convicted/convinced of his sinfulness. The remote context prevents our wandering off into the wilderness of Calvinism on this verse.

Likewise, both nearby and remote contexts must be considered when interpreting Ephesians 3:16. A nearby context commands us to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might” (Eph. 6:11–17). In this passage the apostle explains the way God will strengthen us “with power through his Spirit in the inward man.” The Spirit provides the strength—not directly, but indirectly—through our own utilization of the manifold provisions of strength in His Word. Accordingly, each piece of the defensive armor Paul lists, which will make us strong, is closely

related to the Word of God as its source (vv. 13–16). Our offensive weapon of strength is “the sword of the Spirit, **which is the word of God**” (v. 17, emph. DM).

Paul told Timothy the Scriptural formula for spiritual strength when he wrote that the Scriptures are “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness,” and that they will make the man of God complete, furnished completely “unto every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). To seek spiritual strength beyond what Paul here describes is to imply weakness in the powerful Word. John echoed the means by which the Spirit strengthens us when he wrote to certain young men whom he described as “strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:14b). The Spirit no less strengthens us just because He does it indirectly through His Word, rather than in some direct, “better **told** than **felt**,” mystical way.

7. Deaver Claims that the Holy Spirit, in addition to using His Word, **directly** empowers Christians to produce “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23). As he does with Ephesians 3:16, he has to import direct and immediate action of the Spirit into this passage, for Paul did not put it there. Time and again the Word of God sets before us each of these elements of spiritual fruit, and beseeches and exhorts us to produce them in our lives. Does not being “perfect” (“complete,” ASV) and “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17) necessarily include every item of the “fruit of the Spirit”? If not, then the “fruit of the Spirit” must be something besides good works and perhaps should have been listed with the other “works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19–21). However, granting that they are “good works” (as all rational persons must), Paul identifies in his declaration to Timothy the very means by which we attain them—through the wholly inspired, profitable Scriptures.

For Deaver, though, the Scriptures and my personal application of them will cause me to suffer a spiritual crop failure, unless I have the Holy Spirit’s mystical, internal, direct help. I do not question that in God’s gracious Providence I have received help in producing whatever fruit of the Spirit I have been able to produce. This Providence allowed me to sit at the feet of great Bible teachers at Freed-Hardeman College more than half a century ago, to meet my beloved companion for life, and to be influenced by many good and great saints through the years. However, all of these elements, including the influence of God’s Word, are **indirect** instruments of the Holy Spirit, but no less His work. The burning question is: “Can a child of God, merely by studying and obeying the New Testament, produce the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in his life so as to be saved at last?” I say he can. Mac Deaver says he cannot. Calvin and Wesley say he cannot, but God can.

8. Deaver claims that God will (on the basis of James 1:5) directly grant wisdom to His children who ask for it: “But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jam. 1:5). I apologize for repeating myself, but, as he does with Ephesians 3:16 and Galatians 5:22–23, he works his same eisegetical “magic” on this verse by adding the word *directly* to the passage. Additionally, he not only assumes that God the Father gives His children wisdom **directly**, but that He does so through the Holy Spirit as He personally indwells His children. (Let me get this straight: Is it the Father or the Holy Spirit who administers this wisdom “directly”? If the Holy Spirit is doing this work “directly,” then the Father is acting only “indirectly.” Whew! It gets confusing at times!)

