“It’s Not Fair for God to Judge People For Sins They Didn’t Know Were Wrong”

How is it fair for God to judge an unsaved person’s sin on Judgment Day if that person did not know “specifically” that their action was a sin? If an unbeliever is taught sex outside marriage is morally OK and no one ever shows him in the Bible that it is against God’s laws, how can he be judged guilty? Don’t you have to be taught the law in order to be punished for it?

Thanks for your letter. This is a very good question. Briefly, here are some important points to bear in mind.

First, carefully read Romans 1:18-32 and 2:1-16.

> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*
> *because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.*
> *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*
> *For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*
> *Professing to be wise, they became fools,*
> *and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*
>
> *Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among*

them.
For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,
and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,
being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,
slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,
without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;
and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.
And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things.
But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?
Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

> *But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*
> *who will render to each person according to his deeds:*
> *to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;*
> *but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.*
> *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,*
> *but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
> *For there is no partiality with God.*
>
> *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;*
> *for it is not the hearers of the Law {who} are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.*
> *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,*
> *in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,*
> *on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

These passages strongly suggest that all men (with the exception of infants and the severely mentally retarded) have an inherent knowledge of God (through the things that He has made) and of basic morality (for God has "written" the law on their hearts in some sense). This knowledge of basic morality, though not perfect because of the darkening of our intellects due to sin, comes through our conscience. Thus, in this sense, all men have some knowledge of God and of their morally guilty status before Him—all men are therefore without excuse.

Second, God has graciously provided the Holy Spirit to convict unbelievers of their sin and (hence) their need for a Savior. Please see John 16:7-11 in this regard:

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

Thus, not only has God made His existence and basic morality clear to man through creation and conscience, but His Holy Spirit also convicts the world of their sin and need for salvation in Christ.

Finally, we must remember that God is perfectly holy, just, and fair (Deuteronomy 32:4, etc.). For this reason, we can be absolutely confident that on Judgment Day no one will be able to look God in the face and honestly complain of being treated unfairly or unjustly. God will be perfectly just and completely fair in His judgment of each individual. We can therefore safely rule out any sort of unfair or unjust judgment of any particular individual. Everyone will be treated fairly; no one will be treated unfairly. God is all-knowing and completely good. We can trust that He knows perfectly well just what an individual did—or did not—know about His moral standards. And we can trust that He will judge that individual fairly and with perfect justice.

I hope this helps.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“t’s Not Fair to Punish People with Hell for Believing What They Were Taught to Believe”

If all people are following the teachings of what have been taught to believe, how can any be punished? By punishment, I mean that some religions (Christianity) claim that if you don’t believe what they believe, you will go to hell.

Good question!

Two aspects to my answer: first, this question is coming from a man-based perspective, as if all religions were equally valid and only about what people are taught. (In other words, leaving God out of the equation.)

Philosopher J.P. Moreland gives this illustration: let’s say I am with a group of people and I ask them to describe my mother. They all say, “I don’t know your mother,” and I say, “Go ahead and give it your best guess.” One says, “52 and blue eyes and brown hair.” Another says, “58 and slender, with silver hair.” A third says “55, hazel eyes and blonde highlights.” The problem is, they are all shots in the dark. They are nothing more than guesses. I’m the only one who knows what my mother looks like.

All religions are like that, with the exception of one. They

are all shots in the dark, sheer guesses about the nature and character of God. Except for Christianity, since Jesus says He came from heaven to tell us what God is like because God is His Father. It wasn't a guess for Jesus to tell us about God, it was a reporting of fact. Which is why Christianity is bold enough to say, "This is what God is like, and all other truth claims about God are mere guesses."

The second part of my answer is that in Romans 1, God says that He has revealed enough about Himself in creation that men are without excuse:

> *…because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)*

Christianity is about our broken relationship with God being reconciled and restored through Jesus Christ, and only through Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us about His relationship with us, through His written communication (the Bible) and through His Son leaving heaven to come to earth and show us. Its true that if we try to get to God any way except through the one way He has provided—the death and resurrection of His Son—the relationship will remain broken. Which means an eternity separated from God. . . which is hell.

How is it people can be punished for not believing (actually, the Bible's language is about trusting) in Jesus? Because regardless of what religion people are taught, God has still spoken through His creation: of the earth, of the cosmos, of the moral nature of human beings. And He holds everyone accountable for responding to the evidence He planted in His creation, even if it is contradicted by the teachings of the various world religions.

It’s like a teacher telling her class that there will be a test on Friday, but rumors sweep throughout the class: that the test has been cancelled, or the test will be postponed to the next week, or that tests have been done away with altogether. Regardless of what rumors students may have heard, they are still responsible for what the teacher told them.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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