

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD?
ROMANS 12:12-16

BIG IDEA: TRUSTING JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR IS ONE'S ONLY HOPE OF SALVATION.

FAQ'S

1. Q: But what about those who have never heard God's Old Testament Law?
A: Gentiles have their own form of God's against which they have sinned.
 - v. 12, *All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law.*
 - The fact that the Bible accuses Bible-deprived Gentiles of sin, means that there is some form of divine law that they are breaking; it's just not the Old Testament Law.
 -
2. Q: Where is the evidence of this divine law that condemns the Gentile for sin?
A1: His **upright actions**
 - v. 14, *(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law,¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts...*
 - E.g., *He honors his parents; he doesn't steal from his friends; he doesn't hurt little children, etc.*
 - *When he does the right, as he sometimes does, this shows that he in fact knows what the right is. He may not have the law, but his conduct shows that what the law requires is written on his heart. (Morris, 121)*
A2: His **conscience**.
 - v.15, *their consciences also bearing witness*
 - Conscience is an inner *guilt-o-meter*.
A3: His **conflicting thoughts**.
 - v.15, *their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them*
 - RSV renders this "conflicting thoughts."
 - *Paul is speaking of the way a person's thoughts back up the witness of his better actions and his conscience in pointing to what is right. (Morris)*
 - *This dialogue which man conducts with himself, this debate in which he is in turn the accuser and the defender of himself, shows that, for the appreciation of his conduct, he has at his disposition some objective term of reference, something in fact which God has ingrained in his heart and to which his conscience brings a subjective confirmation. (Leenhardt in Morris)*
 - *[T]hose who have no law nevertheless have convictions about what they do. Their thoughts about their actions sometimes take the form of severe accusation and sometimes of acquittal. (Morris)*
3. Q: What is the penalty for this guilt?
A: Perishing (v. 12). God's Judgment on "the day" (v. 16). The eschatological Day of Judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15.¹
4. Q: Does this passage imply that people get saved by good works? (v.13, *For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.*)

¹ Revelation 20:11-15, *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

- A: No, the point of this verse is directed to Jews who took false security in having and hearing the Old Testament Law. *Having* and *hearing* are not the operatives of secure standing before God—it is the *doing* of the Law. If a Jew broke the OT Law, he was in as much trouble with God as a Gentile who didn't even know about the OT Law. And, of course he *did* break the Law, as is affirmed in **Romans 3:20**, *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*
5. Q: Does verses 14-15 imply that there are Gentiles that can “live up to the light they have” and thus have their obedience rewarded by salvation, even though they are ignorant of the Bible?
A: No—these verses are not affirming the salvation via obedience of the Gentiles but rather affirming their perilous stance under judgment, just as in the case of the Jews in the preceding verse. If the Jews couldn't earn their salvation by “living up to the Book” what hope would there be for Gentiles to earn their salvation by “living up to the light they had”?
6. Q: How does the Book of Romans say that people do get saved? [and a few other passages]
A: Here are the clearest passages:
- **Romans 1:16** *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*
 - **Romans 3:22** *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*
 - **Romans 10:9-15** *[I]f you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*
 - **Romans 10:17** *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*
 - **Acts 4:12** *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*
 - **Acts 16:30-31** *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household."*
 - **1 John 5:11-13** *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*
7. Q: Is there any possibility that someone who has never heard about Jesus or the Bible could somehow get saved by having faith in what he knew of God through conscience and nature? (per **Romans 1:20**, *God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen...)*
A: Here is the hot potato issue. See the next page

What about Those Who Have Never Heard?

THE HOT QUESTION: Is there any possibility that someone who has never heard about Jesus or the Bible could somehow get saved by having faith in what he knew of God through conscience and nature? (per **Romans 1:20**, *God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen...*)

“UNIVERSALISM”

1. Man-on-the-street theology and Liberal Protestantism—*All religions are just different paths that lead to the top of the same mountain.*
2. [U]niversalism, the belief that despite the New Testament witness to the contrary, God will somehow bring all who leave this world as nonbelievers to share the inheritance of those who die living in Christ. This requires successful postmortem evangelism for some and heart-changing corrective discipline for others....When Jesus and the apostles warned people of eternal loss if they did not repent (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 26:16-20), were they bluffing? Do we in fact know more about God's purpose of grace than they did?²
3. Gullery and Mulholland argue from what might be called the logic of grace as they construe it. Since grace is unmerited, it must be equally available to all. And not merely available, for the God they envision regards even a single lost soul as a defeat to his relentlessly loving will. Hence, in the words of Madeleine L'Engle quoted at the end of the book, “All will be redeemed in God's fullness of time, all, not just the small portion of the population who have been given the grace to know and accept Christ. All the strayed and stolen sheep. All the little lost ones.”³