It is fair to ask how this direct bestowal of wisdom would differ from the miraculous gift of “the word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8). Gary Summers posed this very question to Deaver, to which he responded: “How my view of the Spirit’s providing wisdom today would differ from the spiritual gift of wisdom, I would simply say that the difference is one of degree” (Mac Deaver, letter to Gary Summers, Jan. 2, 2003). Is this not an admission he is affirming the existence of a “degree” of miraculous activity at the present? Perhaps he should tell us what degree of difference he has in mind—five percent, twenty-five percent, or perhaps fifty percent? Gary Summers has commented on this very point:

In effect, to argue for direct wisdom today is to argue that one of the nine spiritual gifts is yet available. They all either stand or they fall together. Either we have all nine or we have none. If one exists, they all exist. Mac Deaver cannot escape this dilemma. His doctrine does not merely lead to Pentecostalism—it is Pentecostalism!ⁱⁱ

It is also fair to ask for a demonstration of the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives directly. (Deaver has very likely at some time challenged a self-proclaimed “faith healer” to demonstrate the gift he professes to possess.) When God gave wisdom to Bezalel and Oholiab to do the artistic work on the tabernacle, that wisdom was easily seen in their work (Exo. 35:30–35). When God imparted wisdom to Solomon, it was so evident that his fame spread throughout the world (1 Kin. 4:29–34). Surely Deaver’s wisdom should be evident, setting him apart from those not so endowed. Yet he freely admits that he **does not know** when he is operating on his own low octane human wisdom or when he might have been infused with the Holy Spirit’s high octane wisdom. So, we ask, “Of what value is such ‘wisdom,’ even if the doctrine should be true?”

As we observe the zealous promotion of his error and the sad consequences of it, I must question where that Holy Spirit-directly infused wisdom is for which he so adamantly contends. He stated in a March 12, 1997, letter to me that his father, Roy C. Deaver, and Thomas B. Warren had believed for thirty years what he is now teaching. Granting that they did, it simply

means that they were wise enough not to promote it or to affirm and defend it in debates, articles, and a stream of letters. What happened to this wisdom in regard to Mac Deaver? Perhaps one or more of the following is true:

1. He prayed for this direct wisdom, but did not receive it because he asked “amiss” (Jam. 4:3)
2. He is not a righteous man, for the “supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working” (5:16);
3. His prayer has not been fervent enough (v. 17)
4. His doctrine is wrong, and he believes in and is preaching a false hope because the Holy Spirit does not give wisdom directly.

His conclusions concerning James 1:5 involve the same mysticism we have observed in his conclusions relating to Ephesians 3:16 and Galatians 5:22–23, and we must reject them.

9. In order to avoid claiming awareness of any sort of physical sensation, “nudge,” or “urge” that accompanies his alleged directly-received blessings of the Holy Spirit, Deaver has been forced to state that he does not know either the means or when the Holy Spirit provides these “supra-literary” blessings. I have already discussed this point briefly in connection with wisdom. It applies with equal force to the assertion that the Holy Spirit directly gives us strength or helps us bear the “fruit of the Spirit.” If we do not know how much strength or fruit the Spirit gives, when He gives it, or the way He gives it, I can see little value to the gift, even if I grant the truth of the assertion. The very idea that the Holy Spirit could directly impart to a human being strength, ethical fruit, or wisdom, leaving the recipient unaware of it, seems nonsensical. Such claims are just so much more mysticism.

10. I have already given considerable attention to Deaver’s attempts to legitimize his novel doctrine by alleging that various men have subscribed or presently subscribe to what he is teaching.

One of the things he has sought to do is to persuade brethren that all of the controversy relates to the means of the Spirit’s indwelling. He is convinced that the personal indwelling of the Spirit implies the direct influence and operation of the Spirit. He is therefore tempted to assume that everyone who agrees with him on the mode of the indwelling must also agree with his perceived implication on the direct, internal working of the Spirit. However, he is dead wrong in this. This assumption is doubtless the reason he has erroneously claimed that the late Gus Nichols taught the doctrine he is now teaching. I have shown that various ones of us who agree with Mac on the personal indwelling have never agreed and will never agree with him on his mystical direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit dogma.

