

“What About Those Who Have Not Heard?”

What happens to those who have not heard about Jesus and therefore cannot choose or reject Him?

The Bible does not give a complete answer to the question. But there are certain principles that are contained in the Bible; so, although we may not be totally dogmatic on this subject, neither can we say that we must be agnostic toward it. There is sufficient information given so that we can gain a good perspective on it.

First, God never intended anyone to be out of fellowship with Him. Heaven was intended to be man's destination. God is holy and loving and wants everyone to repent (Exod. 34:6-7; Jonah 4:10-11; 2 Peter 3:9). Though He is a just and righteous God, He's also a loving God.

Second, God's nature prevents Him from being unfair. The Bible teaches that God judges fairly (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 7:11, 9:18; 1 Peter 1:17). In His infinite justice, He will be much fairer than we, with our limited understanding of justice, could possibly be.

Third, man is not in total ignorance or spiritual darkness. The Bible clearly teaches that man has an awareness both of God and of eternity (Psalm 19:1-4; Eccl. 3:11; John 1:9; Acts 14:15-17; Rom. 1:18-21, 2:15). It was the Roman sage Seneca who said, "God is near you, is with you. A sacred Spirit dwells within us, the Observer and Guardian of all our evil and all our good. There is no good man without God." [Quoted in J. Oswald Sanders, *How Lost Are the Heathen?* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 53.]

However, this God-consciousness is not enough. Man must have more information than this in order to be saved. The Christian

message is in jeopardy at either extreme. If God-consciousness is sufficient for salvation, then the Bible's revelation is unnecessary. This is wrong because the Bible places such an importance in bringing the message of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard (Rom. 10:14). But if the Bible is the only way a person can be saved, then we are back to our initial question about those who haven't heard.

In these cases, we have a fourth principle: God will provide the necessary information to those who seek Him. God rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6). He will give anyone who earnestly seeks Him enough information to make a decision (1 Chron. 15:2; Psalm 9:10; Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Acts 8:30-31). God sent Peter to a Roman official named Cornelius to tell him about Jesus (Acts 10). It is also possible that God may work faith in a person's heart so that, like Job, he may say, "I know that my Redeemer lives," without knowing the identity of the Redeemer.

Fifth, the responsibility for a decision concerning this information belongs to each one of us. We are ultimately responsible for the course we choose. No one can make the decision for us. As C.W. Hale Amos wrote, "From what we know, respecting the terms of salvation, we are led irresistibly to the conclusion that no man can perish except by his own fault and deliberate choice." [Ibid., 54.]

We do not have a complete answer to this question. The above principles indicate that God wants all of us to repent, that He is a fair judge, that He will give all of us enough information, and that we are responsible for the decision we make based on that information.

But there is not a totally clear picture about what happens to those who have not heard. This should give us all the more reason to make sure, if we are Christians, that we do what we can to share the Good News with all people or, if we are not Christians, we make a decision for Jesus Christ today. If we

are not completely sure that we are believers, we should make sure by a conscious decision. As C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, “If you are worried about the people outside [of Christianity], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself.” [C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: Macmillan, 1972), 50.]

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