

SESSION 3

WHAT ABOUT
PEOPLE WHO'VE
NEVER HEARD
ABOUT JESUS?



*What makes you say,
"That's not fair"?*

All people are without excuse.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Unfairness hits all of us. Big issue or small, we want fairness. But unfairness rises to a new level when we're discussing eternal matters.

Is it "fair" for a loving God to punish an innocent person because he or she has never heard about Jesus Christ? This question arises from a faulty premise. The truth is no one is innocent. Everyone is guilty and deserves eternal separation from God (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Nevertheless, God in His mercy offered, through Jesus Christ, the way to be forgiven and receive eternal life. The Bible tells us:

1. God desires "everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).
2. Salvation is impossible apart from personal faith in Christ (Acts 4:12).

How do we reconcile God's desire for all people to be saved with the fact that all people have not heard about Jesus Christ? Romans 1 provides valuable insight.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Romans 1:16-25 (HCSB)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

17 For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.

18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth,

19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them.

20 For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.

21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools

23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles.

24 Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves.

25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

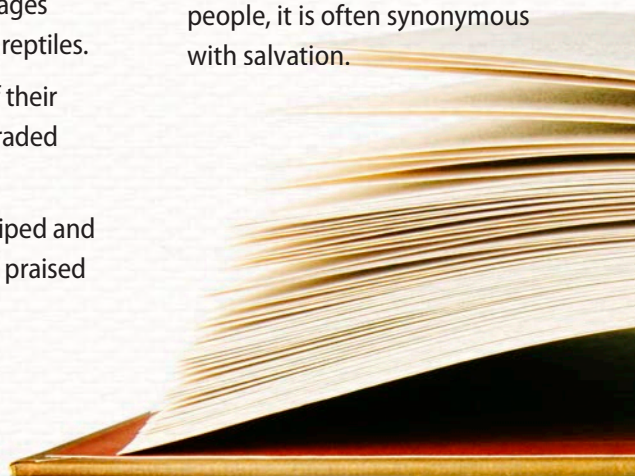
Key Words

delivered them over

(v. 24)—Expression used in a courtroom setting; a judge's order to carry out the sentence imposed on one found guilty of a crime.

salvation (v. 16)—Spiritual, eternal rescue God performs for those who trust Him through Jesus' work on the cross. Those who receive by faith Jesus' offer of salvation, God delivers from eternal damnation.

righteousness (v. 17)—Reflects both God's character of being just and His bringing people into right standing before Him. When used of people, it is often synonymous with salvation.



Romans 1:18-25

In our study of Psalm 19, we looked at two ways God has shown Himself to us.

- ▶ **General Revelation:** Information about God available to everyone through nature (such as God's power).
- ▶ **Special Revelation:** Information about God (such as the gospel of Jesus Christ) that is only available through the Bible.

In Romans 1:18-25 Paul details how some people have rejected the general revelation of God and therefore are without excuse before God. God has revealed Himself clearly. His "eternal power and divine nature" are clearly seen in His work of creation. All people are without excuse for rejecting God.

Verse 21 indicates that those who reject God "knew" Him but failed to honor Him or give Him thanks. This is an apt description of the essence of sin. We were created to enjoy fellowship with God and to dedicate our lives to glorifying Him. We have all fallen short of God's standard. Some who claimed to be wise became fools and proceeded to make a horrendous exchange. This exchange had God at its center. Fallen sinners become guilty of worshiping creation rather than the Creator.

Because of their shameless idolatry, God "delivered them over" to the impure desires of their hearts. God has removed His restraint so that sinful humans might experience the devastating consequences of their rebellion. The phrase "their bodies were degraded among themselves" is a reference to sexual sin. It is no coincidence that wherever we read of idolatry in Scripture, we find it accompanied by immorality.

Whether we are members of a pagan tribe in the isolated depths of another continent or managers of great wealth in a bustling city in America, the Bible declares us to be without excuse before the throne of a holy God. This is definitely bad news. But there is good news. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope to all of us who are without excuse.

What does it mean that people are without excuse?

QUESTION #1



Is it fair that people go to hell even though they have not heard about Jesus? Explain.

