

in their midst? Did their spiritual unresponsiveness to the works of Jesus amount to the failure to cognitively register miracles *as* miracles as in the manner of a neurological deficit? I don't think so. Spiritual blindness is importantly different, and operates in a very different way. *Its* cognitive intransigence is that of personal estrangement. To see that this is so, and that my point is fully biblical, we need only consider the phenomenon of *hardening of the heart* among the unregenerate."

"I think you're right," said Schroeder. "Hardening is a *process*; neurological deficits are pathological *conditions*. And what makes your point so telling is that heart hardening is a process with major cognitive complications in the natural man. In Scripture it is the natural man who is said to harden against God's truth. If the natural man were a cognitive *zero* with respect to the Gospel and God's claims upon him, there would be no capacity to harden. It just doesn't make sense to say that a cognitive *zero increases* its resistance to a given message! If one is at zero, one's hardness to that message would be max."

"Precisely," said Harold. "And to return to the Matthew text, we are now able to see the key difference between the two groups of cities. For simplicity let's keep the comparison to just Capernaum and Sodom. Forcefully, Jesus says that it will be more bearable for Sodom than for Capernaum on judgment day. Why? Sodom was such a perverse stench to God that he destroyed it with the power of a nuclear blast. Are we to think of Capernaum as yet *more* wicked than Sodom?"

"Since I am taking Jesus literally," Harold went on, "I take it as *true* that Sodom would have repented. So what is the difference between Capernaum and Sodom in virtue of which we may take Jesus literally? The difference has to be in the hardness of heart among the inhabitants of the two cities."

"Not so fast, Harold," said Lucy. "'Heart hardening' isn't exactly a psychologically precise term. Can you cinch up its meaning a bit?"

"Yeah . . . look at it this way," said Harold. "It's a desensitization process. Maybe immunization would provide a good analogy. If one is inoculated against a disease, one is infected with a very mild form of the disease itself and the body builds an immunity to that disease's virulent