

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion

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Robert A. Pyne

[Robert A. Pyne is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology,
Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.]

The process of conversion is a familiar battleground in soteriology, particularly when theologians describe the nature of human ability and the necessity of divine initiative. Is mankind able to choose salvation apart from divine intervention? Does God extend the same gracious initiative to all persons? If not, what does He do differently with regard to the elect? Different positions relative to these issues have a profound effect on methods of evangelism and understanding the grace of God. Also the fact that differences over such issues divide the body of Christ serves as a constant challenge to consider the questions afresh in the hope that some measure of agreement might be attained.

The Need for the Spirit's Work

One of the fundamental issues relative to conversion is the nature of human ability. To what extent are unregenerate individuals capable of apprehending the gospel? Are they able to understand it and respond to it affirmatively, or must God specifically enable them to do so?

According to Romans 1:18–21, unbelievers are capable of comprehending the truth of God's existence. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world

His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

By the common grace of natural revelation, unbelievers are said to be aware of the truth of God's existence. This forms the basis for what Paul regarded as their just condemnation. They are without excuse because they have been exposed to the truth. What they should have comprehended they have instead suppressed. Cranfield summarizes this point appropriately.

A real self-disclosure of God has indeed taken place and is always occurring, and men ought to have recognized, but in fact have not recognized, Him. They have been constantly surrounded on all sides by, and have possessed within their own selves, the evidences of God's eternal power and divinity, but they have not allowed themselves to be led by them to a recognition of Him.

When considering the more specific revelation of the gospel, it is obvious from experience that unbelievers are capable of articulating the terms of the gospel without embracing it. As with their rejection of natural revelation in Romans 1, the problem is not one of comprehension, but of acceptance. The truth is evident, but it is wrongly thought to be foolishness.

According to 1 Corinthians 2:14, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." The first part of this verse is similar to Romans 1:18–21 in that the unbeliever is said to reject the things revealed by the Spirit. In the second part of the verse, however, Paul wrote that the "natural man" is "not able to know" () these things. This seems considerably stronger. Is this simply a consequence of the rejection mentioned in the first part of the verse? Howe implies that this is the case when he writes that this verse "shows that an unsaved person's refusal to obey the truth is based on rejection of the Christian position, at least to some degree, and not on incapacity to perceive it." On the contrary, it seems that one's rejection of "the things of the Spirit of God" is because of inability to "know" them. The first part of the verse is explained by the second, which is introduced by an explanatory ("for").

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The unsaved person does not accept God's truth because it seems foolish to him and he is not able to "know" it.

What does "know" mean here? Is it simple comprehension? In 1 Corinthians 2:8 this knowledge seems to be a genuine understanding that has come about through accurate evaluation. The Jews understood what Jesus was saying, but they judged Him incorrectly, regarding Him to be a heretic who claimed to be God (John 10:33). Paul wrote that if they had judged Him rightly, the rulers of this world would not have crucified Him, because they would have understood that He was "the Lord of glory."

This association between "knowing" and "judging rightly" is clarified by the verb used in the second part of 1 Corinthians 2:14, which states that the things of the Spirit are spiritually "discerned." The word translated "discern" () is used in 4:3–4 in the sense of "investigation" or "examination." Only the ministry of the Spirit can enable an individual to think rightly about Christ and the teaching of the apostles (probably centered on the extension of the promise to the Gentiles,

Eph 3). The irony of this passage is that those who are perishing (unbelievers) falsely regard these things to be foolishness (1 Cor 1:18) in spite of the fact that they are looking for wisdom (v. 22).

Does this mean that unbelievers can never comprehend the terms of the gospel or accurately interpret Scripture unless they are converted? That does not seem to be the case. Instead, they seem to be unable to evaluate it or judge its accuracy properly, and in that sense they are unable to understand it. An unbeliever may be brought to a clear understanding of the terms of the gospel and yet disregard it as foolish.

This interpretation suggests that unbelievers will not come to actual faith in Christ apart from the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Only by the Holy Spirit is the wisdom of God properly evaluated and apprehended, for it must be “spiritually appraised.”

