

# A Review of “How Does the Holy Spirit Convict Today?”

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## Introduction

That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

So read the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1:9.<sup>1</sup> Without question, Solomon’s observation is true concerning the fatal error addressed in this manuscript. The doctrine that there must be/is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner in addition to and/or in conjunction with the Word before he can be convicted of sin and converted to Christ is not a newcomer in the realm of theology. However, it is a relative newcomer among faithful saints. This study includes an examination of the roots of the modern manifestations of this error and an examination of its iteration by a contemporary brother.

## Tracing the Roots of the Error

Just as Luther and his disciples in sixteenth-century Germany did not swallow all of Calvin’s doctrinal system as set forth in his *Institutes*, neither did Jacob/Jacobus/James Arminius in Germany’s neighboring Netherlands. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century a great religious conflict involving Calvin’s theology raged in Holland. It had, along with some other Western European nations, recognized the “Reformed” (i.e., Calvinistic) Church as the state church. By the time of Arminius’ death in 1609, he had gathered a substantial following that agreed with his rejections of most of Calvinism. The next year his followers (dubbed “Arminians”) summarized the principal points of his theology in five statements, each of which, with one slight exception, was a direct contradiction of the principal points of Calvin’s theology. The signatories of this document (labeled “The Remonstrance”) petitioned the church/state authorities in Holland to revise the totally Calvinistic Confession of the Dutch Church (which constituted both their civil and religious law) to conform to their understanding of Scripture.

After a decade of futile attempts at settlement, a national Synod was called in the city of Dordt, which had its first session on November 13, 1618. The Synod of Dordt, composed of eighty-four religious delegates and eighteen civil authorities, met in 154 sessions of debate, over a period of six months (*McClintock and Strong*).

The Calvinistic composition and bias of the Synod predestined the outcome before it began. The Dutch delegates thoroughly denounced the Arminian Remonstrance and vigorously denied the petitions of the plaintiffs. Further, the Synod excommunicated them as a whole and employed the civil authorities to execute fines, banishments, and imprisonments for various ones of them. The literary response by the Synod of Dordt to the five points of the Remonstrance was the distillation of Calvin's theology a century after he died. Thus, the nation universally famous for its fragrant tulips became the seedbed for the well-known *TULIP* acrostic that summarizes Calvinistic theology.

The Remonstrance correctly countered the Calvinistic errors of personal election/predestination, irresistible grace, perseverance, and the limited atonement, to which denials we utter a hearty, "Amen." However, article 3 of the 5 articles stated the following:

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as saving faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John xv. 5: "Without me ye can do nothing" (*Schaff-Herzog*).

This third plank of the Arminian platform implies a *semi-free-will* doctrine and a *semi-inherited-sin* doctrine. The Arminian position on man's free will denied Calvin's *irresistible-grace* and *election* follies. While Arminius rejected the extreme version of the Augustinian/Calvinistic *total-hereditary-depravity* heresy, he could not free himself completely from it. He taught that the sinner does not inherit Adam's sin, but he nevertheless is helpless to approach God – to think, will, or do anything good **apart from the Holy Spirit's direct enablement. The Gospel by itself was not sufficient.** Arminius placed the new birth – by means of the Holy Spirit's direct action – prior to believing in and obeying Christ. He, therefore, contrary to the Lord's statement in John 3:5, distinguished between the new birth and conversion that brings salvation.

Clearly, Arminius did not believe the sinner could simply respond in faith and obedience to the Gospel unto salvation without some additional, supra-literary help. He has therefore been credited with being the fountainhead of all those who aver that the Holy Spirit must do or at least does some work directly upon and/or in the sinner for his salvation – in addition to or in conjunction with the Gospel. The fullest embodiment of Arminianism in our time is found in the doctrines of the Methodist, Nazarene, and Pentecostal denominations. Only in the past two decades have these errors gained any currency among the Lord's people,

principally through the efforts of brother Mac Deaver and a few associates. It is apparent, however, that the author of the manuscript under review in my remarks is of the same persuasion – and perhaps has been influenced by one or more of these men. Whatever may be the variations of this basic premise, whether five centuries ago or currently, they all have the consequent of discrediting the all-sufficiency and power of the Gospel to save, which the Lord and the inspired writers consistently attribute to it (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36–47; 20:32; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:1–2; et al.).

