DEAVER’S DOCTRINE, THE WORD, PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

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INTRODUCTION

What do prayer and providence have to do with the direct operation of the Holy Spirit? Absolutely nothing! Yet, there are members of the Lord’s church who insist that in order for God to answer prayers and/or for Him to work providentially, a direct operation of the Holy Spirit is required. In fact, some, such as brother Mac Deaver, go so far as to charge that one is a deist if he denies that, regarding prayer and providence, the Holy Spirit works in a direct manner. That is exactly the position Deaver took in his debate with Lockwood.

Deaver holds that those who believe the Holy Spirit dwells in a person only through the Word and works through the Word—but not in a direct manner, i.e., Spirit-on-spirit—have God in a position where He can do nothing for man today. Seemingly, Deaver has forgotten that God can and has answered prayers without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. He did so with Abram and other Old Testament characters. Were those who prayed to God in Old Testament times deists? Absolutely not! They were men of God who believed that He could and would answer their prayers. Now, as then, man does his part and God does His part. Brother Stephen Wiggins notes:

Thomas B. Warren correctly observes that after we pray to God for our needs we must then do the “very best to obtain our necessities.” He further states, “When we pray for what we need, let us always arise from the prayer with the strong determination to work diligently to obtain those needs.”
A deist believes that God either cannot or will not intervene in the affairs of this world. Deists believe that God created the world, but has nothing to do in its affairs. If this were true, God would not care about the salvation of mankind. However, we know that He does, because He sent His son to die on the cross to make man’s salvation possible. Contradictory to deistic thinking, Jesus said: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). About God’s concerns for man, Peter said: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

Think about it. If God neither had nor has any care about the affairs of this world, why did He provide man with a book that will enable him to go to heaven? About that book, Paul said: “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, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Agreeing with Paul’s statement, Peter explained that God “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3).

No. A direct operation of the Holy Spirit is not required for God to answer our prayers. A direct operation of the Holy Spirit is not required for God to work in providence either. Furthermore, one is not a deist simply because he refuses to accept Deaver’s false premise that there is a direct—Spirit-on-spirit—operation of the Holy Spirit performed to answer the Christian’s prayers.

**GOD CAN ANSWER PRAYER WITHOUT THE AID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

During Old Testament times, was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit necessary in order for God to answer prayers? No! If not, then why would one be compelled to believe that a direct operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order for God to answer prayers in the Christian age? Brother Franklin Camp wrote:

When the proposition is stated that the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word, some ask the question, “What about prayer?” Is the operation apart from the Word essential to prayers being answered? If so, where is the Scripture that teaches this? I know that Romans 8:26 is sometimes used, but this passage does not
prove that the Holy Spirit must operate apart from the Word in order for God to hear and answer prayer. (This passage will be discussed in detail later on. Therefore, I am not entering into a discussion of this passage at this time.)

Those who insist that the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit operating apart from the Word are essential to God's hearing and answering prayers, have a problem that they have not considered. Those who take this position say that the Holy Spirit sustains a relationship to the Christian that He did not have prior to the Christian Age. Their position is that the Christian Age and the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit go together. If the personal indwelling and the operation of the Spirit apart from the Word are necessary for God to answer prayers, then the following difficulty needs to be explained. Did God hear and answer prayer before the Christian Age? If yes, then the personal indwelling and operation of the Spirit apart from the Word are not essential to God's hearing and answering prayers.

In Genesis 18, Abraham prayed and God heard his prayer. God was willing to answer his prayer as long as the conditions could be met. Did Abraham have the personal indwelling as brethren claim that Christians have today? If God could hear the prayer of Abraham without the Spirit operating apart from the Word, or his having the personal indwelling, why can God not do the same today? Other examples of God's hearing and answering prayer in the Patriarchal and Jewish Age could be given, but this is unnecessary. God answered prayer in the Old Testament. The children of God in the Old Testament did not have the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not essential to God's hearing and answering prayer.

