

**THE LIGHT OF MEN:
A STUDY OF THE NATURE OF DIVINE LIGHT AND THE RESPONSIVENESS OF
UNREGENERATE MAN**

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TH-568 Soteriology

May 11, 2017

Thesis

The author's intent is twofold: (1) to unveil the Scriptural definition, types, purposes, and effects of divine light upon unregenerate humanity, and (2) to unveil the Scriptural detail regarding the nature of unregenerate man's responsive tendencies and capabilities.

Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Survey of beliefs concerning light and unregenerate man's ability
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout spiritual history, God has undertaken the task of gradually revealing fuller spiritual truths to a people group by means of what is traditionally known as the “progressive revelation” of doctrine.¹ Even so, God works in the life of the individual to progressively guide him or her to an embrace of truth via the ministry of illumination. Scripturally speaking, spiritual darkness is indicative of sin, alienation, and ignorance in the understanding concerning the Persons and character of the one true God. Light, on the other hand, describes not only the full-orbed holiness, enlightenment and conviction that one has upon faith, but it also refers to the glimmer of radiated truth that shines from the time of its staunch rejection, up until its full embrace by the adherent. God in His matchless devotion for humanity has provided salvation for those receiving the gift of eternal life in the gospel message; however, it remains a matter of confusion and even contention amongst contemporary evangelical scholars as to how God brings about His salvific plan over the course of one’s entire life, and over the course of humanity in general.

Many contemporary evangelicals would agree that God has revealed Himself to fallen man², but disagreement arises as varying schools of thought are questioned regarding the types

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Soteriology.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 104 no. 416 (Oct 1947): 393, accessed February 24, 2017, www.galaxie.com/search/journal?s

² Areas of agreement would include the Old Testament utterances of the prophets, as recorded in Scripture, and the ultimate revelation in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. Nonetheless, the question of debate here is how God influences man in the process leading up to the embrace of the gospel truths.

of light, the ultimate purpose of the revelation, and fallen man's ability to respond to the revelation in accordance with God's ultimate intent. Moreover, such contemporary circles have strayed from what appears to be a more Scriptural alternative.

In response to the question of why such a study is significant, it would be useful to note that one cannot engage in a meaningful evangelistic encounter without resolving this issue in his or her own heart. The significance of the issue aims at the very heart of the nature of God and that of man. The issue causes one to consider the surgical technique of the Great Physician Himself. Although the study of the types and ultimate effects of divine revelation is largely objective, there is a mystical and subjective element which can be experienced and is personalized to every individual. Keeping all of this in mind, it is the author's intent to analyze the Arminian and Calvinist positions concerning: (1) the nature of mere man, (2) the ways, degrees, and purposes whereby God interacts with fallen humanity and (3) the set of possible responses from the unregenerate when factoring in the light. Once this has been surveyed, it is the author's intent to then build a Scriptural composite which addresses these selfsame issues. Throughout this endeavor, the author will demonstrate that God has so designed man, the natural order, and the course of one's history in such a way that (1) did not leave him unequipped to respond to His light and (2) could not give man an excuse for rejecting Him.

SURVEY OF BELIEFS

ARMINIAN VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN

The Arminian view of the nature of fallen man could best be summed up as a nature that is thoroughly and totally depraved such that any possibility of turning Godward via one's own

initiative is hopeless. Concerning the essence of man’s sinful condition, Jacob Arminius asserts, “In this [fallen] state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace.”³ Such a view wherein a pre-conversion embrace of truths peripheral (and preliminary) to gospel truths can exist apart from regeneration is pervasive in denominations influenced by Arminius’ Articles of Remonstrance (e.g., Wesleyan Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, and some more charismatic/Pentecostal circles).⁴ Prominent Christian philosopher and theologian Dr. William Lane Craig leans more toward an Arminian view on matters concerning anthropology (although Molinist on other matters), and concerning fallen man’s predicament, he asserts, “According to Paul, natural man left to himself does not even seek God: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God.’” Again, he claims, “Left to himself, natural man would never come to God.”⁵

ARMINIAN VIEW OF THE WAYS WHEREBY GOD INTERACTS WITH FALLEN MAN

According to Dr. Craig, God has shed light into the darkened state of man by means of the Holy Spirit in order that the sinner might come to a recognition of the truth. In an explanation of John 16:7-11, he states, “Here the Holy Spirit’s ministry is threefold: he convicts the

³ James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius* (three vols.), trans., James Nichols and William R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 252.