After quoting Rubel Shelly's Mac Deaver-like statements at the 1991 Jubilee, William Woodson gave the following advice, with which I concur: "Brethren should refuse to countenance those who would teach such, at Jubilee or in the church building, or elsewhere."ⁱⁱ Please do not forget: William Woodson agrees with Mac Deaver on the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The thoughts in this chapter by no means cover every point of this novel teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. I believe we are seeing the development of another false system of Holy Spirit theology unfolding before our eyes and ears. The dispensational premillennialist sees a future earthly one thousand-year reign of Christ in almost every verse of Scripture. It is beginning to appear that Mac Deaver is more and more seeing direct action and influence of the Spirit, if not in every verse, at least in many verses where we would never have suspected them because they do not reside therein.

Deaver and his doctrinal cohorts are already arguing (as Pentecostals have argued for years) that "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5) refers to Holy Spirit baptism. Therefore, they argue that one is also baptized in the Holy Spirit when he is baptized in water.ⁱⁱⁱ Glen Jobe "pioneered" this doctrine among brethren at the Robertson County, Tennessee, Lectures several years ago, with no disclaimer from Mac Deaver, one of the lectureship directors. Deaver has already reported one "rebaptism" among his converts. The late Bob Berard was "rebaptized" upon becoming convinced of the "Holy-Spirit-baptism" plank in Deaver's doctrinal platform.^{iv} Todd Deaver, Mac Deaver's other son, suggested during the Open Forum of the 2003 Freed-Hardeman University Lectures that *spirit* in John 4:23–24 refers not to our human spirits, but to the Holy Spirit.^v (I suppose this implies that our worship is one other way in which the Holy Spirit gives us direct assistance.)

As with every false system of theology, this one began with just one aberration—the assertion that the Holy Spirit is directly operating on and influencing the Christian internally, Spirit-on-spirit, over and above what He does through His spiritual sword. Also, as with every false system of theology, additional aberrations and "far-out" positions must be assumed in an effort to remain consistent with the basic and initial one. Deaver and his companions have already begun doing this in an effort to remain consistent with their fundamental error. The further he goes, the further he **will** go. I doubt that what he has thus far revealed of his doctrine is all that there is or all that we will see.

A theological system more absurd, ridiculous, and patently and obviously anti-Scriptural than Calvinism could hardly be imagined. It is one of the great mysteries of all time that so many

millions of people who have had ready access to the Bible have been deceived by it over so many centuries.

There is really no practical need for the first five books of the New Testament if Calvinistic doctrine is true. These books are intended to (1) establish the Sonship and Saviorhood of Jesus of Nazareth, (2) record how God sent His Son to die for man's salvation, and (3) reveal through precept and example how men may respond in faith and obedience and be saved. Calvinism makes all of this information unnecessary at worst and insufficient at best to the saving of the soul because the written Word and man's response to it have absolutely no effect on man's salvation—it is total election and total grace.

There is likewise no place for Romans through Revelation if Calvin's system is true. These documents were all written to teach the elect how to live so as to please God and to encourage them to live in harmony with those teachings. However, if Calvinism is true, it makes no difference how one lives or even what one believes. If one is among the elect he cannot be lost, and if he is non-elect, he cannot be saved.

I observed many years ago that people are willing to believe almost anything in religion—as long as it is not in the Bible. It is amazing and tragic enough that so many millions in the “believing world” at large have been led to believe such a Biblically bankrupt doctrinal system. We should not be too surprised that some of the liberals who have departed from us are already firmly wedded to Calvinism. It is a source of great amazement—and lamentation—however, to observe some otherwise conservative brethren carrying on a serious flirtation with this religious harlot.

The implications of the doctrine Mac Deaver and a few others are teaching are many and grievous. He has been confronted with these, and his response is denial. They are no less true because he denies them. His direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit hobby implies the following sad premises:

1. The Scriptures are not adequate and capable of so equipping us that we may live faithfully. If they were, we would not need any extra **direct** help. Paul wrote that they are adequate (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
2. The Scriptures are not adequate and capable of bringing one to Heaven at last. If they were, we would not need any additional **direct** help. Paul said they are adequate (Acts 20:32).
3. The Christian is spiritually weaker than the alien sinner, because the Christian needs help **in addition** to the Word in order to please God, but the sinner does not. The New Testament teaches that neither sinner nor saint needs **direct** help from the Holy Spirit, but that both will be saved by their obedient response to the Word (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 15:1–2).

