

If the only means of salvation is through Jesus Christ, what will be the destiny of those who have never heard the Gospel message?

If the only means of salvation pointed out in the Bible is through Jesus Christ, the recurring questions that often occur are: *"What about children and those with mental problems"* or *"And the Indian who has never heard of Jesus?"* or *"What about those who were born before Jesus?"*

Jesus said, *"No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14: 6). This means that the only way for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life is the way opened by Jesus. Many people think that this implies the automatic condemnation of all those who have not been reached by God's plan of reconciliation, including those who have never heard of Jesus, but the matter must be studied more carefully.

Although the Scriptures do not explicitly teach that the one who has never heard of Jesus can be saved, there are texts that seem to infer this. After all, if God is fair and impartial, he should give equal opportunities to everyone and not exclude anyone because he was born in the improper place or at the improper time.

Paul emphasized the fact that no one is inexcusable before God: *"Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse"*(Romans 1:19, 20).

By these words, Paul defended the fact that mankind has an obligation to recognize God because the testimony of his creation is universal and intuitive.

The same Paul said that the unbeliever *"suppress the truth by their wickedness"* (Romans 1:18) and that man is not seeking God, but running away from him. *"There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God"* (Romans 3: 11). By this reasoning, Paul concluded that while people may have sufficient information or intuitions to recognize that God exists, they voluntarily turn away from God because their hearts are bent toward evil.

However, we do not know how God will deal with the endless circumstances that surround people all over the world and at all times. The only thing we know for sure is that his judgment will be fair, whether people have heard or not of Jesus Christ.

The Bible implies, for example, that infants and children who die before they reach the age of consciousness will go to heaven, even without baptism. This is based on James 4:17, where we read that if anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

Therefore, if he who knows the good and does not do it commits sin, we can conclude in reverse that he who is not conscientious enough to distinguish between good and evil cannot be imputable for sin.

That is why in Isaiah 7:15 the text distinguishes between those who are not yet mature enough to "despise evil and choose good," saying that they should be fed "milk and honey" until they reach the age of consciousness and full reason.

The innocence and purity of the children were highlighted by Jesus in Luke 19:14 as characteristics typical of those who would inherit the Kingdom of God, which led us to assume that they are unenforceable for sin, at least until a certain age.

For the same reason, it appears that the situation of the mentally handicapped is similar to that of infants and toddlers, since they do not act according to the full reason of knowledge.

As for Indians and people who have never heard of Christ, I believe they will also be judged differently from those who have fully known the truth.

Let's consider the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12: 47-48 ... *"The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked"*.

This means that from the moment the Indian or the ignorant in general come into contact with the gospel, they become responsible for their attitudes, so they can no longer claim that they ignore the truths contained therein and need to make a decision.

In John 9:41, Jesus said ... *"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains "*.

He who has never heard of Jesus is like the individual who travels freely on a certain road until the day they set a speed limit. From that moment, the driver will be subject to the fine and other punishments, should he exceed this limit. However, as long as the speed limit is not established, it cannot be fined.

Thus, the situation of individual conscience and responsibility of each individual in this world is summarized in the principle stated in 2 Peter 2:21, which says ... *It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.*

That conscience is a decisive factor for an individual to be found guilty or not, and Paul made it clear in Romans 2: 12-16, where he said ... *"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares"*.

Just as Adam and Eve became guilty in Eden, from the moment they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so it is with all people whose respective consciences accuse or absolve them for what they do or what they gave up doing.

One of the disciples asked Jesus if only a few people would be saved and Jesus answered affirmatively, as we read in Luke 13:23 and 24 ... *"Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to"*.

The texts related to this are Matthew 7:13 and 14 ... *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it...* and Matthew 20:16. ... *So the last will be first, and the first will be last, for many shall be called, but few shall be chosen.*

The fact is that the will of God is that no one should perish, but that all should come to repentance, as 2 Peter 3: 9 says. This shows that God also wants to reach out to those people who have never heard the Gospel.

The Father demonstrated all his desire by sending his Son to die in our place, and we were not even reconciled with him. *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5: 8).

The Bible teaches that God will judge the world in a just and coherent way, as Acts 17:31 says ... *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead”*. This means that in the final judgment no one can accuse you of being unjust or tyrant.

Therefore, we can be sure of two things: the first is that God is just and does not treat anyone unjustly; the second is that no one will be saved, except through the work of Christ on the cross, even if he does not know him. A baby who was born and then died will be saved because Jesus shed his blood to pay for this baby's sin, even though he did not even know it.

So, whatever degree of knowledge a person may have, if he attain salvation, it will be thanks to the blood of Christ shed on the cross, and this holds true both for those who lived before and after Christ; for the sacrifice is eternal and not limited to a particular epoch.

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