⁴ Stanglin, and McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 190.

⁵ William L. Craig. *Reasonable Faith*. 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway), 2008, 46-47.

unbeliever of his own sin, of God's righteousness, and of his condemnation before God. The unbeliever can therefore be said to know such truths as 'God exists,' 'I am guilty before God,' and so forth."⁶ Thus, not only is the natural creation a means whereby God reveals Himself to darkened and deadened humanity, but He also does so in a very personal and subjective way which involves internal convictions and matters of conscience concerning the righteousness of Christ and the judgment upon those who oppose Him.

ARMINIAN VIEW OF THE POSSIBLE RESPONSES OF FALLEN MAN WHEN FACTORING IN LIGHT

Again, Craig posits that "the fact that we do find people who are seeking God and are ready to believe in Christ is evidence that the Holy Spirit has already been at work, convicting them and drawing them to him."⁷ This work which Craig describes is, for the Arminian, not regeneration since the work is occurring prior to faith. Rather, the work is the *prevenient grace* which is so foundational to the Arminian position. Again, Craig explains, "But anyone who responds to the drawing of God's Spirit with an open mind and an open heart can know with assurance that Christianity is true, *because God's Spirit will convict him that it is.*" (emphasis added)⁸ Thus, it is evident that the unbeliever who is aided by such grace is also capable of receiving the light of the gospel truth, according to the Arminian school of thought.

Similarly, Arminianism would hold that the light can be rejected. Proponents would hold that the will of man is responsible for ignoring and dismissing the drawing of the Spirit upon his

⁶ Ibid, 46.

⁷ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 47.

⁸ Ibid, 47.

heart. According to this view, man's love of darkness rather than light is paramount in the determination of his ultimate condemnation.⁹

REFORMED VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN

The view of the nature of man championed by Augustine and Augustinian Calvinists who follow Reformed tradition is akin to the Arminian view which states that man is totally sinful and alienated from His life. Also in accordance with the Arminian, the Reformed proponent holds that natural man left to himself, is not just unwilling but is unable to initiate progress toward God.¹⁰ Thus, there is nothing that unaided humanity will or can do which could begin to rectify a right relationship with God.

REFORMED VIEW OF THE WAYS WHEREBY GOD INTERACTS WITH FALLEN MAN

With regards to the "conviction" spoken of in John 16:7-11, five-point Calvinist John MacArthur explains it as the "[...] act of convincing."¹¹ He then proceeds to say that the reason for the Spirit's ministry to the unbeliever is not to bring judgment, but rather the "[...] conviction of the need for the Savior." When this pre-conversion persuasion of salvific need is compared to Reformed orthodoxy¹², it does bring about questions as to how one could hold both, total

⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹⁰ David R Anderson. *Free Grace Soteriology* (Grace Theology Press, 2012), 38.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 1617.

¹² That is to say, that which asserts the unregenerate is unable to comprehend divine truths and unctious pertinent to special revelation.

inability and this view of John 16:7-11, without espousing the absurdity that real regeneration begins from the initial moment of Spirit conviction (which could hypothetically precede conversion by many years). Specifically, this Spirit conviction is an act upon the unbeliever's conscience, with regards to the gospel implications of the natural creation, the natures of Christ, His righteousness, and the judgment upon those opposing Him.

