

## ARE THE HEATHEN SAVED?

## SPECIAL STUDY ON 2:12-16

1. *What is the spiritual standing of the "Jews" and "Greeks" under consideration in these verses?*

Answer: They are sinners, both Jews and Greeks, not having accepted the gospel. We say this for the following reasons:

- a. Since Paul is discussing the universal need of the gospel, it is only logical that he should illustrate this need by those who did not have access to the gospel and those who, having had access to the gospel, had not accepted it. Inasmuch, therefore, as the Jews and Gentiles under consideration had not accepted the gospel, they were sinners, not Christians.
- b. Paul places the basis of judgment for the Jew as "the law." This would NOT be the case if these Jews under discussion had been Christians, for they would then have been under the law of Christ, hence, would be judged according to the gospel as Christians.
- c. The Greeks are spoken of as having "sinned without the law" and thus they would "perish"—be judged "without the law." If they had been Christians they would be judged by the gospel, and it would have been placed as the basis of judgment.
- d. It is self-evident that the Gentiles described in the verses being discussed (1:18-32; 2:14-15) were sinners and could under no consideration be counted as Christians. To suggest otherwise seems absurd.

Therefore, we must conclude that Paul is discussing those Jews and Gentiles of his day who had not accepted the gospel. Let us not forget that in this discussion he demonstrates their desperate need of the justification found in the gospel. Both the Gentile (chap. 1) and the Jew (chap. 2) when measured by their own law are found guilty.

2. *Why take the gospel to the heathen of today if they can be saved without it?* The answer is threefold.

- a. We should take the gospel to the heathen of today because they are not saved in their present state.
  - (1) They are lost, but not because they rejected Christ, for they never had the opportunity to either accept or reject him. If they had had this opportunity through access to the gospel, it would be a different matter; but we are discussing those who never had the opportunity to accept Christ.

- (2) The heathen of today are surely, actually and eternally lost because they are not conscientious about keeping their law and because they actually try to withstand God. Notice what Paul has to say upon this point.
- (a) In describing the Gentiles in chapter one, he says, among other things, that they "hinder the truth in unrighteousness"; "they exchanged the truth of God for a lie"; "they refused to have God in their knowledge"; "wherefore God gave them up . . ." (1:18b, 25, 28). Thus using the pronouns (they, their and them) with no qualification whatever, he places the greater part, if not all, of the Gentile world under the wrath of God.
- (b) Again in chapter three in summing up the matter, he writes in verses 9-12: ". . . for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that seeketh after God; They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable; There is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one."

Here it would seem beyond a shadow of a doubt that the vast majority of Gentiles (and Jews) are lost and consequently under the wrath of God.

- (3) "Well," someone says, "what about those spoken of in chapter two, verses 6-7 and 10, who were going to be given eternal life, glory, honor and peace because they were patient in well doing and sought for glory and honor and incorruption, and yet never heard the gospel?"
- (a) Well, where are those persons and who are they? According to Paul the number of such persons is practically nil (0).
- (b) God *will* give to such persons **JUST WHAT HE PROMISED** and upon **EXACTLY** the basis he promised it; but on that great day when God begins to judge the secrets of the hearts of men, who will be there to enter into eternal life on this plan?
- (c) The message of these verses (2:6, 7, 10) is the basis of God's judgment; the persons referred to are hypothetical.
- (d) In light of what we have just considered, it would seem to our fallible, human understanding that ac-

tually there will be but an infinitesimal portion of the Gentiles who will receive eternal life on the basis stated by Paul in the verses under consideration.

Thus we conclude that since the heathen are not saved in their present state, we should take the gospel to them.

b. We should take the gospel to the heathen because of the great, glorious, and immediate benefits to be found in the reception of the gospel. Think for a moment of some of them.

- (1) The present knowledge that our sins are all forgiven.
- (2) That we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous.
- (3) That we are the temple of God, the sanctuary of his Spirit.
- (4) That we have God's power through his Spirit and word to help us in defeating Satan.
- (5) That the purpose of life and creation is now clear to us.
- (6) That we are prepared for the judgment.