### **A Current Iteration of Arminius' Third Article**

#### *Background of the Document Under Review*

On February 3, 2014, Jonathan Jones II, at the invitation of the Freed-Hardeman University Lectureship Committee, expounded upon the subject, “How Does the Holy Spirit Convict Today?” Brother Jones is the “pulpit preacher” at the Maryville, Tennessee, Church of Christ.

I have some history with this school. No fewer than fourteen of my kindred, either by birth or by marriage and spanning four generations, have sat/sit in its classrooms over the past sixty-five years. Some of my most treasured memories involve events of my student years at Freed-Hardeman College (now University) involving the years of 1954 through 1957. Those precious memories include meeting, wooing, and winning my beloved Lavonne. Those good memories extend several years thereafter as I returned to the campus many times from the 1960s into the late 1980s. The late Guy N. Woods was responsible for and assisted with my enrollment there to begin my preparation to preach the Gospel. I sat at the feet of such teachers as H.A. Dixon, Frank Van Dyke, W. Claude Hall, G.K. Wallace, and Earl West, and for years the lectureships annually brought to the campus such stalwarts as Guy N. Woods, Gus Nichols, B.C. Goodpasture, Franklin Camp, and, long after he no longer taught there, G.K. Wallace.

Those great and godly men would not know where they were could they be resurrected to attend a lectureship on that campus over the past several years – and not merely because of unfamiliarity with the new buildings. In October 2015, F-HU featured the **denominational** author/scholar, Norman Geisler, for lectures to the graduate theology students. Brother Woods confided to me in 1986, while preaching in a Gospel meeting with the old Pearl Street church in Denton, Texas, that he had serious reservations about making contributions, either of his vast library or of his financial resources to the school. I ceased attending all school functions in 1989 because of this evolution – and because I wanted to maintain my normal blood pressure.

The material to which I turn the reader's attention well illustrates the drastic changes in direction and emphasis of this school that for many years enjoyed an almost unquestioned reputation for the doctrinal soundness of its administration and faculty. It was evident that Brother Jones knew he was not on adversarial ground in delivering his material, not only from his invitation, but also from his introduction. Clyde Woods, a long-time F-HU faculty member (and an F-HC classmate, known by all then as "Woody") introduced him as "a good friend, brother, and former student." Brother Jones' blog states that he is an alumnus of the school, earning a Bachelor's and two Master's degrees therefrom. The biographical material that accompanies his chapter in the lectureship book states that he also is an "adjunct faculty member" of the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies in Knoxville, Tennessee (formerly, East Tennessee School of Preaching) – which means that this brother is passing along his errors to preacher students.

The lectureship planners of earlier years would not have considered assigning the subject of this critique to anyone, except for the purpose of refuting it. Should one have attempted to advocate brother Jones' contentions in the Open Forum, he would have been vigorously challenged and his error soundly exposed on the spot. Brethren would likely have pled with him to repent. I was present at the 1972 lectureship when Max R. King introduced his "Realized Eschatology" heresy and announced the publication of his book advocating it. I well remember the godly Gus Nichols publicly – and tearfully – begging brother King to repent of his error and cease circulation of his book. Gary Summers well wrote concerning the Jones material: "Once the doctrine taught in this lecture is examined, it will be apparent that this is not your father's and especially not your grandfather's Freed-Hardeman Lectures." To this I would only add that the annual lectureship has ever been an accurate reflection of the doctrinal direction of every university operated by brethren, including F-HU.

### ***Unmistakable Overriding Emphases***

One comes away after reading or hearing the Jones treatise convinced of two things, apart from agreeing or disagreeing with its content: Its author believes that (1) the Holy Spirit operates directly – in addition to His work through providence and through the agency of His Word – to convict and convert sinners and that (2) the Word alone is unable and insufficient to convict and convert the sinner.