Several conclusions about the ability of the unregenerate person can be drawn from Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 2. First, he is able to comprehend divine revelation. That is, he is able to understand what is being said. On the other hand he is not able to evaluate that revelation properly so as to regard it as accurate and personally relevant. To the mind controlled by sin, God’s truth seems foolish. The rejection that follows from this improper assessment of God’s Word causes further hardness of heart and further ignorance in a cycle of futility (Eph 4:18–19) that can be interrupted only by the Holy Spirit.

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The Ministry of Reproof

In John 16:8–11 Jesus described one aspect of the Spirit’s evangelistic work. As part of the Upper Room Discourse, in which the Lord comforted the disciples and gave them instructions before His death, He told them they should be encouraged, for it was to their benefit that He was leaving. The reason this is true is that His departure would result in the coming of the Holy Spirit (14:16–17 ; 16:7), who would comfort them, teach them, and help them in their evangelistic mission through His ministry of reproof.

John 16:8–11 poses several problems for the interpreter, particularly concerning the nature and purpose of the Spirit’s work. The central verb is _____, and its meaning is important in seeking to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing.

The Meaning of

In the Septuagint _____ is used in three ways. First, it describes an act of reproof regarding some wrong committed. In Genesis 21:25 the verb is used of Abraham’s complaint to Abimelech, and in 2 Samuel 7:14 it describes the

discipline of the Lord for Solomon's sin (cf. Lev 19:7; Job 5:17). This is the sense in which the word is used in the Book of Proverbs to speak of godly reproof, which is welcomed by the wise but disregarded by the fool (Prov 3:11–12; 9:7–8 ; 15:12 ; 19:25 ; 28:23 ; 30:6).

Second, *καταγγέλλω* is used to describe an act of judging, either between persons (as in Gen 31:37) or against an individual or nation (as in Gen 31:42; cf. 1 Chron 12:17; 2 Chron 26:20; Isa 11:3–4; Amos 5:10; Mic 4:3; Hab 1:12). Third, the word is used in 1 Chronicles 16:21–22 to describe reproof in the sense of a warning or command regarding a wrong not yet committed.

So the verb *καταγγέλλω* in the Old Testament means “to reprove,” “to bring a charge against,” or “to judge.” These classifications accord fairly well with the classical definitions given by Liddell and Scott: (1) to disgrace, put to shame, (2) to question, for the purpose of disproving or reproof, and (3) to accuse, censure. Since the party receiving the judgment or reproof, though always present, does not always welcome it, the idea of “convince” or “persuade” is hardly appropriate here.

Moulton and Milligan give several illustrations of the use of *καταγγέλλω* in the papyri of the New Testament era. They translate

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the word with “make an inquiry” in one example and “give evidence” or “supply proof” in two more. Two other examples are more legal in nature, in which the term means “charge,” “convict,” or “prosecute,” depending on the context. Some continuity may be observed between these illustrations and the Old Testament usage as described earlier. Most notably, the idea of “bring a charge against” or “judge” is certainly present. The idea of “giving evidence” or “supplying proof,” however, seems to be a new development.

For the most part, the use of *καταγγέλλω* in the New Testament is similar to its use in the Old. The most common meaning is “to correct or reprove,” pointing out sin and error with the idea of bringing about repentance. The verb is used in Matthew 18:15 to describe the correction of a sinning believer, and in Luke 3:19 it refers to John the Baptist's reproof of Herod's adultery (cf. 1 Cor 14:24–25; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15 ; Heb 12:5; Jude 22 [variant]; Rev 3:19). In addition, Jude 15 uses *καταγγέλλω* in the sense of the judgment of persons, a condition that may be either corrective or final.

James 2:9 fits either in this category or in one of two separate categories—legal trial and conviction, or “exposure.” Here the passive form of the verb is used to describe what happens to a person through the Law when he shows partiality, and that could mean either “reprove,” “convict,” or “expose.”

The idea of exposure is seen more clearly in Ephesians 5:11, 13, where the deeds of the individual are in view, and Paul told believers to “expose” these unfruitful acts rather than participate in them. He repeats the term in the example of light making unseen things visible.

