

remain. Given what Scripture says about the spiritual deadness of the natural man, what are we to make of this?"

"I think it's hard to make anything of it in a literal sense," said Brown. "I think Jesus is speaking hyperbolically—figuratively, exaggerating for effect. Otherwise . . ."

"Otherwise there would seem to be something like an *evidential threshold* involved?" interrupted Schroeder.

"Yeah, an evidential threshold," returned Brown. "That implies that if you pile on enough evidence, at a certain point you cross over the line of resistance and the person is converted. But that doesn't make sense given the spiritual blindness of the natural man. I think I have to agree with Harold about evidence coming in *degrees*, but surely the spiritually dead are cognitively dead to evidence for God *regardless* of how objectively compelling."

"I'm not going to disagree with you about spiritual deadness," resumed Harold, "but *cognitive deadness* might be quite a different issue. It was, I believe, the fact of the spiritual deadness of the unconverted that grounds some of Jesus's remarks to those in Capernaum in John 6. He told them that no one is able to come to him—receive him and accept his claims—unless the Father *draws him* (v.44)."

"I'm not sure I understand your distinction between 'spiritual' and 'cognitive' deadness," said Schroeder.

"Well," began Harold, "spiritual deadness I think of as *personal estrangement* from God. It is a condition of estrangement not unlike the personal estrangement of former spouses that can make the resumption of intimacy unthinkable. Salvation, or rebirth in Christ, involves an uninhibited fellowship with, enjoyment of, and thirst for God—his presence and truth. What *separates* the lost from God is sin and a preference for sin over obedience to him. The analogy to estranged couples may not be perfect, but I think it's instructive. Recall that the Old Testament image of the union of God with his chosen people is husband and wife, and in the New Testament the image is Christ and bride. Marriage is the context of the greatest human intimacy there is. Full-blown estrangement involves an