If the position that the personal indwelling of the Spirit is essential to God's hearing and answering prayer, then one of two things must follow: 1) The saints of the Old Testament had the personal indwelling (as claimed by some today) just as the Christians do today: 2) God did not hear and answer prayer until the Christian Age. If God heard and answered prayer in the Old Testament without the personal indwelling and the Spirit operating apart from the Word, then the argument that the personal indwelling and the operation of the Spirit apart from the Word does not prove that God cannot answer prayer if the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word today.
Throughout the Old Testament, men prayed to God and He answered their prayers. Moreover, He did so without the Holy Spirit personally dwelling in them and without a direct operation being performed by the Holy Spirit. Elisha prayed that God would raise a child from the dead, and it was done (2 Kgs. 4:32-37). Moses prayed that God would stop punishing the children of Israel with fire and serpents, and God did so when they obeyed Him (Num. 11:1-2; 21:4-9). God answered the prayer of Moses for Aaron whom God was going to destroy because he had made a golden calf (Deut. 9:20). Nehemiah prayed that God would let him rebuild the walls around Jerusalem and God allowed him to do so (Neh. 2:1-8).

The New Testament teaches Christians to pray. Not only that, it teaches the Christian how to pray, the One he is to pray to, what he is to pray for, and those for whom he is to pray. The how to pray was described by the Lord Himself when He taught:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Mt. 6:9-13).

Since the kingdom has come, Christians do not pray “Thy kingdom come.” Furthermore, when Christians pray, they are to pray “in the name of the Lord” (Jn. 14:13; Col. 3:17). In His model prayer, Jesus indicated that Christians should pray that: 1) God’s will be done, 2) God will provide our daily bread, 3) God will forgive us our debts, and 4) God will not lead us into temptation, et cetera.

Another thing Christians should pray for is wisdom. James said: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5). Brother Tom Bright stated:

Some affirm James promised us wisdom which comes directly from God to the saint. The proof text offered is “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5). Now, what is clearly stated here is that God gives wisdom. However, one can comb the verse, extending the search to the context, and he will not find one word that says anything about a “direct” operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man in giving the
desired wisdom. Just as Paul states in Romans 8:14 that as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, so this passage states that God gives wisdom. But just as Romans 8:14 does not state how one is led by the Spirit, so this passage does not state “how” the wisdom is given. It is an assumption to say that it is directly from God.5

What can the Christian know about wisdom and its connection with prayer and the matters at hand? All that anyone can know is what has been revealed on the subject. No place in all the Bible can it be found that wisdom was obtained in any other way than: 1) A miraculous outpouring such as in the case of Solomon. “God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore” (1 Kgs. 4:29), 2) The miraculous spiritual gift, the “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8), and 3) Wisdom given in connection with knowledge. As one studies the words of the wise man, he can see the close connection that exists between wisdom and understanding.

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck (Pro. 3:13-22).

Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Pro. 4:5-7).

Now, where is the passage which states that the Holy Spirit directly gives wisdom to the Christian? It cannot be found because it does not exist. If one receives wisdom directly from the Holy Spirit, as Bright asked: “Is it infallible?” Obviously, if such were the case, the only
correct answer possible would have to be in the affirmative. Providing an example, Bright relates:

For instance, let us say an eldership is confronted with a difficult problem. Each man believes this ‘direct wisdom from God’ doctrine and prays to God for wisdom in handling this delicate situation. All come to the next meeting and all claim that God has given (directly) wisdom, and yet they do not agree—how can they determine which was from God? I know in the first century, there was a way to tell which was right: the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In fact, one of the spiritual gifts listed by Paul was the “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8). It is possible this is what James had under consideration. James certainly had the miraculous under consideration in the last chapter of his writing. He wrote, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15). I do know that wisdom comes from God. But to say it comes “directly” is to say more than the inspired text says. I can show (and have shown) that wisdom comes from an understanding and application of the word of God. What one cannot show is the working of the Holy Spirit directly upon the spirit of man to give him wisdom.6

Deaver believes that the wisdom for which one is to pray (Jas. 1:5) is bestowed directly from the Holy Spirit. However, it is interesting to note that in all twenty-seven books in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is mentioned in all of them—except for three books. One of those three is the book of James. Is that not a curious thing? The very book Deaver wants to use to validate his doctrine that wisdom is given by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit mentions neither the Holy Spirit nor the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

