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Conducted by  
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**“What will happen to people who have never heard the Gospel. It seems unfair that people should be lost if they haven’t had a chance to obey the Gospel?”**

This is a very important and emotive subject, and we ought to get one thing clear in our minds at the outset. We are talking about God and His relationship with His creation and consequently, ‘fairness’ or ‘unfairness’ do not really enter the argument: the Bible poses the question, “Will not the judge of all the earth do right?” and obviously we mortals must accept that He will. If some are saved and some are lost then we can be assured that such a situation will be according to His righteous judgment. If we cannot accept that God is true and just in **all** His dealings then we are truly standing on spiritual quicksand.

#### **Where Do We Start**

If we believe that God will eventually ‘save’ all of His creation then we are guilty of believing as the Universalists do. They believe that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of **all** men. They argue that whether or not all men know this or believe it, Jesus is their Saviour and the efficacy of His sacrifice is transferred to **all**. One of the proof texts used is Col. 1:20, where Paul says, “And having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” So according to the argument, the blood of Christ covers all men, and all men are saved in spite of themselves.

There are several objections to this. In the first place, what would be the point in evangelising if everyone was going to be saved anyway. Secondly, how do we explain the biblical references to Heaven and Hell, and the teaching regarding the final separation of the ‘saved’ and the ‘lost.’ Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; But strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:13,14). See also Matt. 25:32,46). Thirdly, the bible teaches quite conclusively that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), so what menace would there be in sin if **everyone** was going to be saved to eternal life?

I believe that we can say that Universalism is not a scriptural concept. It is true

to say, as the Bible does, that Jesus by His sacrifice on the Cross created the **potential** for all to be saved, but it is equally true to say that only those who embrace a living faith in Him will experience the **actuality** of salvation. The Colossian passage which we quoted earlier goes on to say . . . “if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col. 1:23). The phrase ‘and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven’ is germane to our question and we shall return to it later.

#### Who is ignorant of the Gospel?

When we discuss a question such as this we tend to think of people in the vastnesses of the jungles of Africa and South America and other such remote places. But they could equally well live in our streets and towns, and probably do. Paul asserts, however, that the Gospel was preached “to every creature which is under heaven,” so how do people remain ignorant?

Ignorance develops through not hearing, and not learning and understanding. I believe that infants and the mentally deficient are in a separate category because they are incapable of learning and understanding so consequently they cannot embrace a living faith. In that case it is difficult to understand how such could be condemned, and I believe God deals with them in a special way. “Ah,” someone will say, “but aren’t the deaf, and people to whom the Gospel has never been preached, in the same category?” I believe not. The deaf can usually read, the blind can usually hear, and Paul says, as we have stated, that the Gospel “was preached to every creature which is under heaven” so there must be traditions of the Christian message in every culture. Furthermore, nature and conscience play an important part in understanding according to Paul. We need to examine his teaching relative to the Gentile experience.

#### The Gentile experience

Paul, in his argument concerning the righteous judgment of God, compares two classes of people, Jews and Gentiles. It is true to say that to the devout Jew the Gentiles were the ‘heathen,’ but Paul makes it clear that so far as God is concerned there is no respect of persons. Concerning the Gentiles he says, “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” (Rom. 2:12). Now this is very important teaching because it means that the ‘heathen’ who sinned outside the Mosaic Law were lost, not because they had sinned against that Law, but because they had not kept the law or the ‘light’ which they had. The Jew, of course, stood or fell by the Mosaic Law.

Paul then keeps on ‘mining’ this important vein of truth, for he goes on, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law (Mosaic), do by nature the things contained in the law (Mosaic) these, having not the law (Mosaic), are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law (Mosaic) written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or excusing one another.” Now this must inevitably mean that the Gentiles had some knowledge of God in their consciences, and whenever they did right they became “a law unto themselves.” Whenever at any point their conduct corresponded to the Mosaic Law, at that point they exhibited the unwritten law which was in their hearts.

Furthermore, you will notice that Paul says that their consciences were all the while ‘accusing’ or ‘excusing’ their conduct. This seems to indicate the facility that all mentally-aware people have, namely, that they know when they are doing right or wrong. The very fact that the conscience operates like this is to make us understand that we are sinners, because we understand that when our conscience disapproves of our actions then to that extent we are not meeting the just requirements of God. There has only ever been one person whose conscience has never troubled Him, and

that was the Lord Himself. He was the only sinless One. As a matter of fact we can say with complete conviction that the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross would have been in vain if people, by their own volition, could at all times have conducted themselves in such a way that they were always acting and thinking according to the Will of God. Such a state we know to be impossible because Paul teaches, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). By nature, 'there is none righteous, no, not one.' When people violate the standard by doing that which they know to be wrong, then they become responsible for their own actions. In fact, they sin.

### Why are people lost?

There is nothing in God's Word which intimates to me that people are lost merely because they have never heard the Gospel. the condemnation is for **guilt** not for ignorance. The condemnation according to Jesus is that "Light is come into the world, and men loved (preferred) darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). It is clear that if God had to somehow justify the sinner, then the guilt of sin would have to be removed; this He did in Christ Jesus His Son. As Paul puts it in the Roman letter, "that he (God) might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus". A just and righteous God **had** to deal with the guilt attaching to sin, and only the Sinless One could bear that guilt, and so He bore it to the Cross for us.

So where does this leave us relative to our question? It leaves us with the thought that if those who have never heard the Gospel did in fact hear and obey it then they would be saved, but the fact of their not having heard the Gospel does not make them any less sinners; It is not **ignorance** of the Gospel message which makes them sinners; they are sinners because they are **men**, made in the Adamic mould. As long as they remain in their sinful state then they are subject to "wages" of sin whether or not they **hear** the Gospel.

Answering a question like this one induces in me a state of shock. That shock should, I believe, transmit itself to every Christian. In our efforts to maintain the purity of the Church we have forgotten the impurity of sin in which so many millions of people languish throughout the world. The words of Ezekiel come to mind, "When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from it, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezek. 33:8,9).

(All questions, please to:

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