



GLC  PRESENTS:

APOLOGETICS WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT HEARD?

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If Jesus is the only way to God, what happens to those who never hear about Him?

Surely it would be **unfair** for God to judge people for not believing in Jesus when they were **never given the chance** in their lifetime to hear about Jesus.

This question can be directed towards God's nature and character:

How can we put our faith in a person who is not morally trustworthy, someone who is not perfectly fair, just, and totally loving?

- The question above is a question about fairness, justice, wisdom.
- It is a question about trusting and committing to God.

How Do We Respond?

We are limited in our understanding.

We must acknowledge that we don't understand everything. There things that has been revealed to us but there are also many things not revealed.

Isaiah 55:8–9

⁸“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.
⁹“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Deuteronomy 29:29

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.”

Approach the Question from a Well-Reasoned Faith

“We are supposed to reason from God's Word, taking it as our ultimate unquestionable starting point. Any alternative is arbitrary and self-refuting. Reason is not a substitute for God; rather, it is a gift from God.”

- Dr. Jason Lisle

Following the example of Paul in his missionary journey...

Acts 17:2

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Acts 18:4

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:19

They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

God Himself invites us to reason together with Him.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.

Start with what we know about God

God is just.

Judgement is not going to be arbitrary or capricious. Our Lord is the source of all justice.

Isaiah 61:8a

“For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity;”

2 Thessalonians 1:6

“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,”

Our concept of justice comes from God, as part of being created in His image.

God is loving.

Psalm 145:8–9

⁸The Lord is gracious and merciful;

Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

⁹The Lord is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.

The justice and love of God is clearly revealed in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Romans 3:25–26 (NLT)

²⁵For God presented **Jesus as the sacrifice for sin**. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that **God was being fair** when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past,

²⁶for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

Exclusivity

Only those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

- Salvation is thru Christ alone (John 14:6)
- No other name that we are saved (Acts 4:12)
- Only through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13)

Inclusivity

Wide inclusivity of those who will be saved.

- God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
- He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. (2 Peter 3:9)
- ‘whoever’ believes in Him will not perish (John 3:16)
- ‘whoever’ calls the name of the LORD will be saved. (Romans 10:13)

One must believe in Jesus in order to be saved.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him** shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Not all will respond to Jesus in faith.

John 3:18–19

¹⁸He who believes in Him is not judged; **he who does not believe** has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness** rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”

We must share the good news.

Romans 10:11–15

¹¹For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴How 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? ¹⁵How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”

How could God condemn innocent people?

The implication when people ask this question - what about those who have never heard? Is that we are at a final judgment and there's been a great injustice where millions of people are judged because they were born in the wrong place and in the wrong time with their cry that they've never heard about Jesus. However, the Bible tells us otherwise.

Revelations 19:1–2a

¹After this, I heard what sounded like a vast crowd in heaven shouting, "Praise the Lord!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

²His judgments are true and just.

Just like Abraham while he did not fully comprehend God's judgment, but he confidently asserted that God the judge of the earth will do right and Genesis 15:6 says it was credited to him as righteousness. How did he come to this conclusion? Because while we may not understand everything, we can fundamentally trust that our God will do right.

Is anyone innocent?

Surely, we would have grounds to complain that innocent people are condemned.

The Biblical evidence supports the following facts:

- Lost humanity consistently distorts general revelation that demonstrates the fact that people live under the wrath of God (see Rom. 1:18–23).

- Thus, humanity is dead in sin and alienated from a saving knowledge of God (see Rom. 3:9-19,23).

- All people stand condemned and are, by nature, children of wrath (see Rom. 1:18–20; 2:1; 3:9–24; 5:12–21; 11:32; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:1–3,12; Col. 2:13–14; 1 Pet. 1:18; 2 Pet. 1:4).

- All people without Christ are lost and without hope (see Ps. 16:1–2; Eph. 2:12).

On the day of judgement, there will be no one who is innocent.

Romans 1:18-21

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For 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. ²¹For 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.

No one will be judged about what they don't know about Jesus. But they will be judged by what they do know about God.