QUESTION #2

"We should be astonished at the goodness of God, stunned that He should bother to call us by name!"

—BRENNAN MANNING

POINTING TO THE LIGHT

Naturalism

- Only the physical universe exists. Nothing supernatural exists.
- Human beings must create their own morality and purpose for life.
- Includes nihilism, existentialism, secular humanism, and atheism.

Animism

- Some spirits live in material objects (like trees and rocks), while some are heavenly objects (like the sun and stars). Animals and people who have died may be viewed as deities.
- Humans help the spirits live in their world by making prayers and offerings. If they do well, the spirits provide humans with peace and prosperity.
- Includes witchcraft/wicca, astrology, fortune-telling, spiritism, and voodoo.

Far Eastern Thought

- The essence of reality is not a personal god, but an impersonal life force.
- Pieces of the life force have spun away from its central core and are trying to work their way back. Every life form in the universe is a piece of that life force moving through successive lives (reincarnation) to higher and higher levels. Once it makes it to the highest level, the separated life force can then escape the material universe and merge back with the impersonal main body.
- Includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Hare Krishna, transcendental meditation, and some elements of the New Age movement.

Source: *Freddy Davis, www.MarketFaith.org*

**Select one worldview.
What in that worldview
could I use to point
people to Jesus Christ?**

Romans 1:16-17

The fact that all of us are without excuse is a sobering reality, but let's remember what Paul wrote before he launched into the issue of our sinfulness: there is good news, and it is in the gospel of Jesus Christ!

The word "gospel" is synonymous with the concept of "good news." Paul boldly asserted that he was "not ashamed of the gospel." Paul was proud of the gospel because it is the very demonstration of God's power to save those who, left to themselves, are completely hopeless and under condemnation.

Paul communicated a very clear understanding of the gospel. How can a righteous God rescue those who have scorned Him and deserve His wrath without compromising His righteousness? The cross. God judged our sin in the death of His one and only Son. "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!" (Rom. 5:8). God deals with our sin by allowing the judgment for our sins to fall on Christ.

At the same time God credits the righteousness of His Son to our account. Paul explained this amazing two-fold transaction this way: "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

In the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith." God reveals or activates His perfect plan of salvation "beginning and ending in faith." Biblical faith involves trust, reliance, and complete confidence in its object. I might intellectually believe an airplane is able to carry me safely to my desired destination, but not until I actually strap myself into my seat am I relying on that plane to transport me safely. Similarly, saving faith in Christ relies on the adequacy of Jesus to save us.

Sinful humans have access to the undeserved favor (grace) of God by faith. The gospel is the good news that Jesus brings salvation to all who place their faith in Him. Faith in Jesus is the way—the only way—to experience an abundant relationship with God that can begin now and extend throughout eternity.

How can we reconcile God's desire for all people to be saved with the fact that all people have not heard about Jesus?

QUESTION #3

What do verses 16-17 teach you about the heart of God?

QUESTION #4

LIVE IT OUT

So how do we respond to the questions regarding those who've never heard about Jesus?

- ▶ **Ask yourself.** Begin with your own response to the message of Christ. You have heard the Gospel, so respond with repentance and trust in Jesus Christ.
- ▶ **Get to know an unreached people group.** Research. Pray. Give. Ask God to reveal your role in reaching that people group.
- ▶ **Invest yourself in a mission experience.** Join a short-term mission trip with the goal of sharing Christ with an unreached group.



God could have devised any way to transmit the good news of Jesus Christ. He has chosen to entrust us with His message of reconciliation.

Men in the Grip of Ministry



Scott Lehman will never forget the day he used his seven iron to drive a golf ball through his sister's bedroom window. The most vivid part of the memory is not the sound of shattering glass, or hiding out in the old sand-filled John Deere® tractor tire, or even hearing his father shout his full name: "Scott Nelson Lehman! Where are you?" It was what his father said after brushing the sand off his tearful 10-year-old boy: "Son, you're forgiven."



To continue reading "Men in the Grip of Ministry" from *More Living* magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.



My group's prayer requests

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My thoughts