

Destiny of the Unevangelized – Restrictivist
Fairfield Christian Reformed Church
March 15, 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?¹

¹ 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

There is only one way of salvation available for all people in the world today and that is through Christ. When Jesus spoke of himself as the door of the sheep, he clearly stated that only through him can anyone be saved (John 10:9). He reiterates this again several chapters later, saying “I AM the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also” (John 14:6-7a). Jesus is clear in these passages: there is only one way of salvation and it requires an explicit knowledge of him.

Salvation is unfair. It is not unfair because some are condemned to Hell, for all have sinned against a Holy God and are deserving of eternal condemnation. Instead, salvation is unfair because some are undeservingly granted eternal life. The New Testament writers are clear that the plan of salvation was narrowed and specified following the resurrection of Christ. Jesus said as much after his resurrection, prior to his ascension, that his resurrection and the call to repent must both be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

There is an explicit need to know the Gospel of Christ before you come to saving faith in Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians that prior to their saved status, Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the covenant, without hope, and without God (Eph. 2:12). And Paul tells the Romans that anyone who confesses Jesus as Lord and believes in his resurrection will be saved, and people cannot make this confession unless someone who is sent proclaims Christ to them—faith comes from hearing (Rom. 10:9-17). A phrase from Church history is *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*, “Outside the Church, there is no salvation.” As much as we may want God’s grace to extend to as many as possible, that benevolent-impulse ought to prompt us to go to the nations instead of creating speculative models that justify our unwillingness to go.

Key Passages

- 1 John 5:11-12
 - o The one who has the Son has life; the one who doesn’t hasn’t
- Rom. 10:9-17
 - o Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and they need people sent to proclaim because faith comes from hearing
- Matt. 7:13-14
 - o Narrow is the gate that leads to life
- Luke 24:46-47
 - o Christ’s death and resurrection, and the call to repent, must be proclaimed to all nations
- Eph. 2:12
 - o Prior, you were separated from God, alienated, with no hope, without God

Discussion Question

- What is your reaction to this view?
- This view would suggest aborted babies or mentally disabled persons who die before they can comprehend the Gospel are condemned to Hell. Does that mesh with your understanding of the character of God?
- How would this view approach missions.