

I know not how the Spirit moves  
Convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus through the word,  
Creating faith in Him.  
But I know whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I've committed  
Unto Him against that day.  
-Daniel W. Whittle

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## HOW CAN THE DEAD BELIEVE? THE SPIRIT'S CONVICTION

How can Evangelicals retain a divine initiative in understanding the plan of salvation? Since mankind is spiritually dead, an explanation is needed as to how *any* spiritually dead sinner can come to faith in Christ. Calvinists go back to Augustine's doctrine of irresistible grace, which involves the new birth preceding faith. Arminians, on the other hand, have a doctrine of universal prevenient (preceding) grace to enable all sinners to respond to God's message. Those in the middle do not find either solution satisfying, because neither is inductively\* derived. The answer is in the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus in the upper room, just before the cross and preparatory to the Pentecost event. This is a neglected key to the problem.

### A neglected key

It is tragic that in the discussion of these issues a vital key to its resolution has been overlooked, even though clearly taught in the Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 16:7-11) and exemplified on the day of Pentecost and afterward. The only theologians who have given serious attention to the truth of the convicting work of the Spirit are Lewis Sperry Chafer and James Oliver Buswell, Jr. Few others have given more than a passing notice to this truth, if at all. In 1948, Chafer wrote, "Within the whole divine enterprise of winning the lost, there is no factor more vital than the work of the Holy Spirit in which He convinces or reproves the *cosmos* world respecting sin, righteousness, and judgment."<sup>1</sup> In 1962, Buswell wrote: "The doctrine of conviction as a work of the Holy Spirit prior to either regeneration or faith, it seems to me, solves this problem..."<sup>2</sup>

The core of the issue is how *any* spiritually dead sinner can hear the gospel, believe, and be saved. In order to solve this problem, starting from

their concept of total inability, extreme Calvinists have reversed the biblical order and put the new birth before faith. On the other hand, Arminians seem to put too much emphasis upon human factors. An inductive study of the convicting or convincing work of the Spirit will lead to a mediate solution to the problem and is a vital key to resolving the centuries-old controversy between Calvinists and Arminians.

Calvinists put a great stress upon objective truth: the objective decrees of God in eternity and objective realities in redemption history. But they struggle in the subjective realm. That is, how can one be included among the elect, and how can one know if one is among the elect? What can unregenerate people do while waiting for God's irresistible grace to strike? Many Calvinists have made lists of things sinners can do to prepare themselves for God's irresistible grace in the event that they may happen to be among the elect (preparationism\*). This is a bad solution to their intractable problem. It was the Anabaptists,\* Moravians and pietistic\* Lutherans who began to try to balance off the strong objective slant with a more personal, experiential and subjective approach. Arminians and moderate Calvinists have sought to balance the objective and subjective dimensions of salvation. Today the Pentecostal and charismatic movements have overemphasized the subjective aspect. Albeit, pietistic<sup>A</sup> subjectivism is an important dimension of mainstream evangelicalism today. The restoration of the doctrine of the conviction of the Spirit provides a necessary balance and is a key to this whole conundrum.

In making this proposal a vital distinction must be made, which has not been recognized in the literature. *This is the distinction between the means by which people come to saving faith in Christ, which is a process having heavy human involvement, and on the other hand, the new birth itself, which is one-hundred per cent the work of the Holy Spirit, accomplished instantaneously without any human participation.* Thus, there is a process in which the Holy Spirit works mediately through human instrumentality to bring the sinner under conviction leading to faith, which then triggers the Spirit's work of regeneration. This is a simple, but overlooked distinction.

## The Determining Scriptures

### The context of John 16:7-11

**But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper [Paraklētos] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He when He comes, will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and**

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A. Pietism was an evangelical movement in the Lutheran churches of northern Europe starting about 1675 with an emphasis upon a personal experience of the new birth and conversion, Bible study, personal prayer, and a godly lifestyle. Philip Spener and August Francke were key leaders.

**concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**

The watchword, “Context is king!” is totally appropriate here. One of the main themes of the Upper Room Discourse (John 14 to 16) is the prophecy by our Lord of the coming of the Holy Spirit, which was to be fulfilled about fifty days forward on the day of Pentecost. Not only did Christ state this explicitly, but He reaffirmed it in many different ways:

**And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you (John 14:16-17).**

Then, He identified a specific day in which the Spirit would be *given* (14:20), which is obviously Pentecost. In subsequent chapters, He kept weaving this idea into the rest of the discourse. In 14:26 and again in 15:26, He spoke of the Father *sending* the Spirit and also about the Spirit *coming* from the Father, a word He used again in 16:7, 8, & 13. In 15:26, He also spoke of the Spirit *proceeding* from the Father in the present tense, a reference which has occasioned the controversial and dubious notion of the eternal procession of the Spirit. However, it seems likely in the context that this is a futuristic use of the present tense, thus reinforcing the other statements. Lastly, in 16:7 He reiterated the verb ‘send.’ Thus, ‘give’ is used once, ‘send’ three times, ‘come’ four times, and ‘proceed’ once. *It is clear that the Lord Jesus is predicting Pentecost as an advent of the Holy Spirit equally as earth-shaking as His own at Bethlehem.* Frank Bottome was not off target in penning the hymn, “The Comforter Has Come.”

Of course, we all believe in the omnipresence of the Holy Spirit and might wonder how Christ could predict the advent of an omnipresent Person. Although the Son of God Himself shares the omnipresence of the Trinity, He had an advent through incarnation. Therefore, Charles Ryrie's clarification that the Holy Spirit came to reside in the newborn church is very cogent.<sup>3</sup> In any case, it is clear from the context that the Holy Spirit was to begin His special ministry of conviction on the day of Pentecost. Thus, it is astonishing that few, if any, writers have made the connection between the convicting work of the Spirit and the events recorded in Acts 2. First, the meaning of the key words must be carefully examined.

### **The meaning of *elegchein* (to convict, convince)**

*Elegchein* and its cognates are mostly used in the writings of Greek philosophers in the intellectual realm of the controverting of propositions. Epictetus used it in an ethical sense, of the cure of souls. In the Septuagint, it translates Hebrew words meaning, 'to rebuke,' 'to shame,' 'to punish,' 'condemn,' 'convict,' 'to test,' and 'to examine.' Buchsel concluded that:

... it denotes the disciplining and educating of man by God as a result of His judicial activity. This embraces all aspects of education from the conviction of the sinner to chastisement and punishment, from the instruction of the righteous by severe tests to his direction by teaching and admonition.

It is used seventeen times in the New Testament and means “to show someone his sin and to summon him to repentance.” The means used to bring this about are: the prophet, conscience, the self-revelation of light, divine instruction, and the Law. *Elegchos* has the sense of 'proof,' 'convincing,' 'refutation,' 'investigation,' and 'account.' The abstract noun *elegsis* means 'persuasion,' 'refutation.'<sup>4</sup> The BAG lexicon lists four meanings: “1. *bring to light, expose, set forth....* 2. *convict or convince someone of someth., point someth. out to someone....* 3. *reprove, correct....* 4. *heightened, punish, discipline....*”<sup>5</sup> (Current English dictionaries indicate that the older usage of 'convict' has been replaced by 'convince' except in the legal sphere.)

Most of the New Testament usages have to do with confronting and reproofing moral error, whether in unbelievers (Lk. 3:19) or believers (most). Paul used it twice to encourage Titus to refute and correct the doctrinal errors of Christians (1:9, 13). Only in 1 Corinthians 14:24 is it used in the sense of John 16 to refer to convicting or convincing an unbeliever to repent and believe the gospel. Jude used it of the return of Christ in final judgment upon the godless (15). The abstract noun *elegchos* is used in Hebrews 11:1 of faith as a conviction of the unseen, that is, in a subjective sense.

### The meaning of *kosmos* (world)

It should go without saying that John's usage of *kosmos*, which is so replete at about a hundred times, must be determinative as to the Lord's meaning here. Abbott-Smith lists four connected usages:

1. *order ...*
2. *ornament, adornment ...*
3. *Later, the world or universe, as an ordered system ...*
4. *In late writers only, the world, i.e. the earth;... hence by meton., (a) of the human inhabitants of the world ... (b) of worldly affairs or possessions ...; (c) in ethical sense, of the ungodly, the world as apart from God and thus evil in its tendency....*<sup>6</sup>

John overwhelmingly uses it in the fourth sense, especially 4.(c). This is not controversial, and thus in the exegesis of the passage, the focus must be on the Holy Spirit's ministry to the unregenerate people of this evil world-system, who need salvation. This is made even more striking by Christ's reference to Satan as the “**prince of this world**” in John 12:31, and again even more significantly here (Jn. 16:11).