All but the last three of the quotations below relate to the Spirit's alleged direct work of convicting and converting alien sinners. Those three relate to His alleged direct work in

sanctifying Christians and helping them live righteously, which the material under review also advocates. However, all of these statements are proof of the two claims above concerning the author's insistent emphasis – the direct activity of the Holy Spirit on individual hearts. I gleaned the following phrases from the extensive outline from which the writer spoke (all emphasis his):

- “...It was **not simply the words spoken** that were instrumental in their conversions...”
- “...**This conviction comes from the Holy Spirit Himself**...but in addition to the mere words spoken alone.”
- “...The Holy Spirit himself convicts the hearts of **unbelievers** in conjunction with but in addition to the words spoken.”
- “The Spirit’s power **behind and through** the Word – not simply the words of the message.”
- “Conversion does not occur simply through interaction with cold words on a page...”
- “The power of God in the Holy Spirit works beyond mere human words to bring about faith.”
- “Our faith must not rest merely upon the words spoken...”
- “But could this ‘conviction’ also involve the Holy Spirit’s work in some way that is apart from the Word and more direct?”
- “But in addition to the Spirit’s message, God also sometimes uses providential means attempting to nudge people to repentance and faith...”
- “...The Holy Spirit subsequently [i.e., following belief and repentance, DM] moves the human heart to submit to his **direct work of regeneration** within the heart.”
- “This regeneration and renewal happens ‘instantaneously’ and is a one-time event that happens at conversion at the event of baptism.”
- “Rather, the Spirit works to provide ‘moral power’ to assist the Christian in resisting temptation and living a holy life.”
- “Sanctification does not occur through believing the truth alone. The Holy Spirit must do his sanctifying work within us.”
- “The Holy Spirit works in the heart of the Christian to convict our conscious [sic, surely he means *conscience*, DM] and steer us toward holy living.”

In his oral delivery brother Jones used *nudge*, *nudging*, and *prod* a total of five times to indicate his view of the Spirit’s action on both sinner and saint. He employed *direct operation* five times to explain his idea of the Spirit’s activity regarding sinner and saint. Additionally, he used *action* one time and *work* eleven times in the context of the Holy Spirit’s direct activity in addition to His work through His Word.

At the beginning of his lecture, brother Jones invited listeners to evaluate what he would say in light of the Bible, which I now plan to do. I fully concur with his following statement: “There is much misunderstanding on this topic in Christendom and even among us.” Ironically, the Jones speech is a prime example of said misunderstanding. His “arguments” contain nothing new; they are merely the regurgitation of old Wesleyan and Pentecostal positions that faithful brethren in our nation have met and soundly refuted in innumerable debates over the past century and a half or longer.

### Key Passage Misapplied

Jones was specifically assigned to base his lecture on 1 Thessalonians 1:5, which reads as follows (his Scripture quotations throughout are from the English Standard Version):

Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

Brother Jones averred after quoting this passage: “This verse explicitly states that it **was not simply the words spoken** that were instrumental in their conversions, but two other things were at work: (1) power and (2) the Holy Spirit’s conviction” [his emph.]. By this latter phrase he meant the conviction in the Thessalonians, which he alleged the Holy Spirit produced; he based his conclusion on a single commentator’s opinion to that effect. Jones thereupon asserted: “The full conviction that these people experienced was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit upon them.” He thus blatantly assumed what he needed to prove and then based his assertion upon his assumption. He then asked, “And how does the Holy Spirit do his [sic] work of bringing people to conviction today?” Ah, yes; that is the important question. While fully agreeing that the Holy Spirit stirs conviction in the sinner’s heart, this passage says nothing of **the way He does so**.

