



TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM CHRISTIAN TEENS

What About The Unreached?

By

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We are answering tough questions from Christian teenagers – and the tougher the better.

Tens of thousands of teens are walking away from their belief in Christ every year in the United States. One of the reasons they give is that Christian adults are not answering their tough questions.

We want to do something about that and have joined with youth groups and a Christian school to address the tough questions from their teens.

We now move to the question about the ‘unreached.’ It’s one of the most-asked questions and concerns Christian teens deeply. It goes to their strong interest in justice and fairness.

Unreached By The Gospel

Unreached people necessarily if not likely not possessing saving faith due to no fault of their own: Are these assertions true given that Jesus is the only way to heaven? If so how is God's mercy fairly administered? Certainly justice is what's fair and mercy is categorically not, but neither is feeding two hungry men when you could have fed ten. Perhaps this analogy subtly shifts the focus of this argument, but I think it does (sort of) illustrate the point of my question."

Great question!

Let's look at the issue of unreached people not possessing saving faith due to no fault of their own first, then we'll address the fairness of God's mercy.

One of the best summary statements concerning people in general, including those who are unreached by the Gospel, is early in Paul's letter to the Romans.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”

ROMANS 1:18-23

This assertion from Paul demonstrates that unreached people who don't know the Gospel, along with reached people who have rejected the Gospel, do not possess saving faith due to fault of their own. They are “without excuse.”

The reality of everyone's future is they will one day stand before the Almighty God and give an account of decisions and actions they made during their life on earth.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”

REVELATION 20:12-13

I have great confidence in God's ability to judge rightly and fairly. Because of that, we need to understand how God is going to judge people.

We learn from Jesus that He will be the Judge –

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

JOHN 5:21-23

That’s interesting in light of the fact that Jesus is also the primary focus of the Gospel. Jesus will judge people based on how they responded to what He did for them when He died on the Cross to pay the penalty for sin.

Jesus made it abundantly clear to His disciples, and His disciples to us, that Christians need to be about the business of preaching the Gospel to people in every nation, every language. Jesus wants us to make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe whatever He has commanded us. Why? One reason is that Jesus will one day judge every human being, “each one according to his works.” Christians need to take the Lord’s

command to preach and teach seriously because He is going to judge all people one day.

Jesus will also judge Christians for what they did with their lives. It will be a different kind of judgment than unsaved people. Unsaved people will be judged according to their works. If their names are not written in the Book of Life – “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:15) Not so for saved people. Paul wrote about that to the Christians in ancient Corinth –

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:9-11

This was a follow-up comment to something Paul wrote to the Corinthians in an earlier letter –

“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9-15

Jesus will judge Christians based on being a ‘fellow worker’ building on the foundation that Jesus and His apostles laid for us. If the work a Christian does to build on that foundation endures, ‘he will receive a reward.’ However, if the the work a Christian does not pass the Lord’s judgment, ‘he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” Saved people are not going to become unsaved when Jesus judges them “before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Christians are to reach out to unsaved people and tell them about the saving grace of God – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unsaved people who hear that message and receive it are saved and their names will be written in the Book of Life. Unsaved people who hear that message and reject it until they die will remain unsaved and their names will not be written in the Book of Life.

So, what about people who live and die and never hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Will they be saved or unsaved? Will their names be written in the Book of Life or not? Let’s look back at Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The first chapter of Romans gives us some insight into what people were like in the days before and after the great Flood.

Let's pick up where we left off in Romans 1 –

“Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the

righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

ROMANS 1:24-32

That's what God saw when He looked down on the pre-flood people and what He saw when He looked down on the post-flood people at the Tower of Babel. Both groups knew that God existed, but they did not like to 'retain God in their knowledge.' So, God gave them over (which is a judicial term in Greek) to a 'debased mind.' They knew the 'righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving death,' but that didn't stop them. They not only did what was wrong but also approved 'of those who practice them.'

We see the same thing today. The majority of people in our world have some belief in a god or gods or other variation of a spiritual world. So, what do we mean by the term 'unreached?'

IMB Global Research says a people group is considered unreached “when there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to engage this people group with church planting. Technically speaking, percentage of evangelical Christians in this people group is less than 2 percent.”