### The meaning of *paraklētos* (One who entreats, exhorts, encourages)

Translators have struggled to come up with the right word to render this multifaceted term. *Paraklētos* is used by John alone, four times here of the Lord's description of Himself and the coming Holy Spirit (as well as in 1 John 2:2). To get the meaning of this word in this context it is important to

connect it with its verb, *parakalein*, which many scholars have failed to do. The BAG lexicon mentions how the active idea of the verb became more prominent in the meaning of the noun, thus “equating *paraklētos* with *parakalein*.” They continue: “The Gk. interpreters of John’s gosp. understood it in the active sense=*parakalōn* or *paraklētor* ...”<sup>7</sup> Abbott-Smith lists as prominent meanings of the verb, ‘beseech,’ ‘entreat,’ ‘admonish,’ ‘exhort,’ ‘encourage,’ and for the abstract noun, *paraklēsis*, ‘appeal,’ ‘entreaty,’ ‘exhortation,’ ‘encouragement.’ These connotations greatly open up the meaning of *paraklētos* in John 14-16, since they directly connect with the ministries of Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>B</sup>

### The development of Christ's thought

**Christ, the first *Paraklētos*.** When Christ promised the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, one of His significant ministries would be the convicting, convincing, exposing, and reproving of mankind. The verb is a simple future which would imply that this ministry of the Spirit had not yet begun, and thus, that Pentecost was to be its beginning. Indeed, there is no reference to any such activity of the Spirit in the Old Testament or Gospel accounts. Christ Himself was the first *Parakletos*, who, while He was in the world, sought to bring people under the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment by His entreaty and exhortation.

The Lord implied that He is the first *paraklētos* in referring to the Holy Spirit as “another.” Clearly, Christ’s ministry was full of urgent entreaty, admonishing, exhorting, and encouraging of unbelievers and disciples. He also is represented as believers’ advocate before the Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; Mt. 10:32; 1 Jn. 2:2). Similarly, the Holy Spirit’s ministries include urgent entreaty, admonishing, exhorting, and encouraging, especially in John 16:8-11. But the meaning ‘advocate’ just doesn’t fit in *this context*.

There are many examples. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ used the Mosaic Law to bring Pharisaic Jews under the conviction of their sin and recognition of their need of His righteousness. His sinless character and supernatural works brought conviction to the Apostles, such as in Luke 5:8, when Peter saw the miraculous draft of fish. His interview with the self-righteous rich young ruler shows His use of the Law to bring conviction (Mt. 19:16-26). He sought to show him that he did not love his neighbor as himself, which made him a sinner. Now, as Christ was to depart, and His personal ministry of conviction must necessarily end, He promised the Holy Spirit as another *Paraklētos*. The Spirit would begin to take the responsibility for this important ministry and would not be limited to a human body.

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B. The problem is the rare extra-canonical usage as ‘advocate’ or ‘counsel’ does not seem to connect with the verb *parakalein* and the noun *paraklēsis*. *TDNT* erroneously separates discussion with separate articles by different scholars (Behm., v. 801; Schmitz, v. 773-6, 793-7). Since the Luther and KJV rendering of “comforter” is the least common usage of the verb, it is the least helpful translation. Many modern translations use “counselor,” “helper,” or “advocate,” which miss the main point in this discourse.

**Christ's clarification.** The Lord Jesus gave a clarification of the three-fold convicting ministry of the Spirit. Although His explanation in John 16:8-11 is not transparent, by drawing upon the broader context the meaning is clarified. In 16:9, He explained that the conviction of sin especially relates to the world's unbelief in Him: "... **concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.**" Earlier John referred to mankind's sin as the key issue with which Christ had to deal (John 1:5, 29) and the main obstacle for people to come to Christ (1:5, 10-11, 3:19-21). More specifically, He focused upon the one sin which is the central issue in order to be saved—rejection of the Messiah Himself (3:18, 36). This highlights the uniqueness of *unbelief as the only unforgivable sin*. People need to be convinced that they are sinners, but especially, of the seriousness of unbelief in Christ.

John used the symbolism of the spiritual blindness of mankind repeatedly in his Gospel. Christ is the light come into the world, and men were so spiritually blind that God had to send John the Baptizer to point people to the light (1:6-9).<sup>C</sup> The Apostle Paul confirmed the spiritual blindness of the unregenerate as not being just a natural problem of man's sin, but also a satanic blindness as well (2 Cor. 4:3-4):

**But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

Chafer clearly emphasized this connection with spiritual blindness.<sup>8</sup>

Since mankind is spiritually dead, a significant issue arises. The extreme Calvinistic scenario is that since man is spiritually dead and unable to believe, therefore, sinners must be born again in order to believe. They have got it backward since Christ said in reference to the new birth: "**Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live**" (Jn. 5:25, TNIV). He did not say that the *regenerate* shall hear, but that the *dead* shall hear and come to life spiritually. The convicting, convincing work of the Spirit is a key as to how this can happen.

