

Destiny of the Unevangelized – Inclusivist  
Fairfield Christian Reformed Church  
April 5, 2020



### All the Positions

- Restrictivist → A person is saved by expressing explicit faith in Jesus following the explicit proclamation of the Gospel
  - o Augustine, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, RC Sproul, David Platt
- Universal Opportunity → Flowing from His foreknowledge, God will do everything necessary to bring the Gospel to all people who will respond affirmatively.
  - o Jacob Arminius, John Newman, Norman Geisler, Robert Lightner, William Lane Craig
- Postmortem Evangelism → The Gospel is proclaimed to the dead, giving each unbeliever one final chance to accept Christ
  - o Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, Ambrose, Athanasius, Wolfhart Pannenberg, P.T. Forsyth
- Inclusivist → Jesus provides the way of salvation for all who respond with faith in God based on the extent of revelation given, even if they are unaware of Jesus.
  - o Justin Martyr, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, Billy Graham, CS Lewis, N.T. Wright

### Summary of Agreement among the Positions

God has a genuine, deeply rooted love for humanity, His premier creation, and He desires all would be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way for anyone to be saved. Jesus was crucified for you. He died and was buried. The good news is this innocent Jesus who died for you was resurrected the third day! This resurrection confirmed His identity as Son of God and Messiah. If you believe the Father raised Jesus from the dead, repent of your sins, and call on the name of Jesus as Lord, you are saved, your sins are forgiven, your heart is transformed, and the Spirit indwells you.

### Case Study

Imagine that you are called by God to bring the gospel to an unreached people group on the far side of the globe. After months of language instruction, preparation, and prayer, you head to the mission field... Eventually, a small church is born where once there was no sign of the gospel.

One day, Jamil, one of the first converts, asks to talk to you in private... He asks a question that has been plaguing him for some time... Six months before you came to his land, his father died. His father was a good man, respected and loved by everyone in the village. However, he died without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ... “Is there any chance I might see my father again in heaven? ...Is there a chance my father will somehow come to know the God that has finally been revealed to the village? Or will he be eternally condemned simply because he was born at the wrong time and place?” What would you say to Jamil?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology.” Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

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**Summary of View**

The Restrictivist position is far too extreme. The Restrictivist position would be forced to say that aborted babies would be condemned to Hell forever for failing to explicitly confess faith in Christ. This does not mesh with the gracious and compassionate character of God. There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ; however, an explicit knowledge of Christ is not necessary to be saved by the work of Christ. The writer of Hebrews defines faith as the confidence of what is hoped for without a need to see the promises of God finished (Heb. 11:1-2). Abel, Enoch, Rahab, etc. were saved by their faith based on revelation that was incomplete, for they did not see the fullness of God's revelation found in Christ (Heb. 11:39-40; Col. 1:19).

Those who have heard the revelation of Christ are held to the highest standard; however, those who have never heard the revelation of Christ but have responded affirmatively to the incomplete revelation given through nature or other means are saved by the promise of Christ. Just as judgment for disobedience is limited based on ignorance (Luke 12:47-48), so also is blessing for obedience limited to the extent of knowledge. Paul from the onset tells the Romans that God's invisible attributes are made known through creation, thus leaving nobody without excuse (Rom. 1:20) and even those without the written law have the law instinctively accusing and excusing themselves (Rom. 2:14-16). God is not without a witness (Acts 14:17). This demonstrates that not explicitly knowing Christ does not preclude a person from the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection.

If ignorance limits judgment and if God's invisible attributes in nature are enough to leave someone without excuse, then God's revelation in nature trumps ignorance. For someone in a far off place, with no access to the Bible and no access to the Gospel, it is enough to respond with faith in God based on the limited extent of revelation given him in nature. That person's salvation would be secured by the work of Christ on the cross without any knowledge of it.

**Key Passages**

- Acts 17:26-27
  - o God made Christ the way so all who seek would reach God, though he is not far off
- Heb. 11
  - o Examples of people who were saved by faith absent of knowledge of Christ
- Rom. 1:20
  - o His invisible attributes are made known through creation, leaving none without excuse
- Acts 14:17
  - o God did not leave himself without a witness
- 1 Tim. 2:5-6
  - o Jesus is our one mediator given at the proper time

**Discussion Question**

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This view seems to get awful close to religious pluralism by creating the possibility of someone to be saved through a false, tribal religion?
- Does this view create more ways to salvation than through Christ?
- How would this view approach missions?