Outside of John’s writings, then, the New Testament authors used most often to speak of reproof that is intended to bring about repentance, and in one or two places to speak of exposing evil. The meanings found in the papyri of “giving evidence” or “making an inquiry” are not found here, and the Old Testament idea of judgment may occur in one text, but it is in any case much less common. In these examples one still does not find the idea of “convincing” or “persuading,” unless that idea is implied by reproof that seeks to bring about a change of heart. “Reprove” seems to be the best general translation in that it encompasses the

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ideas of discipline, judgment, and exposure.

John used *καταγγέλλω* in much the same way as the other New Testament writers. John 3:30 refers to God’s light exposing sin in the same metaphorical terms used in Ephesians 5. In John 8:46 Jesus asked, “Who among you convicts Me concerning sin (*τις μὲν καταγγέλλει με ἐν τῷ ἁμαρτωλίῳ*)?” This question uses the same words found in 16:8 (*ὁ πνεῦμα καταγγέλλει τὸν κόσμον ὅτι ἁμαρτωλὸς ἐστίν*). Though the idea of conviction may seem appropriate, Jesus’ question may just as easily be using *καταγγέλλω* in the customary sense of “reprove.” No one is able to correct Him for any sin, for He has done nothing wrong, but speaks the truth.

In John 16:8 the Holy Spirit is involved in pointing out sin in order to bring about repentance. The legal idea suggested by some seems to have been derived from the use of the term in extrabiblical literature, whereas the biblical writers used *καταγγέλλω* primarily to describe correction, not prosecution or conviction.

If the term denotes reproof here, then the meaning of the term has implications with regard to the extent of the Spirit’s ministry as well. As in Proverbs, such reproof is not irresistible; it is welcomed by the wise man but resisted by the fool.

The Objects of the Spirit’s Reproof

Arguing that the world cannot receive the Paraclete (14:17), Brown maintains that the Spirit does not direct this ministry toward the world at all, but proves to the disciples that the world is guilty. However, this idea demands that *καταγγέλλω* means “to prove wrong about” or “to convict,” and this seems unlikely in light of the observations already made. The individual being reproved is usually present, and has freedom to accept or reject the reproof.

Further, as Carson points out, by the promise of the Paraclete, the Lord was assuring the disciples that they would not be alone, particularly in their witness to the world. In this context it seems more than appropriate to describe the nature of the Spirit's ministry to the world. To say that the Holy Spirit has no ministry to the world (while Jesus does) seems odd.

John's use of the word μ reinforces the idea that the

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Spirit's ministry of reproof is an expression of common grace. First, μ can have reference to the physical world, as in John 1:9–10 and 13:1. Second, it can denote those who live in that world, as in 1:10, 29; 3:16–19; and 4:42. In this category, μ often refers to those who are opposed to Jesus, distinct from the disciples (7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:17, 19, 22, 27; 15:18–19; 16:20; 17:6, 9, 14, 16). (However, it should also be noted that the term is not necessarily limited to those who will not believe; 6:33; 12:19.)

In John 17, Jesus affirmed that He came into the world and that God the Father gave the disciples out of the world. As Jesus was leaving the world, He was sending them into it. The world hated Him because He was not of the world, and it hates His disciples because they are not of the world. His aim is that the disciples may be one so that the world may believe that the Father sent Him. It would not be inaccurate to say that the world here is the mission field; the disciples have come out of it, and they are witnessing to it. Far from being written off, the world is the aim of evangelism. As Guhrt writes, "Especially in Paul and John, [μ] designates the place and object of God's saving activity."

As the Light of the world, Jesus exposed the deeds of those in the world. Some responded positively (12:46) and others preferred the darkness (3:19). As with His teaching, this ministry continued only while Jesus was in the world (9:5). When He returned to the Father, the Spirit assumed many of these works in His place (14:16, 25–26; 16:12–15). He continues to expose the deeds of the world. Those who remain in the world, who prefer the darkness to light, reject the message of Jesus and the light given by the disciples and the Spirit.

The Spirit's ministry of reproof comes to every individual; all are charged with sin. Like the reproof spoken of in Proverbs, it is welcomed by the wise man and rejected by the fool.