The second focus of conviction is in verse 10, "... **and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me.**" While He was in the world, Christ brought conviction of righteousness, since He was the perfect example of absolute righteousness. Just the presence of His sinless person brought conviction about the source of true righteousness; He was full of grace and truth. Also consider that He went back to the Father by way of the cross and resurrection, thus, providing the basis for sinners to be declared righteous. Therefore, based upon Christ's going to the Father in

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C. It should be noted that John 1:9 does not make the enlightenment of Christ's advent universal, as held by the Quakers, but rather general. Few translators have recognized that *panta anthropon* can easily be rendered "all mankind," that is, Christ's enlightenment reaches out to all mankind, not just Jews.

this way, Paul could expound this doctrine of justification in Romans, the theme of which is the righteousness of God, or more exactly, a righteousness from God. Therefore, Christ is the ultimate source of righteousness for unrighteous mankind (Rom. 10:4). This is the heart of the gospel about which the Spirit came to convince mankind.

The third focus of conviction is in verse 11, “... **and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**” Again, the connection is not transparent. This is a reference to Satan's judgment in the cross, and connects with John 12:31-32: “**Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.**” Satan's doom was sealed in the cross, even though he is now a usurper at large, prowling about like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). Most relevant to the lost people of this world-system is the fact that their doom has also been sealed, as long as they have not been liberated from Satan's power by faith in Christ. The Lord Jesus made this logical connection of the judgment of Satan through the cross and His drawing all mankind to Himself in faith. The convicting work of the Spirit is the means by which He is drawing all mankind to Himself. Satan's power was broken in the cross, as Paul later affirmed in Colossians 2:15: “**When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.**” Satan's condemnation and expulsion from God's presence in heaven makes it imperative that those who are under his sway claim the Messiah's finished work to experience redemption-liberation. *Since the Spirit's ministry focuses on these three areas, our witness for Christ must be brought into harmony with the Spirit's strategy in pointing people to Christ.*

### **Its Historical Actualization**

#### **Pentecost**

With the context of the Upper Room Discourse and His promise to send the Spirit in mind, it is now obvious that the fulfillment of that promise in the events of Acts 2 must be examined. Indeed, the Lord Himself confirmed this fulfillment a week before Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5, 8):

**Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' ... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ...'**

As the historical record is examined, Acts 2:37 stands out. After Peter completed his sermon, boldly proclaiming the risen Messiah and charging Israel with His death, Luke records: “**Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'**” Thousands of Jews were evidently under the conviction of the Spirit, although not yet saved were asking how they could be. The verb

*katanussein* used here occurs only once and means, “1. to strike or prick violently. 2. to stun. 3. of strong emotion, pass., to be smitten: *tēn kardia*, Ac 2<sup>37</sup>.”<sup>9</sup>

The answer comes immediately: “**And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'**” (Acts 2:38). They needed to repent as a condition of receiving the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the brief time between v. 37 and their actual repentance, they were the recipients of the Spirit's convicting ministry, but not yet of His regenerating work. Conviction precedes repentance, which precedes the gift of the Spirit's indwelling and new birth. The Spirit used the supernatural gift of languages and Peter's sermon as the means of bringing them under conviction. Conviction is a mediate or indirect ministry of the Spirit, as contrasted with the work of regeneration, which is direct.

Luke did not record whether the three thousand who were saved were the only ones who had come under conviction. Presumably, others came under conviction but did not repent at that time. Perhaps many of them were among the thousands who were saved subsequently. Perhaps many never came to repentance and faith. Luke does not say.

### Other examples

**Positive examples.** There are other incidents in Acts which connect with this. Some are explicit statements of a positive response to the Spirit's working. Moreover, every time people are being saved, it implies the Spirit's convicting work is involved, whether Luke is explicit or not. In connection with the healing of the lame man outside the temple gate, the Apostles' witness caused thousands more to believe (3:11–4:4). Luke consistently connected the disciples being Spirit-filled with their boldness and the resulting fruitfulness of their witness (4:8, 31, 33; 5:32; 6:10; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52; etc.). In Samaria, Philip saw crowds come to Christ (8:5-8).