“INCLUSIVISM”

1. The analogy argument
 - The salvation of Old Testament Saints:
 - The salvation of babies and other “innocents”:
2. The “intellectual humility” argument
3. The late Pope John Paul II: He quotes approvingly from the *Council's Constitution on the Church*—*In fact, those who through no fault of their own are nor aware of the Gospel of Christ and of the Church, but who nonetheless search sincerely for God, and with the help of grace attempt to carry out His will, known through the dictates of their conscience—they too can attain eternal salvation. Nor will Divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who have not yet arrived at a clear knowledge and recognition of God, and who attempt, not without divine grace, to conduct a good life” (Lumen Gentium 16)*⁴
4. Liberal Protestantism—Newbiggin
 - *We must first look at the strictly exclusivist view which holds that all who do not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are eternally lost....There are several reasons which make it difficult for me to believe this. If it were true, then it would be not only permissible but obligatory to use any means available, all the modern techniques of brainwashing included, to rescue others from this appalling fate. And since it is God alone who knows the heart of every person, how are we to judge whether or not another person truly has that faith which is acceptable to him? If we hold this view, it is absolutely necessary to know who is saved and who is not, and we are then led into making the kind of judgments against which Scripture warns us. We are in the business of erecting barriers: Has she been baptized? Has he been confirmed by a bishop in the historic succession? Or has she had a recognizable conversion and can she name the day and the hour when it happened? We are bound to become judges of that which God alone knows.*⁵

² J. I. Packer, “Salvation sans Jesus,” *Christianity Today* (October 2005), 88.

³ From a book review by John Wilson, “A Distorted Predestination,” *Christianity Today* (September 2003), 73.

⁴ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 193.

⁵ Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 173.

- “What happens to the non-Christian after death?” I want to affirm that this is the wrong question and that as long as it remains the central question we shall never come to the truth. And this for three reasons:
 - a. First, and simply, it is the wrong question because it is a question to which God alone has the right to give the answer.... (177)
 - b. By concentrating on the fate of the individual soul after death, it abstracts the soul from the full reality of the human person as an actor and sufferer in the ongoing history of the world. (178)
 - c. The third reason for rejecting this way of putting the question is the most fundamental: it is that the question starts with the individual and his or her need to be assured of ultimate happiness, and not with God and his glory....Christians ...have privatized this mighty work of grace and talked as if the whole cosmic drama of salvation culminated in the words “For me; for me”; as if the one question is “How can I be saved?” leading inevitably to the question, “how can anyone be saved?” But this is a perversion of the gospel. For anyone who has understood what God did for us all in Jesus Christ, the one question is: “How shall God be glorified? How shall his amazing grace be known and celebrated and adored? How shall he see the travail of his soul and be satisfied?” The whole discussion of the role of the world religions and secular ideologies from the point of view of the Christian faith is skewed if it begins with the question, Who is going to be saved at the end? (179-180)⁶
- 5. “Anonymous Christianity”--Karl Rahner. His argument runs like this:
 - Christianity is the absolute religion, being founded on the unique event of the incarnation of the Son of God. But, since this event occurred at a certain point in history, we have to ask about God’s relation to those who lived before it occurred or before it was brought to their knowledge....It follows that non-Christian religions, even if they contain error (as they do), are lawful and salvific up to the time at which the gospel is brought to the attention of the adherents. The gospel requires us to assume that God’s grace is offered to all, and that “in a great many cases at least” it is accepted....But after the time when the gospel has been preached and heard, the non-Christian religion is not longer lawful....The faithful adherent of a non-Christian religion must therefore be regarded as an “anonymous Christian.” Her can be saved through his faithful practice of his religion. But the one who accepts Christ “has a greater chance of salvation than the anonymous Christian....”⁷
- 6. “Generous Orthodoxy”—Brian McLaren
 - [T]he centrality of Christ is combined with openness appropriate for generous orthodoxy. For instance, the biblical witness to Jesus Christ as the unique Savior and hope of the world does not demand a restrictive posture concerning salvation for those who have never heard the gospel or those in other religious traditions...His discussion follows in the spirit of the influential missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin who articulated his own position concerning Christ and salvation along the following lines: exclusive in the sense of affirming the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but not in the sense of denying the possibility of salvation to those outside the Christian faith; inclusive in the sense of refusing to limit the saving grace of God to Christians, but not in the sense of viewing other religions as salvific...⁸
 - For too many people the name Jesus has become a symbol of exclusion, as if Jesus’ statement “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through me” actually means, “I am in the way of people seeking truth and life. I won’t let anyone get to God unless he comes through me.”⁹
 - McLaren stresses that his view is not ...a kind of “everybody-is-okay/all-religions-are-equally-true” relativist/pluralistic tolerance...¹⁰