The Focus of the Spirit's Reproof

The most difficult issue in the interpretation of John 16:8–11 relates to the function of the μ clauses. Do they provide the reason for the Spirit's reproof in the areas of sin, righteousness, and judgment, or do they function in some other

way? For example Arndt and Gingrich classify the use here as “concerning [something], that.” Similarly, Brown says that “the main

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emphasis seems to be explicative rather than causative,” and translates “in that.”

Carson has discussed this issue at length, reviewing the options suggested and attempting to fit the pieces together with consistency by maintaining the parallelism of the three clauses. He describes the problem in the following way:

It is easy enough to find a believable interpretation of each case, one that is consistent with Johannine thought, if we forfeit the attempt to insure that such an interpretation will blend harmoniously with the interpretation of the other clauses. We might, for example, find it easy to believe that the Paraclete convicts the world of its sin. Yet we must hesitate before submitting this interpretation because exactly the same structure in the next pair of lines yields the interpretation that the Paraclete convicts the world of its righteousness; and that does not on the face of it appear too coherent. Perhaps these lines mean rather that the Paraclete will convict the world in the realm of the righteousness of Christ. But in that case, we introduce discontinuity: we speak of the world’s sin, but of Christ’s righteousness. We do this despite the fact that there is no formal mention of “world’s” or “Christ’s,” while there is formal identity of structure.

Carson’s own explanation for this problem is that Jesus was speaking of the world’s sin, the world’s pseudo-righteousness, and the world’s wrong judgment concerning Him. Since his explanation does justice to the parallel phrases of verses 9–11, it seems helpful. However, a difficulty arises in the fact that verse 11 does not seem to describe the world’s wrong judgment of Christ.

In John 7:24 and 8:15–16, Jesus spoke of the world’s false judgment, suggesting the possibility that the judgment in 16:11 should be taken in this way. However, in 12:31 Jesus said, “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out.” In this passage, Jesus certainly was speaking of God’s judgment on the world. If this is the case, then it is likely that the same meaning applies in 16:11, for both passages relate the judgment to the condemnation of the “ruler of the world.” The world is judged, beginning with its leader.

If this is correct, the judgment spoken of in 16:11 is God’s

judgment of the world, not the world's perception of reality. Therefore it seems that a strict parallelism in the three clauses (the major presupposition behind Carson's argument) is not necessary.

"Sin" can be understood as the world's sin, about which individuals are reproved because they do not believe in Christ (suggesting unbelief as the essence of sin). Righteousness can be understood as the objective standard of righteousness, concerning which the Spirit reproves the world because Christ is no longer there to do so by word and example. Judgment can be seen as the judgment that the world will soon receive, the imminence of which has been demonstrated by Satan's judgment at the cross.

The Holy Spirit brings correction () to the world, and does so by revealing sin, directing the way to righteousness, and warning of impending judgment. It is as if He says, "You should not sin, but should pursue righteousness in the face of judgment." All three are aspects of His ministry of correction and reproof.

Summary

According to John 16:8–11, the Holy Spirit shows unbelievers their need for the gospel. The passage does not distinguish between the elect and the nonelect in this aspect of the Spirit's ministry, which is directed toward the entire world.

As an expression of common grace, the Spirit's reproof works alongside the "general" or "external" call of the gospel (Matt 22:14). Does this constitute a universal remedy for the problem described in 1 Corinthians 2:14? Is it possible through this ministry of the Spirit for all persons to evaluate the gospel message properly and accept it?

If the Spirit's reproof and the universal preaching of the gospel were sufficient to enable unbelievers to accept Paul's message, the argument of 1 Corinthians 2:14 would be invalidated. Paul's point is that those who regard the gospel as foolishness lack the spiritual insight required to see its legitimacy. If they are to come to faith, they are in need of something more.

The Ministry of Effectual Calling

In Romans 8:30 Paul referred to the divine work of "calling": "Whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

The Objects of the Call

Examining this passage from an Arminian perspective, Guy writes,

So, in the Pauline language here, “foreknow” means that in every instance “God loves man before man loves God.” “Predestine” means that God takes the initiative to remedy the human predicament. “Call” means that God, through the proclamation of the gospel, invites human beings collectively and individually to participate in the actualization of the divine intention for them. “Justify” means that God acts to restore the proper relationship between humanity and deity. “Glorify” means that in the process of salvation God transforms human existence in a way that becomes increasingly evident and is ultimately completed.

