

What about those who never heard?

One of the most difficult questions for Christians to answer is the destiny of those who die without having heard the gospel. This is a big problem because we recognize that it's beyond unjust for anyone having never had the opportunity for salvation to be tortured alive in fire eternally. How can a loving God create multitudes of eternal beings, then allow them to suffer eternally having never had hope? It's not fair and it's not love.

This question, however, isn't a problem once we accept the reality that man isn't an eternal being but a physical being that is either given eternal life or else is annihilated. We recognize that animals pass from existence when they die—dogs don't go to heaven. And we don't think of any unjustness done to them in existing for a short time then passing from existence. Why not the same with humans? What would be unjust with God allowing humans to live, then never live again? For them to not exist, come into existence, then no longer exist?

Now, this isn't degrading humanity, created in the image of God, down to that of animals. It's recognizing the truth taught in Scripture: "Nevertheless man *being* in honour abideth not: **he is like the beasts that perish ... Like sheep they are laid in the grave ...** Man *that is* in honour, and understandeth not, **is like the beasts that perish**" (Psa 49:14, 12, 20); "that they might see that **they themselves are beasts**. For that which **befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts**; even one thing befalleth them: **as the one dieth, so dieth the other**; yea, they have all one breath; so that **a man hath no preeminence above a beast**" (Ecc 3:18-19); "But these, **as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed**, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and **shall utterly perish in their own corruption**" (2Pe 2:12).

Paul taught repeatedly in Romans that the knowledge of sin came by the law and that God doesn't impute sin to those who didn't have its knowledge: "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" (2:12); "by the law *is* the knowledge of sin" (3:20); "for where no law is, *there is* no transgression" (4:15); "sin is not imputed when there is no law" (5:13); "I had not known sin, but by the law" (7:7); "For without the law sin *was* dead" (7:8).

When Paul said "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, **not imputing their trespasses unto them**" (2Co 5:19), he was teaching that while God was working His plan of salvation throughout history to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ, He wasn't imputing anyone's sins to them. This is what he also taught to the Romans, "For until the law sin was in the world: but **sin is not imputed when there is no law**. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that **had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression**" (Rom 5:13-14). All of humanity dies because of Adam's sin. And although everyone also sins, God doesn't impute their sins to them if they haven't sinned the same way as Adam under a direct commandment from God, "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom 5:15). They simply died and will never live again. They were without law, therefore they perished without law, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law" (Rom 2:12).

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in **Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes**" (Mat 11:21), "**The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas**; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here" (Mat 12:41). Jesus taught that had God sent someone to preach to the people of Tyre and Sidon they would have repented. But of course, the obvious question is why didn't He? Why send Jonah to Nineveh but nobody to them? If God had sent preachers throughout history to every people, then the world wouldn't have been in darkness but in light—and a world full of light wouldn't have crucified the Light of the world: "*That was* the true Light" (Jhn 1:9); "that light *is* come into the world" (Jhn 3:19); "I am the light of the world" (Jhn 9:5); "I am come a light into the world" (Jhn 12:46); "for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Co 2:8).

There are three possible destinies of people: (1) they never lived under God's law, they die and will never live again; (2) they lived under God's law and kept its righteousness, they will live again in the resurrection of the righteous and never die again; (3) they lived under God's law but didn't keep its righteousness, they will live again in the resurrection of the unrighteous to be judged, punished, die a second time, and annihilated in the lake of fire. The conclusion is that those who never heard perished when they died and will never live again. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ is our only hope for eternal life.