⁶ Newbigin,

⁷ Newbigin, 174.

⁸ Foreword to Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 13.

⁹ McLaren, 70.

¹⁰ McLaren, 251

7. Clark Pinnock: *The first axiom finds an “optimism of salvation” in the gracious, universal love of God. This optimism is set over and against the “fewness” doctrine of restrictivists who hold that only a few will be saved. Pinnock’s “hermeneutic of hopefulness” is derived from the universal orientation of the early chapters of genesis. The “global covenants” with Noah and Abraham and the presence of Melchizedek and Abimelech (and others) as “pagan saints” prove that “God works outside so-called salvation history.”* (p. 27)...*The second axiom is Christological—“the finality of Jesus as the decisive manifestation and ground of God’s grace toward sinners”* (p. 49)....
- How then does Pinnock relate a high Christology to an “optimistic” view of salvation? He answers, “There is no salvation except through Christ but it is not necessary for everybody to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him”* (p. 75). *“Responding to premessianic revelation can make them [non-Christians] right with God”* p. 105)....
- In chapter 5 Pinnock rules out universalism, but he says that if “God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, it follows logically that everyone must have access to salvation”* (p. 157). *Salvation comes within the reach of the unevangelized by the “faith principle”—the basis of universal accessibility. The Bible shows that “many varieties of unevangelized will attain salvation”* (p. 168). *Further, postmortem salvation is available for those who could not make the decision before death. This position does not necessarily stultify missions, Pinnock argues, because the motivation for missions should not be simply to offer deliverance from wrath* (p. 177).¹¹
8. Justin Martyr: Inclusivism is not a recent development. It shows up in the second century writing of Justin. As he sought to persuade the Romans emperors to stop the persecution of Christians, he tried to bolster his case by including celebrity Greek philosophers in the Christian fold despite the fact that they pre-dated Christ by hundreds of years. He wrote, *[T]hose who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus...*¹².
9. CRITIQUE: *The second speculation [the first is Universalism] is inclusivism, positing a possibility of salvation for sincere devotees of faiths in which Jesus Christ is either unknown or is rejected as divine Savior. On what, biblically speaking, might this possibility be based? Not, clearly, on sincerity or devotion as such, nor on personal merit (no one has any), nor on any intrinsic efficacy of unchristian rituals. On what then?*
- It has been urged that if non-Christian devotees come to know themselves as guilty, defiled, and unworthy, and to confess and renounce their sins, asking mercy from whatever gods there may be, they will receive the forgiveness they seek because of the Jesus they do not yet know, but will know hereafter...But have we reason to think there are such people? The New Testament only speaks of penitents being saved through knowing about, and coming to trust, the crucified and risen Lord...*¹³
10. CRITIQUE: *Some believe that salvation may be possible through “implicit faith,” or by responding to what can be known about God and the human predicament from general or natural revelation. If this is the case, then what is the unique status of special revelation? Is it really necessary?* (p. 6)
- Traditionally, evangelism was motivated at least in part by the conviction that all must be reached with the good news of the gospel, because all are lost and are under God’s condemnation for their sins. Now, however, some view the status of the unevangelized differently. Perhaps those who have not heard the gospel are not lost, it is argued. They may be savingly related to God on the basis of the knowledge all humans can obtain from the study of nature and of themselves. Perhaps those who have not heard the gospel in this life will have opportunity to hear it after they die, and such a presentation might well be more convincing than that of an ordinary human evangelist. Thus, if not already “saved,” they may well be in the future, even without human instrumentality.*

¹¹ Book review by Ramesh Richard in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1995), 108-110, of Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992)

¹² Justin, *The First Apology of Justin* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, n.d.), 31.