My thought about an unreached people group is where people in a group have never heard the Gospel of Christ. They may or may not have heard the name of Jesus, but they don't know the truth about Jesus. Many religions include Jesus in their belief systems. Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims are examples. People in those religions have heard lies about Jesus, but they don't know the truth about Jesus.

Christians can reach those unreached people in many ways – in person, through printed literature, through audio, through video, etc. Lots of ways we can reach the ‘unreached.’

The Apostle Paul was a great example of someone who wanted to reach the ‘unreached’ –

“For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.’”

ROMANS 15:18-21

I think what you are asking is how God will judge someone who never hears the truth about Jesus. Keeping in mind that God will be just and fair, we look at something else Paul wrote to the Romans. In what we know as Romans 2, Paul addressed Jews and also included some important information about Gentiles –

“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God,

but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

ROMANS 2:1-6

Paul wrote the same thing in Romans that John wrote in Revelation – God will judge people according to their works (deeds). Jews thought they God would accept them because they were Jews, God’s people. Paul put an end to that idea. There is no partiality with God. Gentiles who sin without the law will perish without Law. Jews who sin in the Law will be judged by the Law. Then Paul added an interesting note – “for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God

will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

Was Paul saying that some Gentiles who by nature do the things in the Law even though they don't have the Law, are a law to themselves and might be judged not guilty by God on Judgment Day? It will be interesting to see what Jesus does if anyone like that comes before Him on that Day.

I question whether that will happen based on something Paul wrote several verses later in Romans –

“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.”

ROMANS 3:9

Paul went on from there to write, “there is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.” And, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Unreached people need to be reached. That's what Jesus commanded His people to do. We need to do it. How God will judge people who died while unreached will be His judgment to make.

You gave the example of feeding two hungry men when we could have fed ten. Again, that's on us to feed all of the people we possibly can. Every person is born into sin and begins life as a sinner. No matter into what culture or people group they are born, they are sinners in need of the Savior.

You asked how these assertions are true "given that Jesus is the only way to heaven? If so how is God's mercy fairly administered?"

You are correct that Jesus is the only way to Heaven. John 14:6 ("Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'") is one of the most controversial verses in the Bible. Atheists, agnostics and people from non-Christian religions get angry when Christians quote it. Why? Because it's both 'exclusive' and 'inclusive.' Jesus being the only way to God excludes everyone who will not come to Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus being the only way to God includes everyone who will come to Him as the Way, the

Truth, and the Life. People who don't want to believe what Jesus said about His position as the one way to God will, of course, be offended.

However, does that bring God's administration of mercy into serious question? If God, the Creator, determined from eternity that His Son Jesus would be the only way for people to experience God's eternal mercy, does that mean God administered His mercy unfairly? I don't think so.

Biblical and human history are ample proof that God has been long-suffering with all people. God has shown great restraint in demonstrating mercy to every person since Adam and Eve. We've seen how Paul rehearsed humanity's response to God's mercy. Even though they knew God, they rejected Him – over and over and over and over and over again. God has been more than fair in expressing mercy to the human race.

God created a world where only one way is the right way – and that's His way. His world, His way. The way God views the administration of His mercy, He is a merciful and loving God.

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”

EXODUS 34:6-7

That’s how God revealed Himself to Moses after Moses asked God to show him His glory (Exodus 33:18).

The Bible includes many words and songs written by people who had experienced the administration of God’s mercy and they found God to be abundantly fair –

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” Psalm 103:8

“For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the Lord endures forever.” Psalm 117:2

“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” James 5:11

Jesus also testified His Father’s mercy. He called on people to be merciful “just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). That was in the context of Jesus telling His followers to love their enemies, to do good and lend, “hoping for nothing in return.” Jesus continued by saying, “and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke 6:35-36)

Notice that Jesus said God is kind to the “unthankful and evil.” That’s how God administers mercy. It’s certainly fair from His perspective as Creator. I think it may even be seen as fair by some on the Day of Judgment as they hear their unthankful and evil thoughts, words and deeds announced before the One Who judges all.

Thanks for your question!

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