Still, Deaver uses Romans 8:26-27 in an effort to substantiate his doctrine that the Holy Spirit works directly through prayer. Personally, I have problems with his interpretation, and the interpretations given by others, of this passage. It is my conviction that the “spirit” under consideration in this passage is the individual’s “spirit,” not the Holy Spirit. Camp makes formidable arguments to show that the spirit of Romans 8:26-27 is not the Holy Spirit. Although Camp believed that Romans 8:26-27 has reference to an inspired prayer, his arguments help
in understanding that it is the individual’s spirit which is under consideration. Camp commented:

If Romans 8:26 and 27 mean that the Spirit takes the groanings of the Christian and makes them known to God, this is a direct reversal of the general work of the Spirit in revealing the mind of God to man. I can understand why it was necessary for the Spirit to reveal the mind of God to man, but it is a little difficult for me to understand why God needs the Spirit to interpret man's needs to Him. Of course, the fact that I cannot understand something does not mean that it is not so. While on the other hand, if an interpretation can be offered that harmonizes with the general teaching of the Bible and the context in which it is found, it seems to me to be more reasonable to at least consider the interpretation.

There is still another problem with the explanation that these verses teach that the Spirit takes the groanings of the Christian and interprets them to God today. If this is true, then this work of the Spirit is confined to the Christian Age. There is not the slightest indication that the Spirit did this either in the Patriarchal or the Jewish Age. But there were people who had burdens before the Christian Age. There were those who groaned under their burdens before the Christian Age. There were those who prayed under such burdens before the Christian Age. For example, Thayer, on page 587, on the word "groaning," gives Romans 8:26 and Acts 7:34 together. Acts 7:34 is a reference to Israel in Egyptian bondage. They groaned; God heard their groanings. The Holy Spirit did not take their groanings and interpret them to God. If God could hear the groanings of the Israelites while they were in Egyptian bondage, without the Holy Spirit interpreting their prayer to Him, why may not God likewise hear the groanings of Christians today?

Romans 8:26-27 speaks about a spirit which helps our infirmities. Who or what is the spirit in these two verses? I am fully aware of the popular view that the spirit who helps our infirmities is the Holy Spirit. However, it is my understanding that the spirit to which Paul refers is the individual’s spirit. My reasons for this conclusion are:

1. There is nothing in the context of Romans 8:26-27 that demands an interpretation of the "spirit" being the "Holy Spirit."

2. Many of the commentators who hold to the view that it is the Holy Spirit who intercedes on our behalf also hold to the doctrine
of a "personal indwelling" of the Holy Spirit, therefore, they must, in order to be consistent with their doctrine, view the intercessor as the Holy Spirit. (This does not prove anything, but it does give insight as to why they might interpret these verses as they do.)

3. Verse thirty-four explicitly states that it is Christ who "maketh intercession for us." Do both the Holy Spirit and Christ make intercessions for us? Does Christ need the aid of the Holy Spirit to make intercessions for us?

4. Also, the Holy Spirit has already revealed to man how he is to pray. If it is the Holy Spirit who intercedes for man, then it reflects on His ability to reveal how man is to pray.

5. We must keep in mind what Paul has been discussing in the over-all context. The contextual setting is the war between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the spirit. Paul begins verse twenty-six with the word "Likewise." This is an adverb of manner—in the same way. Verses twenty-six and twenty-seven are linked to what Paul had said in the previous verses. That being the case, it is reasonable to conclude that the "spirit" in verse twenty-six is the same "spirit" that was under consideration in the previous verses. There is nothing that demands that we look upon the "spirit" as being the Holy Spirit.