By describing these actions in such broad terms, Guy neglects the fact that the individuals involved do more than *potentially* benefit from this divine activity. They *actually* benefit from it. Several observations demonstrate that this work of God is directed toward the elect only. First, the “calling” is clearly limited to those who are “predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (v. 29). Since only those who are predestined for salvation are called, and all those who are called are justified and ultimately glorified, it seems obvious that the apostle refers only to the elect.

The idea of God’s calling being limited to the elect is consistent with the use of the terms “call,” “calling,” or “called” elsewhere by Paul. He regularly referred to believers as those who are “called” (Rom 1:6; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:17–24; Gal 1:6; Eph 4:1; 1 Thess 2:12; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9), highlighting the divine role of summoning individuals to salvation and sanctification.

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The Nature of the Call

The idea of a “call” in the sense of an invitation is common. The host is the one calling, and the guests are those who are called. When God issues an invitation to salvation, it is in one sense extended to all persons. This is an “external” or “general” calling, which Berkhof describes in the context of gospel preaching.

External calling...comes to all men to whom the gospel is preached, indiscriminately. It is not confined to any age or nation or class of men. It comes to both the just and the unjust, the elect and the reprobate.... That the gospel invitation is not limited to the elect, as some hold, is quite evident from such passages as Ps 81:11–13; Prov 1:24–26; Ezek 3:19; Matt 22:2–8, 14; Luke 14:16–24.

Romans 8, however, is describing a narrower form of divine invitation. As already noted, this invitation is extended only to the elect, to those who have already been predestined to salvation in Christ. If this call is limited to the elect it cannot be rejected. Erickson writes appropriately, “The calling must be efficacious—those who are called are actually saved.” This work of God can be referred to as “irresistible grace” in that it is never refused, or “efficacious grace” in that it is always successful in accomplishing its purpose. “By here is meant not just ‘call’ but ‘call effectually.’” In the same way, Dunn comments, “The thought is not of an invitation which might be rejected; God does not leave his purpose to chance but puts it into effect himself.”

In “calling” the elect, God actually brings them to conversion. In doing so, He summons individuals to fulfill the holy purpose He has ordained for them.

Just as predestination points toward the ultimate conformity

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of the elect to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29), calling is a summons not just to conversion, but to salvation in all its fullness, with all its responsibilities. That explains why Paul seems to have overlapped God’s initiative in his (Paul’s) salvation with God’s directive in his vocation. For example Paul wrote to Timothy, “Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim 1:9). The calling is related to salvation, even to predestination, and also to the apostle’s present responsibilities in ministry.

The fact that believers have been called by God means that He has taken the initiative in providing their salvation, and it also means that He has the prerogative to direct their behavior (Gal 1:6; Eph 4:1; 1 Thess 2:12; 1 Tim 6:12). As Paul suggested in Philippians 3:12, 14, to attain “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” is to “lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” To fulfill one’s calling is not simply to come to faith; it is to fulfill God’s divine purpose in salvation. Ultimately that means becoming fully conformed to the image of Christ through glorification (Rom 8:30; 2 Cor 3:18).

The Timing of the Call

Though the elect are called to much more than a simple “decision” for Christ, Paul seems to have in focus that moment of conversion when he referred to calling in Romans 8:30. Here God’s call is the bridge between predestination and justification. That is why Dunn describes it as “divinely accomplished conversion.” Calling and faith seem to be two sides of the same coin, emphasizing the divine and human aspects of conversion respectively. For example 1

Corinthians 7:17–24 looks back on conversion as the moment when one was “called,” while Romans 13:11 speaks of conversion as “when we believed.” Both terms point to a single event.

At the same time, in a logical *ordo salutis*, calling seems to precede faith, because of the necessity of divine initiative in

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conversion. As Morris writes, Paul’s use of “calling” as a summons to salvation “reminds us of the priority of the divine call in salvation. Men do not choose God. He chooses them.” Cranfield suggests this same order when he writes, “When God thus calls effectually, a man responds with the obedience of faith.”