REFORMED VIEW OF THE POSSIBLE RESPONSES OF FALLEN MAN WHEN FACTORING IN LIGHT

The Reformed position would posit that even with the divine radiance of pre-conversion (pre-regeneration) illumination and conviction in the unbelieving sinner, such divine activity in the unbeliever is still insufficient, in and of itself, to evoke a response of belief from man.¹³ In other words,¹⁴ as Dr. Anderson states, “[...] any seeking of light on the part of an unregenerate man is impossible since corpses are not capable of any motion at all, let alone movement toward God.”¹⁵ Hence, if man believes the gospel, it is due to the regenerative work of the Spirit whereby faith is born. Moreover, if a man rejects the gospel, one may very well attribute such rejection to the predetermined will of God, given that the unbeliever was not elect. The means whereby one may reject the gospel (i.e., via divine hardening) introduces some interesting anomalies which shall be investigated in greater detail later in the study.

¹³ It begs the question of why God would use the means of conviction in the first place, if they are insufficient to bring about the ultimate end

¹⁴ In other words, rephrase the notion with respect to the human recipient, instead of the effectiveness of the light.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Free Grace*, 38.

SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF MAN

THE DEFAULT STATE OF UNREGENERATE MAN

Ultimately, in order to understand reasons for, and the effects of divine light, it becomes necessary to get some Scriptural understanding as it relates to the human predicament. Months after his murder of Uriah the Hittite and adultery with Bathsheba, David expressed his contrition in Psalm fifty-one. In verse five, he stated that he was “[...] brought forth in iniquity” and that in sin his mother conceived him. Here, we see that from the dawn of his existence, sin was with him. Such sin could not have been due to any commission on his part, because no consciousness of anything could possibly exist in man during his development as a zygote.¹⁶

As one who is born with a law of sin in his members, man is described in Ephesians 2:1 to be “dead in trespasses and sins.” Again, in verse twelve (in reference to the vast majority of mankind, i.e., the nations) men are described as “[...] being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Such is the description of mankind at large, and such could be applied to the constituents of Israel before God intervened. Mere men are described as “having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” in Ephesians 4:18. Here, it is said that a pre-existent and self-inflicted “blindness of their heart” was what caused man to be darkened in thought and alienated

¹⁶ The zygote is human. Note too that the sin referred to here is likely original sin. In Rom 5:12-19, we see that “death spread to all men, because all sinned—”, and the way in which all sinned is most probably speaking of the fact of being sinful due to merely possessing this sin nature. Dr. Anderson expounds on this further on page 88 of *Free Grace Soteriology*

in relation to God. In essence, man's status quo is one of spiritual ignorance, darkness, and despair. His deadened mental and spiritual condition are in stark contrast to the enlightenment or understanding of eternal life (i.e., "the life of God" in verse eighteen). The Lord defined eternal life in John 17:5 as essentially knowledge of the Father and Son. This life is the very illumination of His being.¹⁷

THE AFFINITIES OF UNREGENERATE MAN

As one with a darkened and fogged spiritual lens, man is Scripturally described as riddled with other issues as well. Not only does he have a problem with the perception of spiritual matters, but he has a tendency whereby he is attracted to things which are in contradiction to the things of God. Two very definitive places which demonstrate man's passions and tendencies are John 3:19-20 and Romans 3:11-18. In John 3:19-20, we see that although light has entered the world, man's devotion was for darkness instead of light. This light is the light of knowledge, holiness and intimate communion with God, in John's writings.¹⁸ Man loves his evil deeds and refuses to come to the light, because the very nature of light is that it extinguishes and penetrates darkness. The two are mutually exclusive.

In Romans 3:11-18, Paul describes how man's default state is that of unrighteousness. He pursues sin, and refuses to seek after God. Man naturally turns aside, and his tendency is to disparage and misuse his fellow man for personal gain. He is devoted to a life of deceit,

¹⁷ Ron Kangas, "God's Economy In Light," *Affirmation And Critique: A Journal of Christian Thought*, no. 5 (January 1998): 39, accessed February 24, 2017, http://www.affcrit.com/pdfs/1998/01/98_01_a5.pdf.

¹⁸ A. D. Macrae, "Light In The Johannine Epistles," *Tynbul Bulletin* 10 no. 1 (April 1962): 9, accessed February 24, 2017, www.galaxie.com/search/journal?s.

bitterness and destruction, and a reverence of God is not in his heart since he resists the light. In other words, an aim of Paul's argument in demonstrating all to be under sin's domination is to show the effects of sin in man's behavior. His sin principle causes him to gravitate toward more sin in an endless circuit of despair, apart from the intervention of a loving and convicting God.

