



What is the Fate of the “Unevangelized Dead”?

The question is sometimes asked about Grace Communion International’s present explanation regarding the fate of the unevangelized dead – those who it appears died without ever hearing the gospel or knowing about Jesus Christ. The church believes the answer is that all people will have an opportunity to respond to the gospel. Our position on this vital question has not changed. This question was addressed in a letter to the church’s ministry in 1997. Here is what the letter stated:

It is the position of the church that God will make fair and just provision for people who do not hear the gospel in this life. In other words, we retain the essence of our historical teaching on this point. However, we do not teach any dogmatic *timing* of when or how God will do this (e.g. the second resurrection, 100 years, etc.).

We base our belief on the verses that explain that God is not willing that any perish (we see this as God’s desire that none perish *eternally*) but that all come to repentance (though we understand that not everyone will conform to God’s desire). We do not believe that God has decreed before all time who will and will not be lost.

We believe that those who did not have the gospel presented to them during their lifetime will be presented with it in some way by God. They will be judged on the same basis as we are – on whether they give their allegiance and faith to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

One way to understand the question of what will happen to the unevangelized

dead is to ask about God's basic nature and purpose. A familiar verse, John 3:16, says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The Scripture says God loved the world – not just faithful Christians – even while it was sinning against him.

That would lead us to believe, as stated above, that every single person who has ever lived will be given an opportunity to believe in Jesus as Savior. Otherwise, how could God's nature and purpose be what John says it is?

Who has had this opportunity to believe in Jesus and who hasn't had it? Has everyone had it as they lived in the past – and do all people have it as they live today? It certainly doesn't seem so. Can we insist that people who have never even heard about Jesus, have already had their opportunity and rejected it? Certainly not. Then it stands to reason God must have provided some other way for all people to have the opportunity to believe in Jesus, and be given life. How will this occur? We do not know about the "how" or "when," in which the unevangelized will be evangelized with the gospel. There are several Scriptures that talk in general about the final judgment of all human beings, but they are short on specifics. What's important to know is that God is no respecter of persons – he will show everyone who repents and believes the same mercy in Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us that God sent his Son into the world to save the world, and that all those who accept Jesus as Savior will have eternal life (John 3:16-18).

What the church believes is that God has purposed to offer salvation to all, and that he is just, fair and merciful. He will work out his plan so that everyone has an opportunity to receive the gospel, though some may reject it. But the details of how God will work this out are sketchy. We simply have to trust that our gracious and just God has everyone's best interests at heart, and everyone will have an opportunity to accept the grace he offers in Christ.

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