The Function of the Call

Since God’s efficacious calling bridges the gap between predestination and justification by faith, it is appropriate to regard this work as the means by which He brings the elect to faith. As Erickson summarizes, “Special calling means that God works in a particularly effective way with the elect, enabling them to respond in repentance and faith, and rendering it certain that they will.”

It has been argued above that unbelievers are not capable of properly evaluating the gospel message unless they are given insight by the Holy Spirit. On their own, unbelievers have had their minds blinded to the truth about Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:4). Since God moves such persons to faith through His effectual calling, this divine work apparently removes the blindness and enables them to see the Cross as their hope of salvation.

Erickson suggests that effectual calling consists “in large measure” of the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination, “enabling

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the recipient to understand the true meaning of the gospel.” The idea of illumination is an appropriate metaphor. To grant insight where once it was lacking is like turning on a light or giving sight to the blind. Paul used that comparison in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 with regard to conversion.

Paul began his development of this metaphor by recognizing that, even though it was temporary, Moses’ face shone with the glory of God (2 Cor 3:7). Since this was true, he argued, how much more does the Spirit’s present ministry abound in glory? Moses used to veil his face to prevent the Israelites from beholding its radiance, and the same obstruction continues with the Law to this day. The Law does not enable one to behold the glory of God; it actually inhibits one from doing so (v. 14). Paul then compared this situation to that of believers. “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being

transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (v. 18).

By stating that he and other believers were unveiled, Paul emphasized the fact that the obstruction of the Law had been removed. Rather than being prevented from viewing the glory of God, as the Israelites had been, believers enjoy the same sort of unhindered access to God Moses had experienced.

The idea of beholding God’s glory “in a mirror” has similar implications. μ means to “look at something in a mirror.” Hughes suggests that it refers to contemplating something through the dim vision of faith, as in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Kittel argues more specifically that this is a “miraculous mirror in which what is invisible is made visible to prophets and pneumatics.” Kittel says Paul relied primarily on rabbinic discussions of Numbers 12:8, which maintained that Moses saw God in a mirror, as did other prophets, but that Paul’s mirror was clearer. The argument seems persuasive, and the point is that believers, like Moses, are given a clear vision of the glory of God. This vision, however, is dim compared to what will be revealed to them in the future.

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“Those who are perishing” (μ) remain “veiled” (2 Cor 4:3), unable to see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4). These are the same persons spoken of in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and (by implication) in 1 Corinthians 2:14. They continue to perceive the gospel as foolishness, for they are incapable of recognizing its truth in their sinful condition. In their inability their minds remain hardened as the veil of legalism remains in place (2 Cor 3:14–15), and “the god of this world” has blinded their minds (4:4). This condition is addressed by God’s work of illumination.

Paul wrote, “God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). He had experienced the light of the gospel literally, beholding the exalted Christ on the Damascus Road as “a light from heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3). The illumination of the heart is more subtle, but no less spectacular. The blindness of the mind is removed, and the gospel which once seemed foolish is now recognized as the power of God (1 Cor 1:18). Brought to faith through this act of grace, believers have been granted unhindered access to God and a true knowledge of the glory of Christ.

Chafer writes appropriately, “No soul can be saved apart from this enlightenment, for no other power is sufficient to break through the blindness which Satan has imposed on the minds of those who are lost.” Without the effectual call of God bringing

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illumination to hardened hearts, no one would come to faith. This accords with the first line of the Westminster Confession on effectual calling, which reads,

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

Conclusion

Apart from God's specific, gracious intervention no one would come to faith. Unless unbelievers are given particular insight through the Holy Spirit, they are not capable of properly evaluating the gospel message.

The Holy Spirit's work of reproof functions along with the general call of the gospel as a ministry of common grace. However, it is insufficient of itself to bring someone to conversion. If the blindness of the "natural man" is to be removed and the truth about Jesus Christ is to be apprehended, something more must take place.

According to Romans 8:30, the divine work of effectual calling accomplishes that task. Bridging the gap between predestination and justification by faith, God's effectual call brings the elect to faith. This effectual call consists of a divine summons to salvation along with illumination, through which the elect rightly perceive the gospel and inevitably trust in Jesus Christ.