

## Salvation in None Other than Jesus Christ!

A common objection raised by skeptics to the Biblical doctrine of God, especially in its exclusiveness of people who lived their entire lives without ever once hearing about the true God. The question asked in Romans 10:14 is, "*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?*"

This seems an especially vexing problem when expressed in terms of one having to believe in Christ in order to receive eternal life. Perhaps men could be expected to know about God through nature, but, *how could anyone ever learn about Jesus Christ without reading the New Testament* or hearing someone present the gospel to them?

Jesus has plainly stated, "*No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*" [John 14:6]. And Peter said, "*Neither is there salvation in any other...(other than Jesus Christ)...for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" [Acts 4:12].

**Doubters vigorously object to the idea of a God who requires faith in Christ for salvation without giving everyone equal opportunity to hear about Him.**

This objection, however, refutes itself, for a completely equal treatment of all men in this respect would mean that all men must be created *exactly* alike, with *exactly* the same genetic and environmental backgrounds and with *exactly* the same experiences throughout life. Otherwise, inevitably, there would be inequality of opportunity, and those who had lesser opportunity could still accuse God of favoritism toward those who had more. But for God to create all men exactly alike would insure that they would all respond exactly alike and therefore He would have created a race of *automatons* . . . [that is, "*those who act in a routine manner, without active intelligence*"] . . . with no real freedom at all, and every man would have the same destiny, whatever it was!

In the real world, obviously, such is not the case. God has created man in infinite variety, with no two people alike at all. Individual abilities and opportunities vary widely, with respect not only to the Gospel but also to every aspect of life. No one, in fact, would really want it to be otherwise.

People may complain about their individual lot, but no one would really wish everyone to be exactly alike. Complexity and variety are clearly preferable to *homogenized uniformity*, but the very nature of "*variety*" involves non-equality.

Considered in these terms, it is obvious that this question of God's "*fairness*" is broader than just the problem of man's acquaintance with the Gospel. The question deals with all types of differences and inequities. The entire spectrum of variability of human back- grounds and opportunities must be taken into consideration. In any case, it is clear that the existence of variety, and therefore inequality, is quite consistent with the creative power of God.

Man is a free being and therefore capable of responding to God's will and purpose in whatever degree these have been made known to him. If some have more knowledge and opportunity than others, they are to that degree more responsible and therefore more blame-worthy if they fail. God states in Luke 12:48, "*Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.*" Though inequalities are inescapable, God is perfectly able to evaluate all of

these in relation to individual responses. He is also able to effect a system of graded rewards and punishments in the same proportion in a future life and this is exactly what the Bible teaches He will do. Jesus states in Revelation 22:12, "*My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*"

As a matter of fact, however, God is not obligated to any man in any respect. No man has lived up to the light he has received and thus no one deserves salvation. Ecclesiastes 7:20 states, "*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*" and Romans 3:11-12 states, "*There is none that seeketh after God...there is none that doeth good, no not one*" and verse 19 adds, "*that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*"

Since all men are consciously sinners, even against whatever light they may have, they have no proper claim against God's justice. In perfect justice, God could consign everyone to eternal separation from Himself. If He condescends to forgive and save anyone at all, it is entirely a matter of His grace, not of man's merit.

This being the case, any gauge which God establishes as a basis for man's salvation is altogether of *grace* and no one has a right to question it. God could, if He so elected, save only those people who were, let's say, over seven feet tall, He would be completely righteous in doing so, at least as far as any obligation which He has to anyone shorter than seven feet is concerned, because He has no such obligation. Romans 9:21 asks, "*Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?*"

By the same token, God is under no obligation to see that every individual man hears the Gospel, since every man has already rejected the earlier light God had given him. Even if no man ever heard the way of salvation and no man therefore ever accepted it, God would still be perfectly just in leaving all men in their lost condition. That is all anyone deserves!