A Christian’s infirmities are those things in which he is weak as they relate to the flesh (cf. Rom. 6:19). Hence, the Christian’s "spirit" helps his infirmities of the flesh. Why is this needful? "[F]or we know not what we should pray for as we ought." A Christian’s “flesh” does not know what to pray for. However, his "spirit" does know what to pray for because his "spirit" has been taught (cf. Mt. 6:5-15). It should be noted that the Christian’s "spirit" was taught to pray by the Holy Spirit—and, this He did through the Word. If the "spirit" in verse twenty-six is the Holy Spirit, then it must be asked: "Was the Holy Spirit unable to teach men, and, if so, can He be all knowing?" Our spirit intercedes on behalf of our flesh. The Bible declares: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11).

The word "intercession" in verse twenty-six means, "to intercede for one." These intercessions are made with "groanings which cannot
be uttered." If this is the Holy Spirit, then He has trouble articulating His words. However, that cannot be true. A Christian’s spirit can and will have trouble articulating words, but the Holy Spirit has no trouble at all. Paul begins Romans 8:27 speaking of the one who searches the heart. The "heart searcher" is Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:23). He knows the mind of the spirit because it is He (Jesus Christ) Who "maketh intercession for the saints." Verse thirty-four agrees perfectly that Christ is the one who maketh intercessions for the saints.

It cannot be shown in the Bible that Christ and the Holy Spirit ever did the same work. Each one does the work given to Him. The One doing the work of interceding on the Christian’s behalf is Jesus Christ.

PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

How does God answer prayers? The Bible shows only two ways in which God answers prayer. They are: 1) 
Directly
, i.e., miraculously, and 2) 
Indirectly
, i.e., providentially. Brother Stephen Wiggins noted:

Within the religious world there are two false extremes when it comes to the question of how God answers prayer. On the one hand there is the deistic philosophy which claims God does absolutely nothing in answer to prayer, either miraculously or non-miraculously. At the other end of the spectrum you have the Pentecostal claim that virtually everything God does in answer to prayer is a miracle.

Does God answer prayer today? Absolutely! How does He answer prayer? We know that the age of miracles has ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-10); therefore, we know that God does not work in miraculous ways to answer prayers today. Again, God answers prayer either 
Directly
 or 
Indirectly
. Since His answering prayers in a 
Direct
 way is miraculous, and since the age of miracles has ceased, then God must answer prayers in an 
Indirect
 manner, i.e., through providence. Wiggins wrote:

The Bible is clear that God answers prayer today. It is just as clear that he does so in an indirect, providential way. God does not answer prayer today with a direct, miraculous intervention. Providence differs from a miracle in that a miracle is an act of God which involves the suspension of natural law. Providence, on the other hand, is God accomplishing an act by employing his natural law. It is God working through and by means of the natural law.

In a miracle God sets aside natural law. In providence God utilizes his natural laws to accomplish his will. The difference
may be seen in the fact that we are to pray for our daily bread. God promises to provide these necessities (Matt. 6:11). One would be amiss, however, to suppose that God provides these daily provisions in some miraculous way today as he provided the Israelites manna directly from heaven (Exod. 16:4ff.). The former is God providing through providence and the latter by miracle. Since the miraculous has ceased, prayers today are answered by God's providential means.

This is not to suggest that God always responds with the answer that we petitioned him for. Nor is it to imply that we are to exert no effort in attaining that for which we uttered supplication. We must both pray and work toward the blessing we wish to attain. In his book, Jesus—the Lamb Who Is a Lion, the late brother Thomas B. Warren correctly observes that after we pray to God for our needs we must then do the "very best to obtain our necessities." He further states, "When we pray for what we need, let us always arise from the prayer with the strong determination to work diligently to obtain those needs."

Brother Roy Lanier, Jr. once told me to wait about ten years or so, and then maybe I can say whether or not something in the past was God's providence. I can have an absolute knowledge that God works through providence in my life and in the affairs of men, but I cannot say that specific things in my life came about because of providence. I can believe they did, but only God knows for certain if they did. For example, one may consider how he met his wife and all the events that happened which led up to their marriage. Looking back in time, recalling their first meeting and their journey through life together, the husband might say: "I believe that God brought us together!" Even so, that husband cannot say that with an absolute certainty because only God knows all the details of that journey.

