

Hard Questions: The Question of the Heathen

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Introduction: It's been a couple of weeks, but when we were together last time, we introduced the subject of hard questions. Clever atheists or curious agnostic sometimes pitch us hard questions. The existence of questions need not trouble us. Rather it should motivate us to find the answers that defend the faith. In fact, the Bible teaches us that we should have our answers ready.

KJV 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

With that in mind, we are ready to pick up our second hard question: the question of the heathen. We will follow the same format we introduced last time.

- State the Problem
- Survey the Scripture
- Suggest an Answer

1. State the Problem

The question usually is stated something like this:

“What happens to the people in the darkest jungles of Africa who have never heard about your Jesus? God wouldn't send those people to hell, would He?”

Both of these questions, cut at the heart of God's compassion. It suggests that God is not giving every man a fair chance.

Christianity Today: “Such a question implies that God lacks compassion because he's imposed his plan of salvation on us. Often such inquirers seem to imply that they're more compassionate than God!”

Syllogism: There are people who have never heard about Jesus
It would be unjust to send them to hell.
Therefore, your God is not very compassionate/loving.

2. Survey the Scripture

What does the Bible really say about the heathen (those who don't know the God of the Bible)?

A. People without Jesus know more about God than we think.

KJV Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. 2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. 3 *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard.

KJV Romans 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

➤ *What do people who have never heard about Jesus know?*

They know there must be a god bigger than them. And they can know that this God is intelligent, powerful, orderly, and gracious.¹

There is therefore no place in the world where God hasn't already spoken through his creation to the hearts of men. That doesn't mean that a person can discover all he needs to believe through creation. But there is enough to point him to the Creator God.

B. People without Jesus will go to Hell.

KJV Psalm 9:17 The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God.

KJV Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

KJV Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

➤ *How many sins does it take to condemn a man to hell?*

KJV James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

C. People without Jesus remain the objects of God's compassion.

KJV Lamentations 3:22 *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

KJV 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance

➤ *How many people is God obligated to save?*

KJV 1 Timothy 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

3. Suggest an Answer

A. Universalism – all men eventually are converted.

➤ *Are there other ways into the favor of God besides Jesus?*

KJV Acts 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

KJV Luke 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Christianity Today: "For God to force people to go to heaven against their wishes wouldn't be heaven—it would be hell. Atheist author Jean-Paul Sarte noted that the gates of hell are locked from the inside by the free choice of men and women."²

B. Second Chance – men will get a second chance after death to choose Christ.

¹ And a host of other things about God can be learned from creation. See <http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/mevangel/heathen.htm> accessed 2017-03-12.

² <http://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/evangelism/tcw-2000-002-7.62.html?start=2> accessed 2017-03-02. First appeared in *On Mission* (September/October 1999). Used by permission of the North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Georgia. Frank Harber, evangelist-in-residence and professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, is author of [*Reasons for Believing*](#) (New Leaf Press).

KJV 1 Peter 3:19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

KJV Luke 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; 23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

➤ *Do men have a second chance after death to be restored to God?*

C. Missions – God's compassion is revealed in the preachers He sends.

➤ *What proof do we have of that God really loves the heathen?*

KJV Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

KJV Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

➤ *What does God do for the searching soul longing to know God?*

Example: Ethiopian?

KJV Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

Christians have long maintained that God rewards the seeking heart by sending the gospel to them.

Example: Papua New Guinea The following letter was sent by Eric Kaisoa to NTM a few years ago:³

"I'm writing again for the 7th time to ask if you will come to my village or not..."

"Now I'm asking you to return a letter to me now. In the name of Jesus please return a letter quickly. I just want a missionary. I'm just wasting my money on these pens and paper, they don't bear fruit. This one must produce the fruit right."

Eric wrote these letters for ten years, but there were not enough workers to send to his village. As Jesus said, "the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

In 2013, missionaries finally answered his plea. When they arrived, their first priority was to visit Eric and let him know his efforts had finally paid off – They were there to tell him and his people God's talk!

When they reached Eric's home and spoke with his wife they learned something heartbreaking. Eric had died two years before their visit — without having a chance to hear God's talk.

Conclusion: So should I respond to the knowledge of the heathen who haven't heard? Here's how (Romans 10:14-18).

- 1) Pray that the light may come to them.
- 2) Give that the light may come to them.
- 3) Go that the light may come to them.

³ <http://blog.godreports.com/2016/02/when-tribes-beg-for-missionaries-to-come-and-share-the-talk-about-god/> accessed 2017-03-12.

We who know the gospel “owe” the burden of sharing it with others.