On the other hand, it is wonderfully true that God is a God of love as well as justice. He earnestly desire "*all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" [1 Timothy 2:4]. The criterion which God established for man's salvation was not an arbitrary standard (such as whether a man was seven feet tall, or was able to acquire a Ph.D. degree, or to accumulate a million good deeds, or something else) Instead, God has established one which was uniquely consistent both with God's character and with His desire to bring the greatest number of lost men to salvation.

The reasonableness and the necessity of the particular plan of salvation as ordained by God will be discussed in a later lesson, however, the point here is that any plan of salvation whatever is entirely due to God's mercy, and not in the least respect merited by man.

God, in grace, has provided a Savior, able and willing to "*save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him,*" [Hebrews 7:25] regardless of man's sins or his religious background or anything else. Because man is still the free moral being, however, God will not *force* salvation on anyone, asking only that a man *voluntarily* receive salvation as a free gift, accepting Christ by faith as personal Savior and Lord.

Therefore, the offer of salvation is utterly **underserved** and **completely free**, needing only acceptance to become effective for any man. But now, of course, before it can be accepted,

it must be heard. *Obviously the one who never hears the Gospel cannot accept it!* If he never hears, he will die in his sins. However, it should be remembered that he did not *deserve* to hear it or to be saved. Even if he *does* hear it, he may reject it, thus adding even more to his weight of guilt before God.

Nevertheless, God does desire that he hear the Gospel and have opportunity thereby to be saved. **The only problem, then, is how to convey the news to him.**

It is conceivable that God *could have* thundered from heaven to men how to be saved. Or perhaps, He *could have* dispatched His mighty angels to every corner of the globe to search out every man and tell him about salvation through Christ Jesus.

Man, under such a barrage as this, would probably believe what they heard, for how, under such circumstances, could they do otherwise! But relief evoked in this way would be born out of necessity...just as a man would come to believe in the burning ability of the flame when his clothes are on fire. For God's purpose to be fulfilled, on the other hand, He desires man to respond in a faith which is founded on love and gratitude, not on compulsion.

Therefore, God has given man himself the high privilege of conveying the good news of salvation to other men. Each one who has himself been saved is to become a messenger to tell others, by whatever means and with whatever abilities God has given him. ***There is no other means available!*** God has so ordained, and prescribed, that neither He nor the holy angels can bring salvation to mankind without inhibiting man's freedom to reject it; neither Satan nor his wicked angels will do it because they by all means wish to prevent man from hearing the Gospel; unsaved men can't do it because they either don't know it or don't believe it; **only the ones who can serve as God's witnesses are those who themselves have been redeemed!**

But it necessarily follows that, if each unsaved man must wait until he encounters some of God's human witnesses before he can hear the Gospel, he may never hear it. It is true that God desires and urges believers to "*preach the Gospel to every creature*" [Mark 16:15], even promising glorious rewards to those who do [1 Thessalonians 2:19; Daniel 12:3; etc.] and warning of sorrow and rebuke to those who do not [Ezekiel 30:8; 1 Corinthians 9:16; etc.]. Nevertheless, it is sadly true that Christians have been negligent, fearful, and slothful, in implementing this commission, and multitudes have lived and died without once hearing of God's glorious provision of salvation.

Now the heathen or the skeptic may very properly and with full justification rebuke the Christian for his negligence in spreading the Gospel. But this does not justify him in rejecting it or in criticizing God for it. As we have seen, there was really no other way it could have been done and God was under no obligation either to provide a Savior or to send a messenger at all. The message *is* going out this way, and multitudes *have* been saved this way, and isn't this, in itself, sufficient proof that this was the best way?

In fact, there is some evidence that God may go even further than this in trying to reach lost men. "*God is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" [2 Peter 3:9]. There is no doubt that the great majority of men who are without the Gospel - whether animists...[The belief that natural objects possess deity]...or Muslims, or Hindus or whatever they are - not only do not know about Christ but don't want to know! They vigorously resist the Gospel when they do hear it. It is not lack of opportunity to hear the truth, but unwillingness to respond if they do hear it, that is their real condemnation.