¹³ Packer, 88.

Rather than bringing about their salvation, efforts at evangelism and missions may serve only to bring about their condemnation. Further, if some are lost, perhaps they will not experience eternal suffering, but will simply cease to exist. (p. 14)^{14 15}

“EXCLUSIVISM OR RESTRICTIVISM—CLASSIC ORTHODOXY, FUNDAMENTALISM, AND MANY/MOST EVANGELICALS [Newbigin calls this “the strictly exclusivist view”]

1. People must hear about and believe in Jesus Christ to be saved.
2. If not, then we would be better to not send missionaries—since the message may condemn them.
3. The idea of the “noble savage” living up to the light he has is an unsubstantiated myth.
4. The “fairness” argument flies in the face of the sovereignty of God and the doctrine of election.
5. Universalism ignores the clear teaching of the Bible about eternal judgment.
 - **Matthew 7:13-14** *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*
 - **Matthew 25:44-46** *“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

THINKING IT THROUGH...

IN SEARCH OF THE NOBLE PAGAN

- The inclusivists believe that there are “noble pagans” (pagan saints, anonymous saints) out there who are eternally saved by living up to the light they have. God respects their faith and applies to them the saving merits of Jesus Christ, despite and because of the fact that they have never heard the objective truths of the Gospel.
- The burden of proof is on the inclusivists to produce credible examples of such seekers after God. The evidence from missionaries is not encouraging. For example, Adoniram Judson worked for seven years (1812-1819) in Burma and suffered much persecution before he had even one convert, Moug Nau. Where were all the noble pagans eager to hear about the true God? Shortly thereafter a few more were saved.¹⁶
- Elka was a witchdoctor in his Wai Wai tribe deep in the jungles of British Guiana.
 - *The Wai Wais once practiced infant killing, indulged in three- and four-month-long orgies, mistrusted even their own families, and lived in constant fear of hostile spirits.*¹⁷
 - *The Wai Wai showed no evidence of living up to the light they had per Romans 1:20 and Romans 2:14-15. The Wai Wai people themselves were seemingly prepared by God for the work he was ready to do in and through them. This was evident as the degradation and decline in their old life became known. Since no man exists in a vacuum, they were being readied for the inner change that was offered them.*¹⁸
 - *The Wai Wai had no concept of a caring creator God. “God is not Mawalee,” he [Yukuma?] said, speaking of a legendary figure who had sprung from cohabitation of an anaconda with the turtle*

¹⁴ Millard J. Erickson, “The Fate of Those Who Never Hear,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1995), 3-15.

¹⁵ This is a reference to the recent emergence of annihilationism within evangelicalism, e.g., John R. W. Stott, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, and John Wenham. Erickson writes, *In fact debate over the doctrine of annihilation broke out at the Consultation on Evangelical Affirmations, and no statement could be adopted by the assembled theologians.*—Erickson, 13. See *Christianity Today*, June 16, 1989, 62-63.

¹⁶ Theology through Technology. <http://www.tlogical.net/bioadjud.htm>. Accessed 10.19.08. In 1832 there were 217 converts; in 1836, 1144 baptisms; 47 in 1839. *At the time of his death [1850] there were over 7000 baptized Christians in Burma along with 63 churches and 123 missionaries and pastors.*

¹⁷ Homer E. Dowdy, *Christ’s Witchdoctor* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers: 1963), from the book jacket.

¹⁸ Dowdy, x.

and who, as his first act, had created the Wai Wai. “I heard them say that God made everything. And he doesn’t forget the ones He made.”

“Mawalee went away after he made the Wai Wai and we haven’t seen him since,” Karum commented. It seemed to him that God had qualities Mawalee didn’t have.¹⁹

- The missionaries did not discover “pagan saints” among the Wai Wais. The missionary, Bob Hawkins, had once thought he was presenting God to Elka in a spiritual vacuum. He was wrong. Elka believed in the spirit world with more conviction than he did in the physical. He believed that it was full of evil demons, that it trickled out a small amount of good only when pleaded with and appeased. It was not hard for him to believe that God was a spirit.

