

THE UNEVANGELIZED ELECT?

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The Notion in a Nutshell: An Opinion



The diagram above takes its cue from Paul's comments in Romans 2. God can judge unevangelized people on the basis of where their conscience has properly led them, the shaded area in the diagram. For practical purposes in that non-standard situation, God can disregard honest ignorance—where the conscience has misled and where it has omitted the rest of what Christianity stands for.

It is not “another religion” that would be saving such people if God decides to save them. It is, first of all, the area of the correct religion that would be the basis for God's saving them, not the false religion as such. Secondly, it would be God who would save them, not the people's actions relative even to those beliefs wherein conscience had led correctly. The people had not been perfect even in that restricted area.

The role of human action is not to cause righteousness, because “nobody's perfect” and righteousness means moral perfection. Human action only meets the condition for God's considering them righteous in his own mind. No one is, so to speak, objectively righteous. The real condition for fellowship with God is identifying with God, which people do in large part by adopting God's values and purposes. Attempting to live up to his expectancy amounts to an attempt to identify with him as the one who originated that expectancy. Normally we call people to identify with Christ as the one who is what God wants us all to be and as the One who is himself identified with the Father by being sent by him and doing his will. In the case of the unevangelized—those we have not “called on,” that element could be omitted in God's mind for judgment purposes; he could deal with them directly on the same principle—identification. Their attempt and desire to please God as best they knew would be taken to indicate their desire for fellowship him, and that is the essential condition.

Knowing about Christ is not inherently necessary to being saved by Christ as shown by his being Savior of the people during the Old Testament (Hebrews 9:15) and any saved of those before it (1 Peter 3:19-21; 4:6). Christianity then is an exclusive religion, but those raised knowing only some other god the true God could save because of their desire to please God in respect to where the false religion has in part properly led them. That is really to say, they are saved relative to the truth that Christianity is and the rest of what their religion taught could be disregarded for judgment purposes. God could judge them by “the light that they have.”

Describing this possibility removes one other criticism of the faith. God is wise enough to deal consistently with non-standard situations.

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