All these wonderful possessions and more are given to the heathen who accepts Christ. Are not these sufficient reasons for taking the glad news to them? Have we no sympathy for the man who has no present knowledge that his sins are forgiven; who is driven to make appeasement to a dumb idol? Have we no compassion upon those poor benighted souls who have some knowledge of what is right and wrong (unless they have been misled) and yet who, like us, are human and too weak to overcome the efforts of Satan to lead them in the wrong road? Have we no sorrow for those millions who have no inclination to follow in the path of righteousness? Why take the gospel to the heathen? Let us examine our hearts, brethren, if we can see no reason in the above stated information!

c. We would take the gospel to the heathen because the highest authority in heaven and earth has commanded us to take this message to "every creature." The condition of the souls of men the world around is a great constraining force, but above and beyond that is our obedience to our King. He whom we call "Lord" has intrusted us with this task, and to fail is to fail him, yes more, to disobey him. Why preach the gospel to the heathen?—because Christ asked us to do it.

Conclusion: We should preach the gospel to the heathen because they are lost in their present state, because of the benefits they will receive upon accepting it, and because Christ asked us to do so.

## ROMANS REALIZED

3. *How could the conscientious, but nevertheless sinful, persons be saved who never heard of Christ or his blood?*

Answer: The same way that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others were saved. cp. Mt. 8:11. Because of their "patience in well doing" or conscientious (though imperfect) obedience to the law, God mercifully accepted their faith as righteousness and anticipatively extended to them the blood of Christ to justify them from their sins. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." Rom. 4:3. Thus we see a principle whereby the blood of Christ could be applied to those before Christ who had never heard of him. Though we have shown essentially that there are no heathen who are conscientiously trying to keep God's law, they could by the same principle have Christ's blood applied to their sins also.

4. *What about other scripture references which seem to teach that every last Gentile who has not heard the gospel is lost, regardless of what he does?*

a. We will begin our answer by asking two questions:

- (1) Are the persons involved in the reference those that have done the very best they could to obey the law of nature?
- (2) If so, then are they spoken of as being lost?

b. The writer has found no scriptural reference to any person who could be counted as lost, who never heard the gospel or had opportunity to hear and yet lived up to the law of his conscience according to Romans 2:14-15.

c. Find a reference that speaks of a Gentile who never heard of Christ or had opportunity to hear and yet was lost in spite of his "patience in well doing"—faithful obedience to the law of nature (Rom. 2:7, 14-15)—and we will have a case, but not until then.

5. *Would not this teaching give hope to all those who, in all sincerity, were and are following false doctrines? In other words, if conscientiousness is a basis for eternal life in one case, why wouldn't it be in all cases?*

Before we answer this question, please understand that it is *not* our desire that anyone should be lost. cf. II Pe. 3:9. It is the truth we are interested in, for while we might like to see every conscientious person saved, we realize that our personal feelings will not be the basis of judgment on that great day. Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." Jn. 12:48, Rev. 20:12

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Is conscientiousness in itself a sufficient basis for receiving eternal life? Answer: No, in the light of revealed facts. Here are the facts:

- a. The law of nature, Biblical history and the plain statements of Scripture seem to prove that conscientiousness alone is insufficient.
  - (1) The law of nature definitely teaches this fact.
    - (a) Suppose that in all sincerity you take some ant poison, thinking it to be cough syrup—will your conscientiousness save you from sickness or possibly death?
    - (b) Remember the time you were traveling when you unknowingly took the wrong road? Did your sincerity make the wrong road the right one?
  - (2) Biblical history substantiates this fact.
    - (a) Saul of Tarsus was as conscientious as any man could be and yet he was lost. Acts 22:3-4; 23:1; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 1:15
    - (b) The Jews of Paul's day were conscientious and yet lost. Rom. 10:1-3
    - (c) The Gentiles who had neither the law of Moses nor the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1-2) were not to be judged on the basis of sincerity alone. Rom. 2:14-15. We will discuss more about this in division b.
  - (3) Some plain statements of Scripture which seem to bear out this fact.
    - (a) "Can the blind guide the blind? shall they not *both* fall into a pit?" Lu. 6:39
    - (b) "For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed." Isa. 9:16
    - (c) "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; But the end thereof are the ways of death." Prov. 14:12; 16:25
  - (4) All known facts seem to prove conclusively that conscientiousness alone is no guarantee against being eternally lost.
- b. Conscientiousness in relation to the truth is what will count in the day of judgment.
  - (1) This principle illustrated.
    - (a) If you suddenly discover that you are about to take a spoonful of ant poison instead of cough syrup, what will you do?—go ahead and take it, hoping that because you are sincere all will be well?

