

Judging Those Who Have Not Heard

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How will God judge those who've never heard about Jesus?

Acts 4:5-12 (ch 3 healed man and preached; number 5000)

Some believe that those outside of Christ may still be saved if they have sought after God (in their own way). The Bible, on the other hand, shows that salvation is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. The apostles taught no other way! No other way of salvation is given in the pages of the NT. And if all who now live are subject to the terms and conditions of the new covenant, then apparently no other way of salvation exists.

In Romans 10:1-3, Paul expresses his sincere desire for the salvation of his Jewish brethren. The implication is that they were not (then) presently saved because “they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”

Thus Paul continues to impress upon his readers the importance of preaching the gospel to those who have not heard (v8-16). “So then faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (v17).

Acts 10-11 speaks about Cornelius, who was “...a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually” (Acts 10:2).

But despite his good works and desire to serve God, he was still lost until he heard and obeyed the gospel (Acts 11:14).

So how will God judge those who have never heard the gospel? Romans 2:12-16 is sometimes used to teach that God will judge such people according to their consciences. But it actually appears that Paul is merely indicating that all are guilty of sin, whether they know the Law or not. He concludes that all will therefore be judged according to the gospel.

That makes it imperative that the gospel be preached to all creation (Mark 16:15).

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned/condemned.”

The fact remains that God is a just God, and since He is perfect and holy, He has to punish sin (which is why He provided One to bear that punishment in our place). And ignorance does not appear to be an acceptable excuse!

Leviticus chapter 4 speaks often about people sinning “unintentionally;” they were still considered as guilty. Leviticus 5:17 says, “Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty, and shall bear his punishment.”

Ezekiel 3:17-21 shows that God will still punish those who are sinful, even if they have not been warned of God’s judgment.

Furthermore, Acts 17 speaks about people searching after God; v30-31 says that God used to overlook ignorance, but “is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

But God is also a loving and merciful God, and He will surely also judge such people graciously.

In Luke 12:47-48, in the context of being ready for the Day of Judgment, Jesus said, “And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”

Thus it appears that, while those who have never heard the gospel message of Christ will apparently be found guilty of sin, they may be “beaten with fewer stripes” because of their lack of knowledge.