But how could a Wai Wai believe that peace and love, rather than injury and vengeance, flowed from a spirit? The missionary tried to show Elka that while the Devil was the prince of this world, marshalling his demons in the powers of wickedness, God was stronger still and held even the devil’s final destruction in his hand—that, though sin abounded, grace abounded even more.

Elka knew the evil side of life; he would have to become acquainted with the good.²⁰

- The issue, therefore, is not that the unevangelized have not put their trust in a Person of whom they have never heard, but that they have suppressed the truth they have both received and understood.²¹
- They are not condemned for rejecting a Saviour of whom they have never heard. There are condemned for sinning against the light they have.²²
- By the way, our own country is becoming more and more lost—and marked by people who have never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel. In the hit movie, *Forrest Gump*, Forrest’s former commanding officer asks him, “Have you found Jesus yet, Gump?” Forrest replies, “I didn’t know I was supposed to be looking for him, sir.” That dialog confronts the contemporary Christian with the fact that North American Christianity no longer holds center-stage in public culture. There is no longer an American cultural consensus granting superiority or even viability to Christianity.²³ Christianity now exists on the margins; relegated to the private sphere. Christianity has become almost invisible to the culture. Roxburgh refers to this as “liminality,” i.e., existing at the margins. The new center of public culture is the rational mind. Our culture has lost “any genuine center that might give the culture coherence.”²⁴

THE COLLISION OF CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM

- Calvinism asserts that God long ago elected and predestined all those who would be saved. Then, in point of time, he surely draws those people to himself in salvation. Absent the initiative of God, no one would be saved. The origin of faith is divine.
- Arminianism asserts an ability and responsibility in every man to respond to the salvation offered by God. Predestination is redefined as God’s prescience of the future faith of the individual and his resultant choice of that person for salvation. The origin of faith is human.
- Regarding *Those Who Have Never Heard* the Calvinist believes that such people would never be able to respond to God without God’s initiative in birthing faith in their hearts. Consulting Romans 8:29-30, it is apparent that what God starts, he pushes on to completion. If God had chosen an isolated

¹⁹ Dowdy, 68.

²⁰ Dowdy, 93-94.

²¹ J. Ronald Blue in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, “Untold Billions: Are They Really Lost?”

²² Robert C. McQuilken, *The Message of Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947), 29.

²³ Evangelism textbooks used to affirm that four out of five of one’s friends and neighbors would come to church if given a personal invitation. Barna says that has decidedly changed. “According to Barna the number of people who said that they would definitely attend church if they were invited by a friend has declined significantly in the past fifteen years to the point where only 20 percent of nonchurchgoers are likely to respond to invitations to return to church.” Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

heathen to be saved, God would certainly provide him the objective truths to enable him to come to the fullness of faith.²⁵

WOULD THE REAL PAGAN SAINT PLEASE STAND UP

- Inclusivists point to certain Old Testament people before the Mosaic Covenant as examples of “pagan saints,” such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Melchizedek. It is clear in Scripture that these people all knew God and were eternally saved.
- However, the common factors in these instances are 1) extraordinary divine revelatory and salvific initiatives and 2) a human faith response.
- These instances do not provide precedence of a human faith response from the observation of general revelation.

THE CORNELIUS FACTOR

- Inclusivists point to Cornelius (Acts 10) as an example of the “pagan saint.” But note this: *The narrative really insists that a believer in God must become a believer in Christ...In Acts 10, Cornelius is loftily described as a God-fearer, alms giver, one who prayed continually, devout and righteous, and given angelic direction....Now if this paragon of paganness had to be directed to Christ in this life, why should not everyone else who seeks the true God?*²⁶
- Adoniram Judson of Burma wrote, *The spirit of inquiry . . . is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land.* [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6000 applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China - 'Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.' Others, from the frontiers of Kathay, 100 miles north of Ava - 'Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.' Others, from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is a little known - 'Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells us about Jesus Christ.'²⁷—Note that these seekers had no assurance of salvation. They had an assurance of peril. They did not find hope until they reached the missionary who gave them the objective truths of God's special revelation in the message of Jesus.