- (b) Suppose on your journey across the country you find out that you are on the wrong road, what will you do?—continue on the wrong way, hoping to arrive at your destination regardless?
  - (c) When Saul of Tarsus found out that he was persecuting Jesus Christ, he ceased, and as a result became Paul, the apostle.
  - (d) The Gentile of Romans 1-2 was to be judged not upon conscientiousness alone, but upon his sincere (though imperfect) obedience to the truth revealed in nature. This truth was plain enough for all to see who would see (Rom. 1:18-20). cf. Mt. 13:14-15
  - (e) Only an honest concern for and obedience to the truth will bring anyone to his desired destination. cf. Jn. 3:36 A.R.V.; Jn. 3:5
- (2) Application of this principle and conclusion. (While this principle may be applied to many groups of people, we will deal only with two of them at this time.)
- (a) When we apply the above principle to those who profess to believe the Bible and claim salvation in Christ through faith only, apart from baptism (immersion), we base our conclusion upon two facts inherent in the principle.
    - i. The truth is that if the Bible says anything at all, it says that faith, repentance, confession and baptism are conditions upon which salvation is conferred.
    - ii, In their relationship to the truth, they are overlooking or disregarding it and disobeying it.
  - (b) Will such people be saved simply because they are conscientious? If so, God has not revealed it to us either through nature or revelation. In the light of all known facts, we can only say to such people: "Why risk your life by taking this uncertain pathway? Be safe and go by the sure highway which God has revealed in his word."
  - (c) It is not within the scope of this book to discuss the application of this principle to those who have been "baptized into Christ" and yet continue to follow false teaching—unscriptural names and practices and other denominational tendencies.

- (d) We are responsible to see that all such people receive the truth. Surely, if they are conscientious and we give them the proper teaching and example, they will turn from false teaching and obey only the truth.
6. *Why do injury to those who never heard by preaching to them and thus making them more responsible and liable to condemnation?*
- a. It might be well to refer to what has already been said which gives good and altogether sufficient reasons for taking the message to the heathen.
    - (1) They are lost in their present state.
    - (2) There are such great and precious benefits in the acceptance of the gospel that can be found nowhere else.
    - (3) Christ has commanded us to preach "among all the nations."
  - b. If we but think for a moment, we can see that to take the gospel to them would be to make them responsible to a law that is far easier to fulfill than the one under which they live. Thus, practically speaking, their responsibility would be lessened rather than increased. This of course is true because of the assistance given by God through Christ to the person who obeys the gospel.
  - c. Then, too, the persons who are "continuing steadfastly in well doing seeking for glory and honor and incorruption" would be the first ones to accept the gospel message; those, among the others, who do not accept the gospel are all lost anyway.
  - d. This objection is a shallow one from the logical standpoint.

### *Questions on the Special Study*

1. Does the failure to accept Christ figure into the lost estate of the Gentiles? If not, explain why this is not true.
2. Will the Gentiles be judged by law? What will be the result?
3. How can we know the Gentiles are lost being judged by their own law?
4. How many without the gospel are without hope? What does *the text* say?
5. Do verses 2:6;7:10 give hope to any who have never heard of Christ? (No "yes" or "no" answers.)
6. How many do you think there are among the heathen who will be saved according to the standard Paul sets up here?
7. Name from memory three benefits we obtain in Christ Jesus.
8. Why are these benefits sufficient reason for carrying the gospel to the lost?
9. How does the authority of Christ apply to carrying the gospel?

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10. Give from memory the three reasons for taking the gospel to those who have never heard.
11. What is the meaning of the word "anticipatively"? If you do not know, look it up.
12. Honestly now, do *you* know of a scripture reference that states *that heathen are lost regardless of what they do*?
13. What *two* thoughts must be in the reference before it would apply to the case?
14. What is the proper attitude as we approach a discussion of the sincere but lost?
15. What is meant by "the law of nature"?
16. Cite two cases of Biblical history which point out that sincerity alone is not enough.
17. What did Jesus mean by "the blind"?
18. With what must sincerity be linked to be of any value on judgment day?
19. Give an illustration of this principle.
20. Were the Gentiles described in Romans cp.2 judged on sincerity alone? If not, why not?
21. What sad conclusion are we forced to make when we apply this principle to those sincere souls among the "faith only" groups?
22. How do *you* feel this principle would apply to those who are following ANY false doctrine?
23. Would we make the heathen more liable to condemnation by taking the gospel to them? If not, why not?
24. Who among the heathen would be the first to accept the gospel?
25. Show how their responsibility would be lessened.