THE CAPABILITIES OF MERE UNREGENERATE MAN

A Scriptural survey of the spiritual abilities of the unregenerate man reveals that he is unable, of his own accord, to understand things of the Spirit of God. Unregenerate man left to himself (i.e., unprompted) is not willing to proactively initiate steps toward the acceptance of spiritual truths, nor is he able, of his own power, to make efforts toward turning to His Creator. 1 Corinthians 2:14 explains that the soulish (or "soulical") person does not accept spiritually discerned truths, nor is he able to. In John 6:44, the Lord explains that mere unaided humanity is unable to come to Him. Furthermore, man's wretchedness and desperate predicament are explained in places like Romans 8:7-8 which states that those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE OF LIGHT

THE DEFINITION OF DIVINE LIGHT

Perhaps the most fundamental definition of spiritual light in Scripture is found in 1 John 1:5. Here, John states that the Lord's message could be summed up by the notion that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. That is to say, there are no hidden evil agendas in the Lord's

mind, regardless of the acts of divine judgment or the rampant evil in the world.¹⁹ Verse six goes on to explain that if we say that we have fellowship with God and yet continue to walk in darkness, we are liars and do not practice the truth. Thus, one can understand that God is light in that He is absolutely holy and without sin.²⁰

Spiritual light is also depicted in Scripture as spiritual knowledge or enlightenment. In Psalm 36:9, it is recorded, “For with You is the fountain of life; In your light we see light.” In other words, the spiritual enlightenment that belongs to, and is the Lord, is the means whereby we are equipped to perceive more and more spiritual truth. Thus, we see in Psalm 119:105, the spiritual knowledge found in the word of God serves as a guide which illuminates one’s understanding regarding the spiritual path or way one is taking. Likewise, in Psalm 119:130, it is said, “The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” In other words, the knowledge or spiritual light found in the Scripture brings about understanding or spiritual comprehension in those lacking it.

Moreover, in Job 12:25, he who gropes in the dark without light does not have knowledge as to what he is doing. Here, light brings the wherewithal by which one can navigate. Isaiah 50:10 portrays both meanings of spiritual light, namely, the light of holiness, and the light of spiritual knowledge. In the verse, the addressee possesses the light of spiritual holiness in that the addressee is whomever obeys Yahweh; however, it is asked of such an addressee, “Who walks in darkness and has no light?” Such a one is a holy person who still lacks degrees of

¹⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Multnomah Publishers), 2003, 347.

²⁰ Ron, Kangas, "Our Need: Life and Light," *Affirmation And Critique: A Journal of Christian Thought*, no. 3 (February 2003): 96, accessed February 24, 2017, http://www.affcrit.com/pdfs/2003/02/03_02_cr.pdf.

spiritual understanding. Finally, 2 Cor 4:6 says, “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Note the nature of the light—it is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God[...].” Truly, knowledge of His glory is spiritual light.

THE PURPOSES OF DIVINE LIGHT

The purpose of divine light is not too far removed from the very definition of the light itself. In that God is light and the source of spiritual illumination, one cannot expect a satisfactory answer as to the reason or intention for God being light. He just is. On the contrary, one may validly ask the purpose for which He serves as the source of spiritual illumination, (i.e., why this knowledge of Him is given). Once again, the reason is intertwined with the effects that spiritual illumination produces. God illumines in order that people may know Him, and as a result, have fellowship with Him. John 8:11—13 speaks of how He is the light of the world, and that the one who follows Him is no longer in darkness, but possesses the light (purity and understanding) of the life that is in Him. The light of holiness and spiritual knowledge pierces the darkness of sin and spiritual ignorance. The intention for the dispensation of spiritual light appears to be that spiritually captive individuals may possess a full-orbed composite of His character and understanding. This extent (i.e., the initial, indiscriminate availability of the light to humanity) to which God emits this light is indicative of the degree of love He has for every individual, and thereby of his heart and purpose for humanity.