Brother Wayne Jackson stated:

The ways of divine providence are difficult to fathom. The reason for this is that in providence God is operating "behind the scenes." Unlike a miracle, providence is not a physically demonstrable proposition. We know that our Maker operates providentially only because the Scriptures plainly teach this concept.

Jackson then gave Nehemiah 2:8 as an example—"And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me." Nehemiah saw that God's hand was present in this affair. Reviewing
the Bible’s account of Joseph’s life, one can easily see God’s providential hand unfolding his life. But, understand this. Not even Joseph was aware that the providential hand of God was working in these matters until late in life. Upon the realization that God had been providentially working in his life, Joseph told his brothers: “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 45:8). No one can read what the Bible reveals about Joseph’s life and not see God’s providence at work.

Queen Esther is another Bible example of where God’s providence is evident in a person’s life. Discussing Esther and Divine Providence, Jackson points out:

Two passages in this narrative are of special interest. First, there is Mordecai’s statement to Esther that perhaps she had come to the kingdom “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). This surely hints of providence. Second, there was that night wherein the king could not sleep, and so “accidentally” discovered the unrewarded deed of Mordecai, which was the key to the Jews’ deliverance (6:1). Mark these two verses, and in your [Bible’s] margin enter an indication of the operation of divine providence.”

Old Testament examples, such as Joseph and Esther, prove that God’s providence is not limited only to Christians. As a matter of fact, not only did God reveal that He worked providentially in the lives of godly men, such as Abram, Joseph and others, He revealed that He worked providentially in the lives of ungodly men. Consider Pharaoh and the butler in the story of Joseph.

Does the Holy Spirit’s working through the Word do violence or take away from God’s providence? No! Camp answers the question:

If the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word, then what about providence? Is the personal indwelling and the operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word necessary for the working of providence? If so, where are the passages that teach it? I have read several articles that have made this argument. What were the Scriptures used to prove it? The eighth chapter of Acts is the prime passage appealed to. Does the example of Philip and the eunuch prove the operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word in providence? If this example proves the operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word in providence today, then it also proves the direct intervention of angels in providence. "And the
ANGEL of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26). Does this verse prove the direct intervention of angels in providence today? Who has had an angel to personally appear and arrange a meeting between him and the sinner? If the account of Philip and the eunuch could be used today as an example of the Holy Spirit operating in the realm of providence, its also would prove the direct intervention of angels in providence today.13

God’s providence is seen in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament. Jackson observes:

In the book of Philemon the story is told of a slave named Onesimus. He belonged to Philemon of Colossae. Onesimus ran away from his master and made his way to Rome, where he encountered the apostle Paul. Paul led Onesimus to the truth. Commenting upon this matter, the apostle sees the possibility of providence in this situation. He writes: “For perhaps he was therefore parted from you for a season, that you should have him forever; no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved” (Philm. 15-16).14

We also have the account of Paul in Acts 27. Paul was headed to Rome aboard a ship that ran into catastrophic difficulty, but God’s hand was with him and all the others aboard the ship. Once again, it is evident that God worked providentially in saving Paul so that he could stand before all in Caesar’s house—and numbers of others in Rome—to declare the unreachable riches of God’s grace.

CONCLUSION

If it is the case that God works today in a direct manner, either in response to prayer and/or in providence, then He is working in a miraculous manner. Those, such as Deaver, who advocate this concept must be challenged to demonstrate their doctrine in an indisputable manner. This they will not do because it cannot be done.

On the other hand, if it is the case that God works today through providence, and He does, then it is the case that He does so in an indirect manner. That God has and does work providentially, i.e., in an indirect manner, has been Scripturally, indisputably, and conclusively demonstrated in this chapter.
ENDNOTES

1 All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

2 Mac Deaver and Bill Lockwood, *Deaver-Lockwood Debate* (Austin, TX: Biblical Notes, 1998), 123-125, 183.


5 Tom Bright, paper sent to Johnie Scaggs, part of his lesson from lectureship at the 39th St. Church of Christ in St. Louis MO., 2004.

6 Ibid.

7 Camp, 249, 250.


9 Wiggins.

10 Ibid.


13 Camp, 20, 21.