THE PRECEDENT OF CULTURES OF PERDITION

- Assuming the existence of “pagan saints,” it is troubling to see the evidence for widespread wickedness among people-groups of history. For example,
- The whole world was destroyed for excessive wickedness in the Noachic Flood. Only Noah and his immediate family were spared (8 souls). And this despite Noah's persistent preaching of righteousness.²⁸
- The entire populace of Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed excepting Lot's immediate family (four souls).²⁹
- The entire population of Canaan was destroyed before the Israelites because of their wickedness, with the exception of Rahab and her immediate family.³⁰

²⁵ Romans 8:29-30, *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* ³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

²⁶ Ramesh P. Richard, *The Population of Heaven* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 61.

²⁷ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 398-399.

²⁸ 2 Peter 2:5, *he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others*

²⁹ 2 Peter 2:7-8, *he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men* ⁸ *(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)*

³⁰ Exodus 23:23, *My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out;* Genesis 15:16, *In the fourth*

NARROW IS THE GATE...

- Jesus affirmed in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it..."
- In ancient Old Testament times, *Scripture does not portray masses of humans coming into salvation during that time....The redeemed were really few in number at that time, and those left out of the divine initiatives, that we know about, were incredibly large in number. More often there were massive judgments rather than massive salvations.*³¹
- In 1993, approximately 7,000 representatives from more than 125 of the world's religions came to attend the second World Parliament of Religions in Chicago....A hundred prominent leaders from about qa dozen creeds discussed, created, signed, and released a nine-page "Declaration of a Global Ethic"....Incredibly, the word "God" had to be left out of the 5,000-word "Declaration of a Global Ethic." Why? To include the word God would have excluded "all Buddhists and many faith groups with different views of God and the divine"....At the Parliament of World Religions, "God" was the offense; "Ultimate Reality" was passable.³²

UNPACKING THE MACEDONIAN CALL

- If there are noble pagans out there, then why the urgency of the missionary mandate?
- Romans 10:12-17, [T]here is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.
- In 1811 Adonirum Judson wrote, *How do Christians discharge this trust committed to them? They let three fourths of the world sleep the sleep of death, ignorant of the simple truth that a Savior died for them. Content if they can be useful in the little circle of their acquaintances, they quietly sit and see whole nations perish for lack of knowledge.*
- Why the urgency of the Macedonian call? If the Macedonian seekers could be saved by living up to the light they had, why did they need Paul to come preach to them? Acts 16:9-10, *During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

WHAT'S THE HURRY?; I'LL THINK ABOUT IT IN THE AFTERLIFE

- Hebrews 9:27, [M]an is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...
- Note that the Rich Man (Dives in tradition) got no second chance. Luke 16:23-26, *In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'* ²⁵ "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."; Leviticus 18:28, *And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you;* Leviticus 20:22-23, *"Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. ²³ You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them."*

³¹ Richard, 40.

³² Richard, 71-72

1. CHRISTOPHER ZOOLKOWSKI--NIGER

It's a great question that you're addressing this Sunday related to those who have never heard of Jesus, but who have a genuine faith and trust in the true God as did our father Abraham. A few of the veteran missionaries in Niger with whom I work have told me fascinating first-hand accounts of nomadic Tuaregs and Fulanis who have been wandering the desert having never had contact with a missionary or a church or the Bible. These nomads speak of a pre-existing awareness of their sin and need of a savior and also of revelations they had received of a Christ-like savior. They readily embraced the Gospel message as the message that they had believed all along.

I am convinced that God is in the business of redeeming His creation from the curse and that He does so in conventional as well as un-conventional and surprising ways. If God is saving individual pagans, or even entire families and communities, without using humans as the instrument of communicating His salvation through Jesus, it doesn't and shouldn't make a difference for either the unbeliever or the believer.

The unbeliever who has access to the written Word and to the Body of Christ can't say he doesn't need them on the basis of the pagan saint because God has made it clear that the Bible and fellowship in the Church are to be valued and sought after by each person who calls himself a child of God.

Neither can the believer use the pagan saint to avoid going into all the world. The written revelation we have received tells us that people won't hear without us, that our feet are the carriers of His message, and that what we do or don't do in this life will affect, not only ourselves, but other people as well in the next life.