THE TYPES OF LIGHT

The means whereby God illumines would be the focus of what is meant by “types of light.” Romans 1:18-21 reads as follows:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although the audience in question may not be limited to the unbelieving world, the fact is that God’s wrath is presently being revealed against those who suppress the inescapable and arresting truth to which the physical creation testifies. This truth is that there is a Creator who has unfathomable attributes and eternal power attributed to His Deity. One interesting note in this passage is the phrase in verse nineteen which says “because what may be known of God is manifest in them [...]” which suggests that more may be known of God via creation, other than the mere fact that someone created the universe. Note also that this kind of illumination is an indiscriminate illumination given to all men such that all are without excuse. For those who do embrace this “Creator” light but nothing more, it would seem rather shallow and unfulfilling for God’s will to have only been for the true light that emits from and points to His true being and character to have been received by them in only a partial, pre-mature way. Furthermore, the onus does appear to be on the human being in that God has done everything on His side outside of violating His own character to supply them with sufficient evidence and opportunities to reckon His existence. Hence, mankind truly is without excuse.

Another type of light whereby the Lord brings about an understanding of Himself is through conscience. Consequent to the very thing against which God commanded man (i.e., eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil) lay the redemptive and salvific faculty of conscience. In other words, God commanded Adam and Eve to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the consequence of eating of the tree was not exactly as Satan had described it (i.e., to not include death, but to be like God), for man truly did die. Moreover, he was less like God than he had ever been. Even so, God ensured that if man did sin against Him by eating of the tree, there would be a gracious provision—conscience—which would guarantee man had some spiritual wherewithal to reckon his shortcomings in light of the righteous standards of God. In essence, man would possess an innate awareness of a realm of objective moral values and duties. Not only would man naturally have an awareness of some independent, objective realm of true right and wrong, but he would have a natural capacity to begin to know in specifics which actions lay in the “right” category, and which ones lay in the “wrong” or “evil” category. In essence, man would have written on his heart a moral law which originated from, and reflected back the character of its author to some degree. This kind of instinctual moral knowledge which man possesses is illustrated in Romans 2:14-15.

Note, this is not to say that the divine provision of the conscience is infallible, absolute, and unaffected by external influences. On the contrary, it is the case that an unbeliever’s properly trained conscience can be stimulated by the commission or realization of objective wrong, so as to produce a guilt or conviction that leads one to adhere to some moral standard or to some means to eradicate one’s moral standing.²¹ The use of the conscience to lead one to adhere to

²¹ Marvin Halverson, ed. *Handbook of Christian Theology*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 63.

some alternative moral standard would, for example, be exemplified in a case of guilt for stealing, coupled with a resolve to make amends and to change one's moral standards. The stimulation of conscience may also lead one to seek a means that corrects his or her ultimate moral standing, such as in John 16:8-9.²²

In addition to the more general light of natural creation and that of conscience is the light of prevenient grace. Such light of prevenient grace might be best understood as any thought, action, or circumstance in the life of the unregenerate individual which brings deeper understanding or appreciation about the nature of God. Such a compulsion drives one toward an openness to, and a careful contemplation or desire of His being. Note, contrary to the Reformed idea that God in His sovereignty brings about His salvific will by overriding the defective and unresponsive will of man via regenerating them first, this concept of prevenient grace may very well present a greater sovereignty of God whereby God does not directly override the disabled unregenerate will via rebirth. In other words, God need not micromanage the universe in a controlled way in order to make sure His will is accomplished. Rather, He uses indirect and even opposing means (e.g., other people, tragic events, and other obstinate wills etc.), to influence an individual's disposition toward a receptivity of more light.

²² Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books), 1989, 41.

SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN LIGHT AND MAN

THE CAPABILITIES OF UNREGENERATE MAN—REVISITED

It has already been established by the author that man in and of himself is neither willing nor able to initiate a relationship with God, apart from some degree of divine intervention; however, this divine intervention need not be something so extreme and transformative as regeneration either. Scripture suggests that unregenerate man is capable of receiving and responding to increasing degrees of light manifested through the divine means of conviction, wooing, and drawing. Although only one clear example of man's responsiveness is sufficient to illustrate the point, a few examples shall be analyzed for the sake of argument.