But was Paul referring to the “full conviction” (“much assurance,” ASV) in the hearers or to such in Paul and his companions who powerfully delivered the Gospel to them? Contrary to the Jones assumption based upon the one commentator Jones cited, numerous able Greek authorities and/or commentators aver it to be the latter:

**Assurance.** Assured persuasion **of the preacher** that the message was divine (Vincent, 17, his emph.).

As the *kathos* clause [*you know what manner of men we proved to be among you for your sake*] indicates, *pleroph* [i.e., *full conviction*], here must denote personal conviction and unfaltering **confidence on the part of the preachers** [emph. DM] (Nicoll, 24).

In 1 Thess. 1:5 it [i.e., *plerophoria* [i.e., *full conviction*]] describes the willingness and freedom of spirit **enjoyed by those who brought the gospel** to Thessalonica” [emph. DM] (Vine, 43 [NT section]).

The presence of the Holy Spirit gave them [i.e., the preachers] much assurance, and **they preached with a conscious conviction of the truth** of their message [emph. DM] (Lipscomb, 18).

And so go the comments of A.T. Robertson (11), William Hendriksen (51), William Neil (33-34), and Charles R. Eerdman (35).

Now note: F-HU faculty members **asked** brother Jones to speak – and he spoke – on a **subject** based on a **passage**, the two of which apparently are not even related. The assigned passage does not even refer to the “conviction” of those who believed and obeyed the Gospel – the theme of his topic. Even if the New Testament taught (which it does not) that the Holy Spirit directly, immediately produces conviction in the hearts of unbelievers, 1 Thessalonians 1:5 is worse than a poor choice for a “primary text,” as brother Jones described it. The lectureship committee that assigned this text and linked it to conviction in sinners should be red-faced. They should be all the more embarrassed if it ever dawns upon them that the recipient of the assignment has three earned degrees **from F-HU**, and that he, as did they, failed to see the disconnect between passage and topic – to say nothing of the error of his doctrine.

The situation is ludicrous. Brother Jones first misapplied Paul’s words regarding who are convicted and then proceeded boldly to assume that the Holy Spirit did something besides what the Gospel did in bringing them to Christ. One is almost made to feel sorry for him and for those who gave him this topic.

### **Reviewing Some Other Cited Passages**

To be fair, Jones made some good statements relative to the Spirit’s working through His Word in the conviction/conversion process: “The message stirs belief (John 20:31), creates faith (Rom. 10:17), and is the well-spring of salvation (Rom. 1:16) .... The word of God is the Holy Spirit’s sword that he uses to convict our hearts (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12) ....” Those who have a grasp of the Truth concur with every word of the above statements. Amazingly, however, after these Scriptural affirmations, brother Jones then almost immediately stated:

This passage [i.e., John 16:8-11, DM] speaks of the Holy Spirit [sic] convicting unbelievers of “sin, righteousness and judgment” because they do not believe in Jesus. In context, we again see the **primary way** this occurs is through the message of truth that the Spirit revealed to the apostles (John 16:12-13) (emph. DM).

By saying that the Gospel is the “**primary way**” the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, he thereby left himself “wiggle” room to insist that the Word is **insufficient** of itself to convict and convert. Further, he seemed completely oblivious to his clear self-contradiction. Which is it, brother Jones? Is the message sufficient to stir belief, create faith, and serve as the well-spring of salvation as the Spirit’s agent to convict hearers **OR** is the written/spoken Word of God merely the “**primary way**” the Spirit convicts and creates faith in sinners? Both positions cannot be true.

He cited and/or quoted numerous passages in which he remarkably “found” his *direct-operation* error. All a passage need do is mention the Holy Spirit in any remote connection with a sinner’s belief in and/or conversion to Christ, and – voila! – there must be a direct operation involved. In fact, a passage does not even have to mention the Holy Spirit for Jones to “find” Him there. Even as he (and his former university professors) misapplied his “primary passage,” so he misapplied numerous others. While space limitations forbid noticing all of the passages he referenced, the following, with his comments on them are representative of others.

