

## Apologetics Sunday School

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"Will God Condemn Those Who Never Hear?"

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Before we get to how we can best answer the question, "Will God condemn those who have never heard of Jesus?" we need to read back over a couple passages from the beginning of the book of Romans and make sure that we are grounded in their truths. If we don't believe these passages, we will not be able to answer this question well or Biblically.

### Romans 1:18-25

*"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **19** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. **20** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **24** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, **25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."*

What do you take away from these verses?

- All people have knowledge of God the Father
- People suppress that knowledge despite it being clear
- People are without excuse
- They exchange the truth of God for a lie, worship the created rather than the Creator
- God "gave them up"; He gives them what they want, but that doesn't ease their responsibility
- This can sound past tense, but it's not just describing the past- it's the ongoing human condition

### Romans 2:12-16

*"**12** For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. **13** For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. **14** For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. **15** They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them **16** on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."*

- Even those people who never have a Bible have God's law written on their heart.
- They condemn themselves because they don't even live up to their own standards, much less God's standards.

### Romans 3:9-12

*"**9** What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, **10** as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; **11** no one understands; no one seeks for God. **12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;*

*no one does good, not even one."*

- No one seeks God on their own, everyone has rejected God and earned judgment.
- No one is innocent, no one deserves heaven.

So our Question today is: "Will God Condemn Those Who Never Heard Of Jesus?"

People ask R.C. Sproul, "What happens to the innocent native in Africa who has never heard of Jesus?" And he answers (essentially), "The innocent native in Africa who has never heard of Jesus has no need to hear of Jesus. Don't bother sending missionaries to preach to him. He will go straight to heaven."<sup>1</sup>

This sounds shocking coming from a great Bible teacher until you realize that he's trying to call attention to how loaded that question is! You will never find an innocent native in Africa, or Australia, or anywhere else. Jesus came into a world that is under the indictment of God the Father because the whole world has rejected Him. There are no innocent people in the world! Romans 3 completely underscores this; no one does good.

And furthermore, if innocent people that have never heard the gospel automatically go to heaven because they "never had a chance to hear the Gospel", then the cruelest thing we can do is send missionaries and preach the Gospel to them. Because then they don't have an excuse!

Also Sproul: "Will God punish someone for rejecting Jesus whom they've never heard of?" "No, God won't punish someone for rejecting someone they've never heard of. But He will punish them for rejecting the God that they do know about." And as we've seen in Romans 1, everyone knows God.

What about the Aztecs who worshipped the sun god? Isn't that good enough for the level of their knowledge? No, that's not good enough, because they've worship the created rather than Creator.

The question that everyone wants to know is: is it possible that people can go to heaven even if they haven't heard the gospel of Jesus in their language?

Ken Boa and Larry Moody answer that: "There is no single passage of Scripture that neatly addresses the eternal plight of all the categories of people who didn't hear a meaningful explanation of Jesus during their lifetime... Responsibility is proportionate to revelation, and God knows exactly how much revelation a person received and exactly how he or she responded to it."<sup>2</sup>

But the doctrine of election, that God saves those He wants to save, is reassuring! It's how we answer the hard questions: what about the baby who is old enough to sin but not old enough to understand the gospel and accept Christ's salvation? What about the mentally handicapped person who can't understand the Bible? Answer: God's purposes in election will stand, He will save whom He wants to save.

The God who created the universe can use all sorts of means to bring the Gospel to His elect wherever they are, or whatever time they lived in. I have heard accounts of people in unreached tribes having faith in Christ already when missionaries first arrived. I have heard of Muslims having visions of Jesus that led them to faith in Christ without a single Christian involved. God can even use

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<sup>1</sup> Sproul audio clip is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afAUAhdNIUA>

<sup>2</sup> Ken Boa and Larry Moody, *I'm Glad You Asked* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), pp. 58-59.

supernatural means we are unaware of to bring the Gospel to people (including the mentally handicapped, the very young, those in a coma, those who never hear the Gospel preached, and those who have never heard about Yahweh or the Bible).

The point is, none of us deserve to hear the Gospel. None of us deserve to believe it, or enter into Heaven. All of us deserve God's wrath. Ravi Zacharias says instead of us being upset that God didn't provide many ways to get to Heaven, we should be grateful that he provided any way at all. Also, we should be grateful that everyone of His elect will hear the Gospel, and will believe it. We need to remember that God does not have the challenges of geography and time that we do.

And ultimately, if you're talking to an unbeliever who is hung up on this question, you need to let them know that they have heard the gospel and it's only important whether they accept it or reject it. You may or may not have satisfactorily answered their questions about all the other people in the world hearing the Gospel, but the bottom line is that they are only responsible for their own souls. Either Jesus is their Lord and Savior and they are ready to follow Him, or they don't believe the Gospel.