Many theologians dismiss Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts seventeen as a great debacle and futile effort of philosophical reasoning on Paul's part. In doing so, theologians can dismiss everything Paul says in the passage as irrelevant or doctrinally suspect. The truth of the matter is that Paul makes quite a few Scripturally orthodox claims in the passage. Although the propriety of Paul's ascription of true Deity and actual worship to the "Unknown God" is debatable, Paul does attribute the qualities of absolute Creatorship and Sovereignty to Him. Although Paul did not explicitly call God "the only true God", perhaps the attribution to Him of the qualities "Lord of heaven and earth" and the proper mode of worshipping Him (i.e., not via temples or handmade things) in verse twenty-four designate this Lord as much different and greater than the greatest of the Greek gods. Even so, in verses twenty-nine through thirty, Paul does urge men everywhere to repent concerning their failure to acknowledge the Nature of true Deity. This too entails that fallen man is capable of recognizing the nature of true Deity and that he is able to resolve within himself to be open to the truth regarding God.

By a similar token, in verse twenty-six, Paul is correct to say that God did make all peoples from one blood. He goes on further to say that He “has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him[...].” Paul proceeds by mentioning some verbiage from some secular poets which bolster his conclusion. In the aforementioned quote is clear evidence as to the rationale behind why God has placed each individual into each one’s respective geographical and chronological setting—so that men should seek Him. In the seeking lay the remote possibility that, through the conviction of the Spirit, men would actually find Him in their groping.

Another instance of one who responded positively to divine light was Cornelius. The Scripture is quite clear that Cornelius was not everlastingly saved prior to Peter’s encounter because in Acts 11:12-14, Peter recounted how the Spirit said to Cornelius, “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.” Note, this salvation is spoken of in an immediate context wherein Peter quoted the Lord who said, “What God has cleansed you must not call common[,]” thereby showing that the issue with the Gentiles dealt with spiritual cleansing. Not only did Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit and get water baptized in Acts chapter ten, but when Peter reported the events to the circumcision in chapter eleven, the matter was concluded in verse eighteen where it says “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’” This “repentance to life” indicates that they had no life, and were thereby in a state of spiritual death, prior to this repentance.

Thus, the accolades attributed to Cornelius in Acts 10:2 which describe him as “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” were all indicative of his rapport before the Lord while still unsaved. This indicates that Cornelius had acquired and responded to a substantial amount of spiritual light concerning the God of Israel and the Messianic focus of John’s ministry.

The messenger who appeared to Cornelius told him that God did in fact hear his prayers. Cornelius’ steadfast response to the prompting and drawing of the Spirit culminated in his responding to the message which, if received in faith, would grant him eternal life. Cornelius was faithful to respond to the spiritual light and to seek more light until the morning light of the gospel truth dawned upon his heart. He became a living testimony to the hearer of the “good ground” in the parable of the sower. The Lord said in Luke 8:15, “But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart [...]” Furthermore, John 3:20-21 says (emphasis added), “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But *he who does the truth* comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that *they have been done in God.*” The heart of such an unregenerate individual was divinely prepared for the moment wherein he or she actually comes to the light in saving faith.²³

Moreover, in John 5:24 it is recorded that the one who *hears His word* and believes in Him who sent the Son has everlasting life and will not come into judgment, but has been translated from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. In the very next verse, the Son said that the hour had already come wherein the dead (i.e., spiritually dead) *will hear His voice*,

²³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press), 1996, 497.

and that those hearing will live. The logical conclusion to these verses is that the spiritually dead (i.e., the unsaved) can in fact hear the voice of the Son of God, and live through the hearing. Note, this “hearing” is not a mere, passive physical hearing, or else everyone that ever audibly heard the gospel message would be saved. Rather, this hearing is a deep spiritual heed to the truth claims of Christ in the gospel message. Hence, the spiritually dead individual can, by the Spirit’s pre-regenerate illumination, begin to consider and ultimately receive the things about the Son, and thereby enter into the realization of the truth claims of the Son of God.²⁴