1. “Conversion does not occur simply through interaction with **cold words on a page**, nor does transformation of life happen through intellectual exercise alone. The Pharisees ‘searched the Scriptures,’ but Jesus knew that the love of God was not with them (John 5:39-42) (emph. DM).” Do the F-HU Bible professors share their former pupil’s opinion that the Bible constitutes mere “cold words on a page”? This description of God’s Word smacks of the jargon of liberal theology, both within and without the church. It constitutes a despicably low view of God’s revelation to man. Compare Jones’ *cold words on a page* with the Holy Spirit’s evaluation of the Word of God: “For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12a). Before reading the Jones lecture, I was utterly unaware that the Lord in John 5:39-42 was actually lecturing the Pharisees on their need for the Holy Spirit’s direct work!
2. “While it is true that we have to ‘work out our salvation with fear and trembling,’ we must also recognize that it is ‘God who works in you’ (Philippians 2:12-13).” There it is in so many words: “God works directly through the Holy Spirit in you.” The only problem is that Jones only imagines his *direct operation* heresy is in the “work” God does in us.
3. The following is an amazing case of eisegesis: “The power of God in the Holy Spirit works **beyond mere human words** to bring about faith: ‘my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God’ (1 Cor. 2:4-5) (emph. DM).” First, to refer to the Gospel as “mere human words” again smacks of the evaluation any run-of-the-mill liberal theologian would give it. Further, freshman Bible students in the old days



of F-HC understood that Paul was simply reminding the Corinthians that he did not attempt to compete with the Greek orators in preaching the Gospel to them. He had plainly stated such in Verse 1 of the chapter: “And I, brethren when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.” The “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” were the Word-confirming “signs of an apostle” he wrought among them (2 Cor. 12:12), rather than some hocus-pocus, mystical work of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the Corinthians to elicit conviction in them. It is strange that Luke did not mention any work of the Holy Spirit apart from the “cold words” of the Gospel that convicted these Corinthians when they became Christians. Rather he recorded, “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

4. How can anyone who has an appropriate reverence for the Bible as God’s Word make the following statement: “**Our faith must not rest merely upon the words spoken**, but upon the power of God to transform our lives. Our faith must rest upon the powerful ‘working of God’ (Col. 2:12).” This statement is an amazing demonstration of isolating and prostituting a clause to make it a “proof-text” for one’s preconceived idea. The full verse reads: “Having been buried with him [i.e., Christ, v. 8] in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” In context, Paul simply reminds the Colossians that when they were baptized they looked not to themselves for salvation (which falsifies the claim that Scriptural baptism is a work of human merit), but to God to fulfill His promise to forgive their sins through Jesus’ blood in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16). They could have uttered faith in “the powerful working of God” to forgive their sins, because He had demonstrated His ultimate power in raising Jesus from the dead (cf. Rom. 6:3- 4). Colossians 2:12 is utterly bereft of any reference to any direct work of the Holy Spirit. Jones’ misapplication of this passage is truly deplorable.
5. Like any ordinary denominationalist, he cited Acts 16:14 and the case of Lydia as a proof-text. Of her Luke wrote: “...whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” That which Jones asserted, namely that the Holy Spirit operated directly on this pious woman’s heart – apart from the Word – to open it, is totally lacking in the text. The late Rex Turner correctly observed:

The fact is that the text states the medium, or the how, that the Holy Spirit opened Lydia’s heart, the medium, or the how, was “the things which were spoken (past tense) by the apostle Paul.” The medium of operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of Lydia was the teaching which the inspired apostle had spoken. Lydia gave heed, or attended unto, the things which were spoken by Paul (112).

### **Jones’ View of the Restorers and Their Efforts**

From several of his statements it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Jonathan Jones at least borders on holding a denominational view of the Lord’s church. A major necessary effort of the restorers of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to expose the errors of Calvinism, which then gripped, as it still grips the majority of religious people in our fledgling nation. They thus attacked the claim that the Holy Spirit must directly impact the alleged totally depraved

sinner's heart before he could be convicted and converted. The efforts of these spiritual pioneers in combatting this heinous error and in emphasizing the correct division between the Testaments were among their major accomplishments in making the restoration of primitive Christianity a reality. Jones expressed agreement with a member of the ultra-liberal Disciples of Christ denomination who described the restorers' work of opposing the Spirit's direct operation as a "theological resistance movement." Jones' termed their work in this regard "reactionary theology."