- People instinctively know the existence of God by creation and their conscience. (Romans 2:15)
- People are guilty of 'willful ignorance'.

No one will be condemned for not believing in Jesus for those who have not heard of Jesus.

People are judged on what they do know, not on what they don't know. They are condemned not because they have not heard; they are condemned because they are sinful.

God would not be unjust to condemn sinners.

Even if God were to save nobody He would not be unjust. Much like a business person chose to write off the debt of one and not another.

Is this incompatible with God being all loving? Why not give all people the chance to be saved.

If God is all loving why wouldn't he give everyone an opportunity to be saved? Isn't this unfair?

At least everyone who desires to be saved? This is the real difficulty presented by the problem of those who have never heard the gospel. How can an all-loving God who desires all people to be saved allow people to go to hell simply because by accident of history they were born in a place the gospel wouldn't penetrate?

Does it mean that only those who hear about Christ can actually be saved by Christ?

- We are sure that those who respond in faith to the explicit preaching of the gospel will be saved.
- Those who hear the explicit preaching of the gospel and reject it are condemned.
- Nowhere does it explicitly say that only those who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ can be saved while all others are swept into a lost eternity.
- On the other hand, neither does it explicitly promise that those who hve never heard the gospel do have a chance to be saved.

Different views have developed to what the answer to this question might be:

Theological Views	Position	How it is Viewed	Biblical Support
Hard Exclusivism	Only those who heard the gospel and directly put their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved.	Presents God as unloving as those who are unevangelized will not be saved.	Romans 10:17 - faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
Pluralism	All religions are valid channels of salvation.	Attractive because it fosters tolerance and peace.	
Inclusivism	People can be saved without knowledge of Christ through their faith in whatever revelation they have of God.	Adopted by the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council and a minority of evangelicals.	Salvation of God fearing Jews and Gentiles before the time of Jesus. Like Rahab in Joshua 2 – who did not know Jesus but they put their faith in the revelation they did receive from God.
Soft Exclusivism	In addition to preaching the gospel, God can use special or supernatural revelation to bring people to faith in Christ.	Missionaries report that these events are occurring especially in places of harshly intolerant cultures where Christianity is explicitly outlawed and it is difficult if not impossible to preach the gospel.	The Biblical accounts of Cornelius in Acts 10 to whom God sent an angel to help him hear the gospel; and of Saul in Acts 9 who encountered the risen Christ himself on the road to Damascus.

Theological Views	Position	How it is Viewed	Biblical Support
Molinism	God so ordered the world that those who never hear the gospel and are lost are only people who would have not believed the gospel and be saved even if they have heard of it.		Acts 17:24-28 says that God determines the time set for men and the exact places as where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find him, though He is not far from each one of us.
Agnosticism (as to the fate of the unevangelized)	We do not know the fate of the unevangelized because the Bible never addresses the particular question directly. The missionary imperative is not diminished.	Affirmed repeatedly at major evangelical conferences using the Biblical accounts of Melchizedek, Naaman, Cyrus and the sailors in Jonah's boat as cases.	The Bible does not explicitly answer what happens to the unevangelized. (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 10:12-13)

Source: RZIM and The Gospel Coalition

How does God judge those who have not heard?

1. Affirm it is a legitimate question. Humbly acknowledge that we don't have all the answers.
2. Explain that this is what we know - no one can be saved on their own it is from Jesus.
3. It is a gift of grace, and that God's desire is that all people are saved.
4. He never forces people to accept.
5. There will be no one who will be judged unfairly.
6. All who seek Him sincerely will find Him and will be saved.
7. How that all works itself out to the unevangelized, that we don't know.
8. But given who God is there must be many options at His disposal for people to know Jesus.
9. We can trust that Jesus, the judge of all the earth, will do right. (list some of the different possibilities that different theologians have suggested as to how God might work things out for the unevangelized)
10. If the person is not a Christian, then we can gently remind them that if they have heard the gospel, that this is not a question that applies to them personally. What matters to them personally now is that individual response to Christ's invitation to repentance and a faith relationship with Him.