I believe Jesus speaks to the theology of the pagan saint in John 21:21, where Peter is essentially asking Jesus if there is going to be "fairness" of treatment between him and John. I think an accurate modern paraphrase of Jesus answer to Peter is, "That's none of your business!" If the believer asks Jesus, "You're saving pagans without us, so what's the point of evangelism and missionary service?" Jesus will reply in like manner, "It's none of your business how I choose to save certain pagans. I told you what to do."

So, in summary, my experience in Niger tells me that God shows mercy on whom He will have mercy. He has compassion on whom He will have compassion. When He does so unconventionally without our help, it's exceptional and it's marvelous. When He does so through us feeble human conduits, it's even more of a miracle and a privilege we should all want to be a part of.

2. KEVIN BEACH--MEXICO

We have worked in the "animistic" part of the world for good part of 12 years and we have observed and studied how the Mexican Catholic culture, the Tarahumara and Tepehuan people tried their very, very best to "DO" all they could and in the "light" that they had. We have found that basically there are really two camps if you will on this subject. Both are just as lost.

- 1) Their basic concept of God is totally derailed.
- 2) Those who have a correct concept of God.

They look to the creation (both Indian groups gave their worship to the sun, moon, stars and other things) rather than the Creator. They are forced to look for their own solution to gain acceptance with their god. They have missed the true God. They fear. They in all their "doing" merely appease present wrath and for some good fortune in the afterlife as they travel not knowing where they will end up. The "civilized metropolitan" on the other hand whose professing religion is Catholic falls under the above less the sun, moon and stars. (that's for the "uncivilized")

The heathen are lost. The very "creation" that is worshipped and appeased by pagan religions is enough to condemn a man (for "they are without excuse..." Romans 1:20). Romans 10:1 reveals to us that Paul's heart desire was that the whole nation of Israel would be saved! Their basic concept of God was on track. They were proud of it too! So again two camps of people. 1) The heathen whose understanding of God is completely misguided and 2) People who may have a proper view of God but... both are lost.

Scripture boldly proclaims Jesus as the Savior of the world. Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, where by we must be saved."

The gospel is certainly "easy" and its merits attainable (Salvation) to those who would believe in Jesus. Galatians 3:22

We have numerous commands by Jesus for us to "Go into all the world and preach this gospel." Then Paul famously pens Romans Chap. 10! Vs 9-14...

A verse comes to mind when people choose to do their own thing. Proverbs 14:12.

3. DANA HUFF—MADRID, SPAIN

Well, you certainly haven't thrown me an easy one but I'll give it my best shot. Actually this is a question I have thought about recently after coming across an article in a theological journal about Clark Pinnock's position on this very subject. I had taken a class under Pinnock at Campus Crusade's Institute of Biblical Studies summer course and respected his teaching, at least at that time.

I would fall back on the basic underlying scriptures regarding salvation, the two key ones speaking to this point in my mind being John 14:6 – Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." and Romans 10:13-14. "for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?"

From these verses I see that there is no salvation, no right standing before God apart from the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. I take that to mean one must believe He died for our sins and then accept that sacrifice as payment for his sin. It has to be belief in the specific person of Jesus Christ the Son of Jehovah God of whom the unsaved must have some knowledge. From the Romans passage I glean that although God does reveal much about himself through nature, conscience and even culture (Rom. 1:19,20), only through specific revelation can one be redeemed, through a preacher of the word or a teacher, the Bible, evangelistic literature, etc.

Now, having said that, I do believe that God rewards those who respond to the light they have been given. Someone with no access to the word of God may be given a little light, and if he is positive toward that illumination, I believe God will give progressively more light and insight (Lk. 8:18) until He provides the specific revelation of the gospel through a missionary going to that person or bringing that person out of his situation to a place where he can hear the Truth. I believe God has, does and will continue to use extraordinary and even miraculous means to bring someone to the point where there are ready and able to hear the gospel.

There is ample anecdotal evidence of this happening. A missionary stepping off the boat in a remote area and being met by a native who says, “We have been waiting so long for you to come to tell us about God.” Our church here in Madrid and other missions in Spain who work with Muslims have heard repeatedly of Muslims, especially during Ramadan, who have had dreams in which Jesus appeared to them and called them to Himself. They afterward would seek someone to tell them more about Jesus or ask for a Bible so that they could find out for themselves.

So, I see the missionary as being essential in God’s dealings with men, for even if they have responded to general revelation, all men need the specific revelation of the sacrifice of the Son of God which is the only propitiation for our sin, and then need to respond in faith.