While admitting that the restoration stalwarts rightly opposed Calvin's errors concerning the Holy Spirit's work, Jones then asserted that the work of these men resulted in almost universal opposition among brethren to **any** direct operation of the Spirit apart from the Word. He argued that this was a mistake. Jones' mistake, however, is in advocating any **direct** work of the Spirit on the human heart/spirit. He quoted Jack Cottrell, the Christian church preacher frequently in an effort to justify his position (so frequently, in fact, that his MS would have been two or three pages shorter without these quotes). Jones identified Cottrell as a member of "the Independent Christian Church, a part of the Restoration Movement." Further, he referred to the "Stone-Campbell movement" and then said, "of which we are heirs."

Consider the following observations on the foregoing material:

1. Jones is apparently comfortable with the label, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, a descriptive term invented by the late Leroy Garrett, who, for the last six decades of his life apparently never met a professed believer of any stripe whom he would not fellowship. This label was his way of placing an umbrella of spiritual equivalency over the Disciples of Christ Christian Church, the Independent Christian Church, and the Lord's church. The Disciples of Christ female "pastor" who spoke at his funeral (which I attended October 3, 2015) praised Garrett for his broadmindedness, for his help in obtaining her "ordination," and for his affection for the Disciples of Christ Sect.
2. *Stone-Campbell Movement* is a sectarian moniker, which Jones used more than once to include us, but which I vigorously reject as both odious and untrue. I am not in a religious body that is the "heir" of any "movement." When I was baptized into Christ for remission of my sins, the Lord added me to His church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47), not to the "Stone-Campbell Movement" or any other "movement." I duly admire, respect, and have profited greatly from various heralds of the plea for restoration of the Lord's church in the first half of the nineteenth century. Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, and a host of others sacrificed greatly for Truth's sake in that era, and we owe them much. However, when all is said and done, they were fallible men, at times holding positions and engaging in practices not authorized by the New Testament. I am not a disciple of any of them.

The hyper-liberal Disciples of Christ sect wears that name dishonestly. If they were honest, they would change their name to “Disciples of Campbell,” for they claim Alexander Campbell as their founder – the true “Campbellites.” Restorers such as Campbell and Stone never intended to, nor did they begin a new church; their efforts were bent on calling all men back to the original church, which had been all but lost to history through centuries of apostasy.

3. To describe the restorers’ opposition to Calvinism’s heresy regarding the direct work of the Holy Spirit as “reactionary theology” and a “theological resistance movement” is disgraceful if nothing else. It reveals a blatant liberal taint. The restorers’ iconoclastic action relative to this fundamental error of Calvin’s creed was a requirement of their times if the Truth that would produce the church was to prevail. For this same reason we must still oppose Calvin’s widespread influence not only in the denominations regarding the Holy Spirit’s work, but also now in those among us who have drunk from the same well. Men such as Jones, Deaver, and others seek to intimidate us by hurling *reactionary* and *resistance theology* our way and calling our efforts “pitiful,” when we oppose their fatal Holy Spirit errors; we must not cease to resist and react against this deadly error.
4. Granting the validity of the term, *restoration movement*, for the sake of discussion, it is ludicrous to read Jones’ identification of the Independent Christian Church (ICC) as “part of the Restoration Movement.” The forefathers of that denomination were indeed once part of the effort to restore the first-century church a century and a half ago. However, they forfeited any claim to still plead for restoration when they corrupted the worship and work of the church, respectively, with instrumental music and the American Christian Missionary Society. Once they crossed the “Rubicon” of those unauthorized innovations, it was a given that other departures would follow – which has most certainly occurred. All the while professing still to preach “restoration,” they themselves need to be restored. The ICC is as much a religious denomination as the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches are. Those who call ICC members *brethren* err greatly, whether through ignorance or deliberation. Jones apparently considers them to be brethren.