Even when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting Christians, the Holy Spirit was convicting him through the witness of Stephen and other Christians' testimonies, as he dragged them into court. The risen Lord said to him, “**It is hard for you to kick against the goads**” (Acts 26:9-14). Up to that point he had been resisting the conviction of the Spirit. But after his conversion and subsequent filling with the Spirit, he immediately proclaimed Christ boldly in Damascus (9:17-22). Peter's ministry in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa got a massive response (9:35, 42), which was connected with outstanding miraculous signs by the Holy Spirit.

Cornelius and his household were not saved people before Peter preached to them (11:14), but the Spirit must have been working in their lives before they heard the gospel from Peter. The outstanding follow-up of the conversion of these first Gentiles took place in Antioch of Syria, where a large number of Gentiles were saved through Jewish believers from Cyprus

and Cyrene, and later, through the Spirit-filled ministry of Barnabas (Acts 11:19-26). The Spirit continued working there as Paul and Barnabas were sent out as the first cross-cultural missionaries among the Gentiles (13:1-3).

On their first stop in Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul were the instruments of the Spirit in persuading the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who had summoned them to share the gospel (13:6-12). After Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, Luke records: **"And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath"** (Acts 13:42). Many were under conviction and some were being saved. Many were convicted but not yet saved. Responding to the Jewish opposition, the Apostles announced: **"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles"** (Acts 13:46). Many of these convicted Gentiles rejoiced at the opportunity and believed (13:48). This verse has been a major Calvinistic proof-text, but the translation needs to be corrected to (cf. Ch. 23, pp. 313-15): **"And as many as had been devoting themselves to eternal life were believing."**

On Paul's second missionary journey, the account of Lydia's conversion stand out: **"... and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul"** (Acts 16:14). Although Calvinists see this as an example of irresistible grace, it can equally be understood as a reference to the convincing, enlightening work of the Spirit. It is our responsibility to be the instruments of the Spirit in opening sinners' eyes to the truth (Acts 26:18). Subsequently, the Philippian jailer also was certainly under conviction to have cried out, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"** (Acts 16:30). He had heard the testimony of Paul and Silas in prison and being overwhelmed by the extraordinary circumstances, recognized his own need of eternal salvation. Paul's response was similar to that of Peter on the day of Pentecost, except that he used the imperative "believe" instead of "repent."

The language Luke used to describe Paul's witness at Thessalonica ('reasoned,' 'explaining,' 'giving evidence') indicates that he sought to be the Spirit's instrument in persuading the Jews and devout Gentiles in the synagogue, which resulted in many conversions (Acts 17:1-4). This is harmonious with the meaning of *elegchein*, as seen above. Again at Athens and Corinth, Luke used similar words related to convincing and persuading, i.e., 'reasoning,' 'trying to persuade' (17:17; 18:4). Especially at Corinth, this convincing ministry of the Spirit through Paul was effective in the conversion of two synagogue rulers, Crispus and Sosthenes, during his eighteen-month ministry there, as well as many other Jews and Gentiles (18:8, 17). The example Calvin gave from 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 is also relevant: **"But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you."** Note that the unbeliever is convicted by the instrumentality of people, not by some 'irresistible grace.'

**Negative reactions.** There are also some accounts which might be understood as negative reactions to the Spirit's conviction. After the second arrest of the Apostles and Peter's defense, there is a negative reaction in Acts 5:33: **"But when they heard this they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them."** After Stephen's defense and charge, a similar reaction is seen using the same word, *diapriein*: **"Now when they heard this they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him"** (Acts 7:54). They were almost surely under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Stephen had just accused them of always resisting the Holy Spirit (7:51). If so, it would indicate that not all who are convicted come to faith. Related to this is the account of governor Felix's reaction to Paul's forthright witness in which he was under conviction: **"And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you'"** (Acts 24:25).

**Human instrumentality.** Since the cognates of *elegchein* have the sense of 'proof', 'refutation', and 'persuasion', it is relevant to consider accounts where the Holy Spirit was using the Apostles in related activity. Luke records in Acts 14:1: **"And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and Greeks."** In Acts 18:28 there is a similar emphasis upon the human instrumentality in reference to Apollos's witness: **"... for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."** There are also a number of allusions to Paul's use of reasoning and persuasion in his evangelism, such as 18:4: **"And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Gentiles."** Human instrumentality comes through very clearly in Paul's testimony about Christ's apostolic charge to him: **"... to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:18). It is clear that the above enumerated things are the work of the Holy Spirit, but Christ mandated Paul to do them. The issue is the Holy Spirit's use of human instrumentality in His ministry of conviction. Extreme Calvinists tend to see all of the Spirit's ministries functioning directly and immediately, thus minimizing human instrumentality.<sup>10</sup> It is of interest that Berkhof mentions that Lutherans use this passage in constructing an *ordo salutis* (plan of salvation), but as a Calvinist, he apparently did not feel comfortable in doing so.<sup>11</sup>