4. STEVE POUNDS—FRANCE; REACHING OUT TO MUSLIMS

Delighted to hear that you are tackling this vital topic! Two resources that I have benefited from are Hesselgrave’s Paradigms in Conflict, and Piper’s Let the Nations be Glad .

From my perspective, the continual bombardment of postmodern thought combined with materialism has really altered our perceptions of the biblical teaching on this subject. We are simply too uncomfortable with the implications of the need for special revelation which requires our personal involvement. This affects more than just “missions”. It seems that the health of missions is the proverbial canary in the coal mine. If we are weak in this area, then we need to check the foundations. The antidote is solid teaching, personal Bible study and personal evangelism in a discipling relationship.

It may be interesting to collect some informal stats. Drop by a high school SS class for example and ask how many have ever shared the gospel in the context of normal life (camps, mission trips, church activities etc. shouldn’t count for this survey). And then see how many have ever observed someone else share the gospel.

5. DEBBIE CHILDS—NORTHERN INDIA

I’ve not been trained in a seminary or trained in theology so these are just my personal thoughts about it.

I know that in Romans 1:20 it says that God’s invisible attributes are clearly seen.... I believe that....However, I feel that Satan has twisted that truth so that even though the truth is right in front of their eyes they still miss it or they interpret it in their own way to fit their needs.

I see that in Hinduism.... They have millions of gods and if none of those millions of gods fit their EXACT need, they create a new one and somehow take something in history, twist it, and make it back up their information.

I can't recall a specific this morning, but I have heard of things in the Hindu religion and you know that bits and pieces are from the Bible, just twisted.

When I went to a couple of the meetings at Canyon Hills where Ron Carlson was speaking of the different religions (which would be a great person to get his insights), I remember reading through the Mormons beliefs and it reminded me how they just twisted things.

Another one, is the book Peace Child by Don Richardson, talks about (and again I only remember bits and pieces from books I read, especially ones so long ago), where the two tribes knew that a life had to be given to bring about peace (sorry, I can't remember the specifics)...

All that to say, yes, I believe the truth is clearly before them, HOWEVER, they have to have someone to bring clarity to it. And, it may be just them watching our actions and how we live out the love of Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps them to see the difference and then maybe it all makes sense to them.

Even though the Holy Spirit could do this without our help, it is a mandate for us to go.

So, I also have a problem with "living up to the light they have."

That's why I'm here. Not to preach (that's not my gift), but to show the love of Christ (hopefully) with my actions so that they see the difference (hopefully) and ask.

6. ARLENE SORENSON--THAILAND

I confess I had not yet heard the term "pagan saint" but I will share some of my thoughts on your comment: The idea is that there are people in other lands and other religions who have never heard of Jesus Christ, but because they "live up to the light they have" from General Revelation, God accepts their primitive faith and applies the merits of Jesus Christ to them and they are saved.

It is scary to learn of evangelical churches becoming more and more liberal in their theology. Anyone who begins making God into the personality that they prefer – tolerant and not the holy Sovereign Lord is heading towards more and more deception. This is like "making God in our own image" and that is similar to Satan's conversation with Eve in the Garden when he led her to question God's character and His holy standards.

This attitude and belief that any one will be accepted for living up to the light they know removes the need to submit to the God who created us and gave us life and breath. The trends of the times make Jesus' question, in Luke 18:8 even more understandable. He asked, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Besides the issue of God's Sovereignty, the cross is also bypassed. If there were some other way of salvation except through Christ, then God would not have planned from eternity past that Jesus would become man and die in the sinner's place on the cross. No one else can provide salvation that brings us into right relationship with God.

Old Testament "believers" were brought into right relationship with God by faith. They did not know Jesus, but their faith in a holy God was shown in obedience to His will.

Finally, in Thai Buddhism, there is not a concept of a Sovereign God to whom we are to submit

and whom we are to obey. This is not easy to deal with when trying to share the Gospel. God must reveal Himself and my longing is that those who are hungry for something more than they have will come under the sound of the Gospel. Some people refuse to listen. Others are politely resistant.

It is not easy to proclaim that there is only one way – and the Church is responsible for the spread of the Gospel. How we need His fresh empowering to make known the God of Creation – and His Son – the only Savior.