4. The Christian should be able to live a sinlessly perfect life, never yielding to temptation, if he has **direct** help from the Spirit. However, the New Testament frequently both warns us about the danger of falling away and describes those who do so (1 Cor. 10:12; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:2–4; et al.).
5. Saints have a depraved nature that requires special, direct help from the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation and sin. Contrariwise, Paul states that saints are able to walk in “newness of life” in their freedom from the slavery of sin (Rom. 6:4, 17–18).
6. Man’s free will must be affected if we have a **direct** operation or influence of the Holy Spirit upon our spirits. If the Spirit gives us **direct** help to overcome temptation, how could this help fail to affect my free will to choose to yield to the temptation? The great bulwark against temptation and sin is the Word of God (Psa. 119:11; Eph. 6:11–17).
7. This direct-operation doctrine for the Christian could easily encourage all sorts of speculative subjective claims, as it does in alien sinners under the influence of Calvinism who testify to their “conversion experiences.” This doctrine makes our feelings and thoughts the standard, rather than the Word of God (Col. 3:17).
8. It must be the Holy Spirit’s fault if I fail in the hour of temptation or if I make a foolish decision; He could have given me sufficient help and strength, but He failed to do so. Paul declared that we have the fully powerful and adequate source of help and strength, both for conversion and for sanctification (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).
9. It will be the Holy Spirit’s fault if I am lost at the Judgment, because He could have given me sufficient help in addition to His Word, but He failed to do so. The Bible teaches that if I am lost at last, it will be my fault alone (2 Cor. 5:10).
10. When I am saved at last, it will not be because I have striven with temptation and sin, and by the grace of God—through my faithfulness—have overcome temptation and sin. Rather, it will be because the Holy Spirit took over my personal responsibility to be faithful toward God and did for me **directly** that which I failed to do in response to His Word. The Bible teaches that each of us is personally responsible to God and that we will be judged accordingly (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

The outward practical consequences of this doctrine are already apparent. These include division in various congregations and alienation of brethren who once worked shoulder-to-shoulder in facing the Lord’s enemies, both within and without. This doctrine and the stubborn manner of its advocates in pressing it has already caused a major rending of fellowship. I am sometimes asked if this doctrine should be a fellowship issue. It not only should be, it just is, and for more reasons than I had room to discuss in this essay. Not too long ago Mac Deaver was pleading that his doctrine should not be a fellowship issue. However, he is on a course that will soon demand, if it has not already demanded, that **he** make it an issue of fellowship if he wishes to be consistent.

Let it be clearly understood that if/when division over this doctrine comes, it cannot rightly be laid at the feet of those who have resisted it. It will belong solely at the feet of those who were determined to force it upon the church of the Lord, led primarily by Mac Deaver, just

as the innovators, **not the resisters**, precipitated the tragic division over the instrument and the missionary society a century ago. Let us all pray that those who teach this doctrine may soon awaken to what they are saying and doing, both for their own sakes and for the sake of the body of Christ.

