

## **DEAVER DOCTRINE—WHERE DOES IT END?**

### **Introduction**

**By Dub McClish**

Solomon observed that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecc. 3:7). Perhaps all of us wish for the “wisdom of Solomon” to know just when to do which (more about “wisdom” later). Through its four years of publication *The Gospel Journal* has observed “a time to keep silence” concerning a grievous false doctrine being foisted upon the church. It has already caused considerable disturbance and threatens to cause much more. I believe it is now “a time to speak.” Accordingly, this “special edition” addresses the doctrine just mentioned. Each writer has prepared his material, regretting the necessity of it. We all love those who have embraced this doctrine, but even more we love Christ and His church.

### **The Heart of This False Doctrine**

Approximately ten years ago (1994) Mac Deaver began iterating a novel doctrine relating to the work of the Holy Spirit. He and a few cohorts have promoted it in oral debates, lectures, published articles, numerous letters, and private conversations. Their basic error is well summarized in the debate proposition Mac affirmed in a November 2000 debate with Jerry Moffitt in Denton, Texas (sponsored by the Pearl Street Church of Christ):

**Resolved:** 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.

The core of the doctrine asserts that the Holy Spirit works **directly** on the heart/mind/spirit of a faithful saint, beyond what He does indirectly through His objective Word, to make one holier than he could otherwise be. It implicitly denies that the inspired Word can make a saint sufficiently holy to enter Heaven. I have been accused of being “hypersensitive” toward Mac’s doctrine because I dared oppose it in a fellow-elder with whom I served. How could one be “hypersensitive” to a doctrine that is so devastating and deadly in its implications?

Mac Deaver has been so much the leading advocate of this doctrine that its common designation is “The Deaver Doctrine.” Seven years ago (March 1997) Mac claimed in a letter to me that his father, the beloved Roy C. Deaver, had believed this doctrine “for about thirty years” (i.e., since about 1967). It has now come down to a third generation: Both of Mac’s sons, Weylan and Todd, promote this teaching. Mac and Roy have for years been in the forefront of our battles with both anti-ism and liberalism, which fact makes their behavior the past few years even sadder. Now, instead of being pleased to stand and fight with them, I (with many others) must oppose them and separate myself from them.

## **This Doctrine Is Novel**

As do all false teachers, Mac strives mightily to convince us that his doctrine is not novel (which is true, of course—among Calvinists, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, assorted other denominationalists, and liberals in the church). He would have us believe that it is merely the doctrine of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit and therefore is nothing about which to get excited. Were this all there is to it, most brethren would agree. Brethren who differ on the means of the Spirit's indwelling have for generations lived and worked in close fellowship. As long as Roy and Mac believed/taught only the Spirit's personal indwelling, there was no problem.

Mac would also have us believe that to deny his direct-operation doctrine is to deny the providential work of Deity as well as the power of prayer. We dare not be confused by this ploy: Providence and prayer are areas in which God works **behind the scenes** and **for us**. Mac teaches that the Holy Spirit works **immediately** and **does things** and **to us**. There is a vast difference in Bible doctrine and in what Mac is advocating.

Neither providence, prayer, nor the means of the Spirit's indwelling are the issues. Mac's assertion that a direct, in-addition-to-the-Word impact of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of Christians occurs makes his doctrine "novel": new and strange.

Mac's doctrine is **new** in the sense that it is not old enough to be Scriptural. Although a few brethren over the past two centuries have professed this doctrine, It has never taken hold

among those dedicated to the old paths, and for good reasons: (1) The Bible does not teach it, and (2) It was—and is—correctly perceived by most brethren as a reflection on the power of God’s Word. It is also a **new** doctrine in regard both to Roy and Mac Deaver. Roy wrote the following in 1989:

For near fifty years...I have preached the **transforming power of the Holy Spirit** in the lives of men, but the **Spirit’s working always in and through, by means of, the written Word** of God, both in the matter of **conversion and in the guiding of the Christian**—never separate and apart from the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This I will continue to preach (*Biblical Notes*, March-April 1989, emph. DM).

Roy made it clear that the Spirit works only through the “written Word of God” in both “conversion and in the guiding of the Christian [i.e., ‘sanctification,’ DM].” This statement flatly contradicts Mac’s “direct-operation” doctrine, which, since 1994 (at least), Roy has endorsed. Furthermore, Roy wrote these words in 1989, **only fifteen years ago**, which contradicts Mac’s claim that Roy had held this doctrine “**about thirty years**” (i.e., since 1967). (Son and father need to get their **stories** straight, as well as their doctrine.) Does Roy believe what he wrote in 1989, or does he believe what Mac began teaching in 1994? He cannot believe both.

Nor has Mac always believed that the Holy Spirit works directly on men's hearts. He wrote in 1993:

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 (emph. his).

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 (*Biblical Notes*, Nov.-Dec. 1993, emph. DM).

He contended that the Holy Spirit, among other things, "...edifies **only** through the Word of God," with which most sound brethren agree completely. He said that he would oppose "any and all" who deny this view (i.e., those who would teach that the Spirit **directly** edifies the Christian) and that any view besides Word-only-for-edification would affect fellowship. He was right—and precisely **because** he was right we have had to oppose and cease our fellowship with him. Were he yet teaching what he believed in 1993, I would not be writing these words, but would—with many hundreds of others—still be enjoying the sweet

fellowship I once enjoyed with him. (An interesting incidental question here is why Roy, editor of *Biblical Notes*, printed Mac's article **if he believed in 1993 [as Mac claims] that the Spirit edifies us directly**? If Roy then believed in the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, Mac apparently did not know it and Roy did not tell him.)