Nevertheless, it does seem that there may be some individuals in every nation and tribe who do have a real desire to know how to be saved and who would respond if they heard it with sufficient understanding. In view of the great lengths to which God has gone in order to provide salvation, it does seem conceivable that He might undertake in some special way, if necessary, to get the message to those who would really desire it. "*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him*" [2 Chronicles 16:9].

Missionaries frequently have told of entering new tribes or areas and finding individuals actually anticipating their arrival and eager to learn about the way of salvation. The experience of Cornelius in Acts 10 seems to have been paralleled in some degree in such instances. As Peter told Cornelius, "*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.*" [Acts 10:34-35]. As soon as Peter preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his waiting household, they all immediately believed on Christ and received the Holy Spirit.

Suppose, however, that no missionary was available for God to lead into such an area where prepared hearts were ready and waiting. Is there any way in which the Gospel message can reach such a man?

He does, of course, have the witness of his conscience that he has a basic responsibility to obey a higher power. Those who do not have God's written Word, Paul says, "*...shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another*" [Romans 2:15]. Another translation of this same verse states, "*They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, their conscience bears them witness, as their moral convictions accuse or it may defend them.*"

And, one should, also, know by the witness of creation that there must be a God who created him and to whom, therefore, he is responsible. "*For the invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead*" [Romans 1:20].

Furthermore, since all men are descended from the three sons of Noah, God's primeval revelation was the common property of the ancestors of all present nations at one time. In every religion...distorted though it may have become through both demonic corruption and human invention...there can be traced elements of God's original revelation.

Most religious traditions, for example, preserve a record of the great Flood and of a primeval golden age at the dawn of history. All religious sense, too, that man is somehow alienated from God (or "gods") and that something needs to be done to restore the lost fellowship. Most of them preserve the knowledge that god's favor can be restored only through

sacrifice, and so various animals - sometimes even humans - are offered as a propitiatory sacrifice for this purpose.

Although this knowledge is often corrupted into the form of gross polytheism, with sacrifices made to idols and to demons, there still seems to be a vague awareness in most cases of a distant High God who is somewhere "*out there*." Many religions also retain the idea of a coming Redeemer, who will somehow restore all things to their primeval perfection, though now these beliefs often seem more descriptive of the coming Anti-Christ than of the true Christ. In any case, certain features of God's true program for man's salvation seem to have been preserved in vague and distorted form through mythologies, through the names and stories associated with stars and constellations, and through certain religious practices and traditions.

Is it possible that an individual who desires to find the true God and is willing to believe His revelation may somehow be guided by the Holy Spirit (whose ministry is to "*convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*" [John 16:8]) into an awareness of his own sin before his creator-God? Since Jesus Christ is the "*propitiation...for the sins of the whole world*" [1 John 2:2], the price has been paid for his redemption. And since Christ also is "*the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*" [John 1:9], there may yet remain in his understanding a dim hope that God must have somewhere provided a Savior.

He might also realize that he is unable to save himself and must rely completely on God to save him in whatever way He may have provided. If there does exist such a person, and if he does arrive at such an attitude of faith and trust in God as Savior, this is the same attitude with which one who does know about Christ must approach Him for salvation, and is, of course, produced only as the Holy Spirit "*draws*" him. Can we say that, like Abraham, "*his faith is counted for righteousness*"? [Romans 4:5]. "*He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him*" [Hebrews 11:6].

We do not know whether individuals like this have existed nor how God would undertake to get the Gospel message to them if they did. God is both just and loving, and we must leave such matters in His hands. The Scriptures seem altogether silent concerning such hypothetical situations.

On the other hand, it is crystal clear that the heathen (whether highly cultured or grossly savage) are lost in the darkness of sin and rebellion, and that Christians have been commanded by Christ to carry the testimony of salvation "*unto the uttermost parts of the earth*" [Acts 1:8].