### **Implications, Consequences, Confusions, Assumptions, and Denials**

All who require a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner **imply** that the Spirit’s Word is insufficient and impotent to convict and convert. Yet it was the unaided spoken Word on Pentecost that caused sinners to be “pricked in their heart” and to ask, “what shall we do?” (i.e., to be converted, forgiven, saved [Acts 2:37]). Luke noted the same phenomenon shortly afterward among Jerusalem Jews: “But many of them that heard the word believed...” (4:4a). The same thing occurred in Samaria: “But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (8:12). Likewise, as earlier noted, “...many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (18:8). The Gospel was sufficient to convict and convert.

It is sheer **assumption** to say that the Holy Spirit directly impacted the hearts of those who heard – and today impacts the hearts of those who hear – the Gospel, “nudging” them to respond. Such assumptions come about only when one is so wedded to a position that he is willing to engage in the most extreme form of eisegesis – reading into the text what is not there, but what one wishes and preconceives were there. The foregoing examples – plus many others – constitute the pattern of conviction and conversion: sinners heard the Gospel, by which means those with honest hearts were convicted and converted, and so it continues to be.

To hold that there is/must be a direct action of the Holy Spirit for the sinner to be convicted and converted not only implies the insufficiency of the Word, but it also constitutes an **outright denial** of the Word’s power in this regard. Paul declared, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it [not it **and** the Spirit’s direct impact on the sinner] is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Jones and his cohorts should rewrite Romans 10:17 to read: “So then belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ – plus some direct help from the Holy Spirit.”

Jones **confused** “providence” with his *direct operation* credo, suggesting that the Holy Spirit “nudges” people to “start having a conviction toward belief and repentance.” However, the very nature of providence is that it is invisible, in “the background,” and imperceptible through the senses. It is an occurrence that always involves “who knows if” or “perhaps” this or that was the providential work of God (Est. 4:14; Phi. 15). If Jones and others of his persuasion were merely advocating the employment of God’s providential activity, there would be no alarm. However, the one is **indirect** activity, while that which Jones asserted is **direct** activity on the part of the Holy Spirit. The former is Scriptural and safe, but the latter is unscriptural and spiritually fatal.

Jones’ failure to distinguish between God’s providential work behind-the-scenes and the contention that the Spirit directly impacts the hearts of sinners leads him to erect the straw man of Deism (echoing the contentions of Mac Deaver). He evinced his **confusion** as follows:

It is my judgment that when we reject the possibility of any direct action of God in our lives today, we get dangerously close to a deistic view of God that leaves us in a place where we view God as being far-removed from our world and has left us with nothing but the Bible. To deny an eminent presence of God’s work in our world today leaves us spiritually like a valley of dry bones.

This “logic” is similar to that of Pentecostals who assert that if one denies the presence of miracles today, he thereby implies that God is incapable of performing them. No, brother Jones, it is not an either/or matter concerning the Spirit’s working directly or not at all in the lives of men today. The fallacy of this reasoning completely omits the presence/activity of God through providence. Incidentally, note the Bible-bashing conclusion that, if the Spirit is not directly affecting human behavior, God “has left us nothing but the Bible,” which produces a spiritual “valley of dry bones.” Nothing but the Bible, indeed! Such a low view of Scripture is unworthy of anyone professing to be a child of God, much less one who is supposed to be preaching it.

One effective way to accentuate the falseness of a doctrine is to recognize its unscriptural and ungodly **consequences**. Consider the following deadly consequences of the contention that the Holy Spirit directly operates upon the hearts of sinners to convict and convert them:

1. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34–35), and He wills that all should be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). These premises being true, why does not the Holy Spirit directly operate to convict **every** sinner so that all will be converted and be saved? If the Spirit directly leads only a few to conviction and conversion, this surely constitutes “respect of persons” on the part of God. Any doctrine that makes God a respecter of persons cannot be true.
2. If the sinner cannot be convicted and converted apart from an immediate intervention by the Holy Spirit and He does not intervene in my case, why can I not blame God for my unreadiness to face the Lord in Judgment? This very consequence borders on the ungodly Calvinistic doctrine of arbitrary predestination and election. Any doctrine that implies that God is to blame for lost souls cannot be true.