Endnotes

- i. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, rep. 1968), 2:871. (Note: Others [e.g., Ben A. Warburton, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), p. 59] state that the synod concluded on April 23, after 136 sessions.)
- ii. Warburton, p 35.
- iii. McClintock and Strong, 1:414.
- iv. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 185.
- v. David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism—Defined, Defended, Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1963), pp. 20–21.
- vi. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
- vii. Parts of this section appeared in a slightly different form in the author's chapter in "A Study of Election and Apostasy in Paul's Writings," *The Apostle Paul: Great Soldier of the Cross*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1996), pp. 491–517.
- viii. As quoted by Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott Pub., 1990), p. 47.
- ix. As quoted by Warburton, p. 107.
- x. Ibid.
- xi. Shank, p. 133.
- xii. Parts of this section appeared in a slightly different form in the author's chapter in "A Study of Election and Apostasy in Paul's Writings," *The Apostle Paul: Great Soldier of the Cross*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1996), pp. 491–517.
- xiii. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (containing *The Confession of Faith, The Catechisms, and The Directory for the Worship of God*: together with *The Plan of Government and Discipline* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1839 ["adopted, amended by the Presbyteries, and ratified by the General Assembly, 1821–35]), pp. 95–97.
- xiv. It is my conviction that Paul is the inspired writer of the Hebrews epistle, although I realize that some do not so believe.
- xv. K.C. Moser, *The Way of Salvation* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1932), pp. 39, 44, 50. Also see K.C. Moser, *The Gist of Romans* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1957), pp. xi, 17.
- xvi. As quoted by Tommy J. Hicks, *The Handley Herald* (Fort Worth, TX: Handley Church of Christ, May 30, 1984), p. 1.
- xvii. Jim Hackney, *The Grapevine* (Fort Worth, TX: Midtown Church of Christ, Jan. 23, 1991), p. 2.
- xviii. As quoted by Robert Dodson, *Studies in Romans*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1996), p. 114.
- xix. Rubel Shelly, "Arbeit Mact Frei," *Love Lines* (Nashville, TN: Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Oct. 31, 1990). Shelly was challenged by the elders of the Knight Arnold Church of Christ, Memphis, TN, to defend this statement in public debate with Garland Elkins. He refused.
- xx. Shelly, from transcription of taped speech at Nashville "Jubilee" (1991), as quoted by William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ* (Athens, AL: School of Bible Emphasis, 1994), p. 236.
- xxi. As quoted by Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Pub., 1991), pp. 611–12.

- xxii . Ibid., p. 616.
- xxiii . Denny Boultinghouse, "100% Grace" in *Image* 11 (December 1991): 4, as quoted by Dennis Gullede, "A Christian Can Fall from Grace" in *God's Amazing Grace* (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1995), p. 226.
- xxiv . Shelly, from transcription of taped speech at Nashville Jubilee (1991), as quoted by Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Pub., 1991), pp. 231, 256.
- xxv . As quoted by Robert Dodson, *Studies in Romans*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1996), p. 114.
- xxvi . Bill Love, *The Core Gospel: On Restoring the Crux of the Matter* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992), pp. 31–32, 48, 71–72, 142, as quoted in Curtis A. Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted* (Memphis, TN: Cates Pub., 1994), p. 75.
- xxvii . Lucado said in a December 1996 radio sermon, broadcast on KJAK, Lubbock, Texas: "I want to encourage you to find a church. **I want to encourage you to be baptized.** I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don't want you to do any of that **so that you will** be saved. I want you to do all of that **because** you are saved" (emph. DM).
- xxviii . Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), pp. 90–91).
- xxix . John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), p. 239.
- xxx . Ibid., p. 240.
- xxxi . Ibid., p. 249.
- xxxii . Daniel Steele, Sanctification," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974, 4:2685.
- xxxiii . *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, KA: Nazarene Pub. House, 1968), pp. 30–31.
- xxxiv . Ernest Rosenthal Harper, *Harper on the Holy Spirit Issues in the Twentieth Century* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts and Sons Pub., 1976).
- xxxv . Ibid., p. vii.
- xxxvi . Terry Rush, *The Holy Spirit Makes No Earthly Sense* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Pub. Co., 1991, rev. Ed.), as quoted by Terry Hightower, *Studies in Ephesians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1997), pp. 200–02, 204.
- xxxvii . Rubel Shelly, as quoted by William Woodson, "These Signs Shall Follow," *The Spiritual Sword* 25 (July 1994): 21.
- xxxviii . For numerous similar statements from others, see Curtis Cates, *Does the Holy Spirit Operate Directly Upon the Heart of a Saint?* (Olive Branch, MS: Cates Pub., 1998), pp. 52–68.
- xxxix . Mac Deaver, "For All To Know," *Biblical Notes*, ed. Roy C. Deaver 22 (November-December 1993): 1. Mac should have given credit to Franklin Camp for the last few lines of his statement, which he copied verbatim from Camp's book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption* (Birmingham, AL: Roberts and Son, 1974), p. x.
- xl . Terry Hightower, *Studies in Ephesians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1997), p. 202. Mac denies that he changed his views "at the urging" of Roy C. Deaver and Thomas B. Warren, but admits that he "finally came to understand what [his] father and Warren had all the time known": Mac Deaver, "Debate Affirmations," *Studies in Philippians and Colossians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 2000), p.545.
- xli . Mac Deaver and Marion Fox, *The Deaver-Fox Debate* (Spring, TX: Bible Resource Pub., 1995), pp. 246, 292.
- xlii . Mac Deaver and Bill Lockwood, *The Deaver-Lockwood Debate* (loose-leaf transcription), p. 3.
- xliii . Admittedly, he can name a few who hold a personal indwelling view who agree with him. According to Mac, his father, Roy C. Deaver and the late Thomas B. Warren, believed this doctrine for decades (although not all of the evidence agrees with this claim). Goebel Music apparently agrees with Mac. Mac has stated several times (orally and in letters and at least one article) that this is the case. Music has refused to deny this agreement on several occasions and to various individuals. He also refuses to give **direct** answers to **direct** questions about his views on the Holy Spirit's **direct**