**The epistles.** The epistles also shed some light on this ministry of the Spirit: **"And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement"** (1 John 5:7-8). Here the focus is on objective witnesses to the gospel message by his reference to the water and the blood. Thus, the Spirit uses objective witnesses in His work of conviction. Hebrews 10:29 also refers to those who are convicted but never really come to repentance and

faith, counterfeit believers: “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Since these had never been regenerated, apparently they were convicted by the Spirit and in failing to believe had insulted the Holy Spirit by rejecting so much light (cf. Ch. 13). Jude 15 also speaks of Christ in His coming convicting the ungodly, but it will be too late for repentance then.

### The Extent of Conviction

One question that has been minimally discussed is the extent of the Spirit's ministry of conviction. Is it universal, is it general, or is it limited only to the elect? The answers to this question from Chafer and Buswell are puzzlingly inconsistent. Chafer, as a moderate Calvinist, held that it is limited to the elect.<sup>12</sup> Since he had always stressed the world-system of the unregenerate as hostile to God and taught general redemption, this is inconsistent; his Calvinistic leanings bleed through. On the other hand, Buswell, as a five-point Calvinist, posited a universal ministry of conviction.<sup>13</sup> He arrived at this through misunderstanding of John 1:9 and his belief that the witness of nature is part of the witness used by the Spirit in conviction. His conclusion, however, is more consistent with Arminian theology. Much more satisfying, in the light of the biblical examples of conviction noted above, is the view of John Walvoord: “The fact is that the Spirit of God brings conviction and understanding to many who never believe, who turn from the gospel even after the way of salvation is made plain to them.”<sup>14</sup> This is in harmony with the mediate nature of many of God's workings in relation to world evangelization. This is also in harmony with Calvin's understanding: “Under the term *world* are, I think, included not only those who would be truly converted to Christ, but hypocrites and reprobates.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Nature of Conviction

One outstanding question then, is whether conviction is objective or subjective, external or internal. From the evidence given above, conviction seems to work both internally through believers and externally through objective evidence. The emphasis of the secular and Septuagintal usage of *elegchein* was objective. Since the Holy Spirit came to indwell the Church, it follows that He works through the members of Christ's body as they proclaim the word of God. This is the clear pattern of the book of Acts. In any case, He uses human instrumentality.

There is another remaining question. Since the Spirit's ministry of conviction was clearly said to have begun at Pentecost, how did pre-Pentecost saints come to saving faith? Apparently the work of conviction was *an enhancement* given to the church for a more effective impact of the gospel after the day of Pentecost. But as seen in earlier chapters, a balanced view of depravity does not preclude sinners from exercising repentant faith on

their own. This may sound shocking to Calvinists, but it is what the inductive biblical data leads to.

### Conclusions

In making a distinction between the means that the Holy Spirit uses in bringing spiritually dead sinners to saving faith and the direct work of the Spirit in the new birth, a key emerges as to how the spiritually dead can believe prior to regeneration. The Spirit's conviction of the sinner through the human instrumentality of ministry of the word of God best explains all the Scriptural data. Since we are to be the instruments which the Holy Spirit uses to bring conviction, we must follow the apostolic example by focusing on the three areas which Christ emphasized.

Limiting it to the elect moves the focus back to a deterministic view of God's decrees. Universalizing it to all men at all times does not do justice to Christ's use of the future tense and the rest of the evidence. Although Calvin's references to it are harmonious with this, it does not fit into the system of extreme Calvinism, especially their doctrine of irresistible grace.

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1. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), VI, p. 88.

2. Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 163.

3. Since Dr. Ryrie made this point in class, there is undoubtedly documentation somewhere in his many books.

4. Friedrich Buchsel in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II, pp. 473-476.

5. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, pp. 248-9.

6. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), p. 255.

7. Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 623-4.

8. Chafer, VI, p. 90.

9. Abbott-Smith, p. 237.

10. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, p. 663.

11. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 416.

12. Chafer, VI, p. 94.

13. Buswell, II, p. 160.

14. John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 111; also Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 324-5.

15. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 138; see also *Institutes*, 3.24.8.