

What About Those Who Never Hear the Gospel?

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)

Some have challenged the justice and benevolence of God on the basis of His condemnation of those who never have the opportunity to obey the Gospel: “What will happen to those folks who never are given an opportunity to know Christ and His teaching?” Several factors deserve consideration.

All human beings of accountable age and mind have sinned by violating God’s commands (Romans 3:9ff.,23; 1 John 3:4). Sin condemns a person to an eternal hell—there are no exceptions (Matthew 10:28; et al.). The only way a person can escape the consequences of his sin is to be forgiven by God.

But the nature of deity is such that God cannot merely wave aside sin and forgive. To do so would literally violate His infinitely holy, righteous/just nature. So God had to formulate a plan by which He could forgive human sin in harmony with His divinity. The one and only suitable means of atonement (“propitiation”—Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2) was for God to come in person in the flesh and offer Himself for our sins. He did so through the person of Jesus Christ—God in the flesh. This incredible sacrifice/scheme of redemption is what the Gospel is all about: it is the Gospel—the good news that Jesus opened a way for humans to be forgiven.

However, that tremendous plan of salvation requires an obedient faith response (Romans 1:5; 16:26). That response consists of hearing and understanding the Gospel (Acts 8:30-32; Romans 10:17), believing that Gospel and the One Who offers it (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), repenting of sin (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3), and being immersed in water to contact the blood of Christ in order for sin to be cleansed (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 22:16).

In view of these plain biblical truths, it clearly follows that all persons who do not contact the blood of Christ cannot be forgiven by God. God is, in fact, **powerless** to forgive them. It would be completely contrary to His nature—and therefore ungodlike—for Him to try to forgive a person on some other basis than the blood of Christ. But the **only** way to contact the blood of Christ is to obey the Gospel (Romans 2:5-9). Those who do not obey the Gospel will be lost eternally in hell (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). It unmistakably and logically follows that God cannot and will not forgive anyone who has not been immersed into Christ—since they have not contacted the blood of Christ, the one and only means of atonement. We are forced to conclude that **no one** can be saved who does not hear the Gospel and obey it (Acts 4:12). If a person can be saved without hearing and obeying the Gospel, then Jesus did not need to come to Earth and die for sin.

With these facts in mind, the issue now shifts to a different question: Is God fair for condemning to hell all those who do not come into contact with the Gospel? The Bible offers a clear response. First, all human beings can and must come to the conclusion that God exists based on the readily available evidence of the incredible Creation that reflects the presence of the Creator. After all, “He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Indeed, “[t]he heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). “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**” (Romans 1:20).

This knowledge should motivate all persons to seek Him, as Paul explained to the Athenians: “that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27). In seeking Him, they will come into contact with Christianity and the Bible: “those who seek me diligently will find me” (Proverbs 8:17; cf. Matthew 7:7-8). For those persons who possess an honest, noble, and good heart (Luke 8:15), examination of the Bible will cause them to conclude that it is the only book on the planet that possesses the attributes of divine inspiration (John 7:17). Hence, they will learn about the Gospel and the need to obey.

Second, the Bible also teaches that all persons on the planet who have a heart that is receptive to the truth will have access to that truth via the providence of God. God will make certain (without performing any miracles) that they come into contact with His Word. When God spoke to Paul while in the city of Corinth and stated, “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10), He meant that there were individuals who would be receptive to the divine message once they encountered that message. Hence, Paul was God’s instrumentality for reaching those potential converts (cf. Acts 10:4ff.; 16:9ff.). World evangelism, i.e., announcing the Gospel to the world, is an ongoing task for the Church. All Christians who are yielded to the will of God, willing to be used in His service, will have opportunities to influence people with the truth. God’s purposes will not be thwarted. In His unfathomable providential dealings in the world, God can interface receptive hearts with those who will introduce them to the good news (Acts 8:30; 10:24ff.; Colossians 1:23). (The Internet has only enhanced this accessibility to the Gospel even further.) He will see to it that receptive hearts are contacted.

Third, observe that all those who will not accept the truth, even if presented to them, need not be confronted with that truth, since God knows they would reject it. So the question, “What about those who never hear the Gospel?” suggests that there are innocent, honest people who would accept the truth if they heard it, but never get a chance to hear it. **No such people actually exist.** All those who **will** accept God’s truth will be given an opportunity to accept it via God’s providence and their own honest searching (Matthew 7:7-8). All those who never hear the Gospel would not have accepted it anyway.

A fourth and final observation pertains to the fact that the Bible plainly teaches that the vast majority of humanity throughout the 6,000+ years of world history have not desired the truth and would not have received it if presented to them (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:26; 1 Peter 3:20). Hence, the task of getting the Gospel to those who will receive it is considerably reduced in magnitude. Indeed, the multi-pronged combination of avenues through which efforts are made to reach the lost, including missionaries, printed materials, word of mouth, radio/TV, Internet, et al., are such that those whose hearts are receptive will have the opportunity to access the truth.

The nature of God is such that He must allow all human beings to act as free will agents and make their own choices regarding their eternal destiny. Hence, He will not interfere with their will. Nevertheless, He has done everything He can possibly do to enable mankind to access the Gospel message so that all can be forgiven of sin and live with Him forever. After all, God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” and He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

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