## Epilog

The Jones material (whether in the lectureship book or the oral presentation) did not escape all criticism. On July 18, 2014, Jones wrote the following letter:

FHU Lectureship Committee,

It has come to my attention from David Lipe [lectureship director, DM] that there has been some criticism of my recent lecture on “How Does the Holy Spirit Convict Today?” from the 2014 lectures. I feel that I need to clarify any misunderstandings from my manuscript in the lectureship book and from the presentation.

Upon further reflection, I perhaps should have avoided language like “nudge,” “prod,” or “direct operation.” These are terms that seem to polarize the constituency to whom I was speaking.

I was simply trying to communicate that God is actively involved in our salvation (Philippians 2:13–13) and sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23–34; cf. 1 Pet. 1:5) [sic; he doubtless meant Philippians 2:12–13 and 1 Thess. 5:23–24, DM] .... I am convinced that the Holy Spirit Himself gives us inner spiritual strength (Eph. 3:16) and helps us win victory over temptation

(Rom. 8:9, 13). I do not believe that the Holy Spirit communicates to us today outside of the Word nor does he provide any miraculous abilities....

I regret any unnecessary confusion I may have caused you as a committee....

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Jones II

I could not help thinking how much Jones' "mea culpa" resembles that of a politician who expresses regret for using terms that offended some, all the while continuing to embrace the error behind them. His "apology" almost comes across as "I'm sorry some were offended," rather than "I'm sorry I offended some," thus subtly transferring blame for the offense to the hearer. He apparently does not realize that his critical "constituency" was/is not so much concerned with the words he used, but with the dangerous convictions those words convey – for which he expresses no "mea culpa."

Note that, immediately after he states his conviction that the Spirit "Himself" (i.e., directly) provides inner spiritual strength and helps us overcome temptation, he then denies believing any extra-Word communication or miraculous abilities. I call to brother Jones attention the fact that "communication" is not limited to spoken or written words. If the Spirit immediately provides inner strength and help with temptation, He is most definitely "communicating" with the recipients of such gifts, though they do not constitute "miraculous" activity. Jones' words are almost quotations of some of Mac Deaver's contentions.

One could wish that some statement from the F-HU religion faculty had been forthcoming, distancing the school from the convictions Jones presented. Realistically, however, we should not expect such since members of said faculty invited Jones and his material, apparently knowing and approving of his convictions on the subject they assigned him.

### **Conclusion**

The Jones material is a mishmash of semi-Calvinistic, semi-Arminian, semi-Wesleyan, semi-Pentecostal errors, with some true statements and conclusions here and there, making it all the more dangerous. Although he never referred to him or quoted him, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that brother Mac Deaver has considerably influenced brother Jones. Moreover, one is made to wonder if Deaver has not influenced at least some of the Freed-Hardeman University religion faculty to invite Jones to spew his Deaver-like errors. One must wonder if Mac Deaver will soon receive an invitation to speak on the F-HU lectureship.

## Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated. All quotations of the material by Jonathan Jones and references to statements made in the course of the oral lecture are from one or more of the following sources:
  - a. “Speaking Outline” of the lecture (9 detailed single-spaced pages) downloaded from the Maryville, TN, Church of Christ Website (this material has been removed from said Website).
  - b. The MS of the lecture, which was published in the lectureship book: “How Does the Holy Spirit Convict Today?” *The Patience of Hope: First and Last Things in Thessalonians*, ed. David Lipe (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 2014), pp. 93–98.
  - c. Gary Summers’ notes, made from listening to a recording of the lecture (my thanks to him for graciously supplying them to me).

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