LIGHT’S RECEPTION OR REJECTION, AND THE CONSEQUENCES THEREOF

John 1:9 says that “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” This could also be rendered, “That was the true Light which, coming into the world, gives light to every man.” Whichever way one decides to translate it, the meaning does not really change. In either case, “every man” receives light from the true Light who in fact did come into the world two-thousand years ago. Whomever receives some degree of spiritual illumination, more will be given, and if fallen man suppresses the light of the truth from illuminating his own mind, less will be given him. This notion is echoed in the Lord’s explanation as to why He spoke in parables. In Matthew 13:12, it reads (clarity added) “For whoever has [understanding], to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have [illumination, due to rejecting it], even what he has will be taken away from him.” Although every man is indiscriminately given divine light from birth, the degree of light one continues to get is determined by what he or she does with the light currently had. It has even been suggested by Dr.

²⁴ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan, 1989), 60.

Anderson and other likeminded individuals that Christ spoke in parables as an act of mercy to those who suppressed the truth in order that they would be less accountable at the future judgment for not receiving the truth contained in any of His parabolic utterances.²⁵

LIGHT, HUMAN RESPONSIVENESS, AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD

If the doctrine is correct which teaches that the unregenerate cannot respond to a spiritual truth of special revelation in any circumstance, then why did God hide spiritual truth from the religious elite and the multitudes, in the form of parables? Well first, in Matthew thirteen, Jesus describes the spiritual state of the majority of hearers by referencing the fulfillment of Isaiah in Matthew 13:15 which states:

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.

Notice that the text says “[...] And their eyes *they have closed* [...]” which suggests the onus for their disbelief is upon them. Furthermore, their responsibility is further established when the text says “Lest they should [...]” which is to say, lest they should be open to the light and perceive God in the situation. As a result, in verse fifteen, they could then “[...] turn [...]” so as to be spiritually healed. The Lord recognized that had the people not resisted the drawing of the Spirit,

²⁵ Anderson, *Free Grace*, 284.

they really could have had opened eyes, hearing ears, and penitent hearts so as to be saved; however, since they continued in their hardheartedness, He withdrew His illumination via speaking in parables.²⁶ Perhaps this was due to the fact that they would never believe anyway in any circumstance (due to their decision), or perhaps it was due to the fact that the people would actually believe if given a great length time or some other set of environmental conditions which were beyond the scope of what He would deem permissible or feasible. It should be noted that Christ's parabolic ministry started on the heels of the people's unforgivable sin of the blasphemy of the Spirit.²⁷ So even if it were hypothetically possible for the people to still respond to the Spirit's light (had He chosen to convict and draw them post-blasphemy), the just divine protocol was to obscure the truth to the people²⁸ from this point onward, given the severity of the unforgivable sin.

CONCLUSION

The evidences supplied throughout this study have been given to discredit the Reformed idea that man as a "spiritual corpse" can, in no circumstance, respond to spiritual truth found in special revelation, at a point prior to regeneration. The more Scripturally balanced view tends to take into account the devotion of God to His creation in that He draws all to Himself since the Son has been lifted up (Jn 12:32). Moreover, the more orthodox view does not overlook the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world of the unsaved.²⁹ The Spirit was given to

²⁶ A. Webster, *Studies in the New Testament* (Baltimore: Friedenwald, 1879), 186.

²⁷ Anderson, *Free Grace*, 283.

²⁸ (i.e., people who possibly could have had a change of heart had God not removed His light post-blasphemy)

²⁹ W. Madison Grace, II, "Through The Holy Spirit: His Work In Salvation," *Journal for Baptist Theology And Ministry* 06 no. 1 (Spring 2009): 85, accessed February 24, 2017, www.galaxie.com/search/journal?s.

reprove the world of its unbelief for rejecting Christ. Although it is true that man, in and of himself, can never initiate a relationship with God, it is not true that man cannot respond to varying degrees of light designed to make his heart fertile for receiving the seed of the gospel message in due time.

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