- operations. Apparently, 1 Peter 3:15 applies to everyone but him.
- xliv. Unfortunately, this excellent volume is out of print. However, several pages of these pertinent quotations can be read in B.J. Clarke's chapter in *Studies in Luke* (Cibolo, TX: The Gospel Journal, Inc., 2003), pp. 717–21.
 - xlv. Roy H. Lanier, Sr., *Twenty Years of the Problem Page* (Abilene, TX: Quality Pub., 1984), 2:26, 30.
 - xlvi. Hightower, p. 181. I highly recommend the reading of Hightower's entire chapter. For additional material on why Mac Deaver's doctrine creates a breach in fellowship, see *The Gospel Journal* 5 (February 2004), particularly the articles by Gary W. Summers, "Is Mac Deaver's Doctrine a 'Fellowship Issue'?" and by Wesley Simons, "Questions Malcolm Hill **Should** Have Asked Mac Deaver."
 - xlvii. For an excellent discussion of this subject, see Clarke as cited above, pp. 702–11.
 - xlviii. Woodson, p. 21
 - xlix. Hightower, p. 173
 - I. Weylan Deaver, letter to Jerry Moffitt (and 20 others of us), February 16, 1997. Here we see already three generations of a family involved, first with Roy C., then Mac, and now Weylan and Todd. Mac has already apparently "progressed" some distance beyond his father in his conclusions (e.g., advocating Holy Spirit baptism) and certainly in how publicly he has been willing to affirm and defend them. It is not unrealistic to fear how far the third generation will take this doctrine.
 - li. Summers, in article cited in endnote 46.
 - lii. Woodson, p. 22.
 - liii. See documentation that Mac thus believes by Wesley Simons, "Can a Man Be Taught Error, Obey Error—and Be a Christian?" *Defender* 33 (February 2004): 6. See further documentation and a review and refutation of this doctrine by Daniel Denham, "Is Holy Spirit Baptism for Everyone," *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* 5 (February 2004).
 - liv. Mac Deaver told Wesley Simons of Bob's "rebaptism" in a phone conversation in late January 2003. Although Mac did not administer it, he obviously approved of it.
 - lv. Audio and videotapes of the Forum are available from the university.

[NOTE: I wrote this MS for and delivered a digest of it orally at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures, March 28–April 1, 2004. It was published in the lectureship book, titled *Sin and Salvation*, ed. Bobby Liddell (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 2004).]