Mac's doctrine is **strange**, at least among those generally counted faithful through the years (again, admitting a few exceptions), and most sound saints have strongly opposed it.

In an attempt to calm some concerned brethren, Mac has stated that he is not claiming: (1) any miraculous manifestations of the Spirit or (2) any physical sensation by which one may know he is receiving extra strength, spiritual fruit, or wisdom. If what he is teaching involves no **miraculous** activity, it does describe **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 tempted to speculate that Mac was reading this definition when he formulated his post-1994 Holy Spirit doctrine.)

His "direct operation" claims might make more sense if he professed getting some "whispers" and "nudges." The absence of any sensation of this special, immediate help ("better told than felt"?) renders it—even granting its occurrence—utterly impractical and defeats its purpose.

The Bible clearly indicates that, when the Holy Spirit operated on men directly, causing them to speak by inspiration, speak in tongues, and such like, those affected were quite aware of it. Why should Mac's direct-operation-of-the-Holy Spirit activity be different?

### **This Is a Progressive Doctrine**

As with every false doctrinal system, this one began with just one basic aberration— direct Holy Spirit impact on the Christian internally, Spirit-on-spirit, doing more than what He does through His Word. Also, as with every false system, additional “far-out” positions must be taken in an effort to remain consistent with the basic one.

Mac and his companions have already advanced to other errors. When asked if there is a difference between the wisdom God allegedly gives directly through the Holy Spirit (Jam. 1:5) and the spiritual gift of the “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8), he replies, only in “degree.” (Surely, if he had received this “direct wisdom,” he would not have attempted to force his doctrine upon the church. Or maybe he has not prayed hard enough.)

He has made similar statements regarding Jesus' inspiration promises to the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13)— what the Spirit did for them and what He does for us differ only in “degree.” Mac and company now insist (as Pentecostals have long done) that “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5) implies Holy Spirit baptism. They therefore argue that Holy Spirit baptism is as universal as water baptism. (It is amazing that Mac Deaver is thus teaching!) He has already reported one “rebaptism” among converts to his Holy Spirit baptism dictum—the late

Bob Berard (Mac did not administer it, but approved it). Todd, another one of Mac's sons, suggested that *spirit* in John 4:23–24 refers not to our human spirits, but to the Holy Spirit (2003 F-HU Lectures Open Forum).

Another false system of theology is unfolding before our eyes. The further Mac goes, the further he **will** go. What he has thus far told us will not be the end of it. His 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.

### **This Is a Destructive Doctrine**

Besides the dire spiritual consequences of “Deaver Doctrine,” its practical consequences are also increasingly apparent. It has either caused congregational problems or outright division in Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and even in Singapore. Mac has already succeeded in alienating numerous brethren who once worked shoulder-to-shoulder with him facing enemies of the Truth. This doctrine—and the stubborn manner of its advocates in pressing it—threatens another major division among us if it is not headed off.

I am sometimes asked if this doctrine should be a fellowship issue. It not only **should** be, it **must** be, and for various reasons addressed in this journal. Not too long ago Mac 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 such if he is consistent.

## **Conclusion**

Those doing the most harm concerning this doctrine may not be those who openly agree with Mac. Perhaps more harmful are those who profess disagreement, but who do not count it something that affects fellowship. All such are aiding and abetting a handful of brethren who are teaching an exceedingly dangerous doctrine that they seem determined to force on the church, or to divide it trying. (Whatever happened to Mac's 1993 "serious concern" about a "rupture in fellowship"?)

If/when general division over this doctrine occurs, it cannot be rightly laid at the feet of those who have resisted it. Blame will belong primarily to those, led by Mac Deaver, who were determined that we must believe it, and secondarily to those who disagreed but did not count it a "fellowship issue." 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 body of Christ. Let us also pray that those who profess to see no harm in it soon realize their harmful attitude.

## **Post Script**

The Pearl Street Church of Christ sponsored the Moffitt-Deaver Debate as a means of exposing and opposing the "Deaver Doctrine" in 2000. A new eldership of four men was appointed in 2001, of which I was one. Unfortunately, unknown to any of the other men at the time of our appointment, one of the new elders eventually revealed to the remainder of the eldership that he was in agreement with Mac Deaver's doctrine and had held such views for many years. In spite of my opposition (and that of brother Gary Summers, Pearl St. preacher at the time) to this doctrine within the eldership over several months, the elder in sympathy with Mac Deaver eventually persuaded the other two elders (besides me) to support him. These developments resulted in the departure from Pearl St. by brother Summers and me in the spring of 2003. My accusations against the remaining elders of their acceptance of the Deaver position brought forth their vociferous denials by means of a series of

letters in 2003–2004 aimed at discrediting me. The utter hypocrisy and dishonesty of these men became evident to all when they employed Mac Deaver as the Pearl St. preacher in August 2005.

**Note:** This MS, in a slightly different form, originally appeared as an “Editorial Perspective” in the February 2004 issue of *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*.