THE FATE OF THE UNEVANGELIZED

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Introduction

The debate of what happens to those who never hear the word of God. Do they go to Heaven or Hell? This topic can also be referred to as the Unevangelized Debate.

There are four major viewpoints on the issue. These points are the restrictivist, universal opportunist, postmortem evangelist, and inclusivist views.\(^1\) The four views have similarities and differences which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. The support and arguments against each viewpoint will be explored briefly. The purpose of this paper is to explore these four viewpoints and come to a Biblical conclusion as to the one that has the best theological support behind it.

The Restrictivist View

The Restrictivist Viewpoint takes the position that Salvation can only be received by those who have actually heard the Gospel message.\(^2\) There is a general consensus that in order for Salvation to be received there must be a certain level of knowledge of Christ imparted. Without faith in Christ, one cannot be saved.\(^3\) Many restrictivists also believe that salvation is only available to the certain elect.\(^4\)

There are arguments against the Restrictivist viewpoint. One of these arguments begs the question of what would happen to someone who was on an island and never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel. This is an emotional argument. If God were to save everyone, there would

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\(^2\) Ibid., Kindle Location 3934
\(^3\) Millard J. Erickson, "The Fate of Those Who Never Hear: Part I of 4 Parts of "the Destiny of the Unevangelized"," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 605 (1995).
\(^4\) Laverne P. Blowers, "Are They Really Lost?," (Mishawaka, IN: Bethel College).
have been no need for the great commission. Proponents of the viewpoint, however, say that there is no Scriptural backing for other viewpoints that are offered on the topic. They claim that the only logical point of view is the Restrictivist point of view. They claim this because of verses such as Romans 5:12-21 that describe the hopelessness of the Unevangelized.

There are also many early and modern supporters of the Restrictivist viewpoint. Early supporters include Augustine, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards. Modern day supporters include Carl Henry, R. C. Sproul, and Ronald Nash.

**The Universal Opportunistic View**

The second viewpoint to be discussed is the Universal Opportunistic Viewpoint. This viewpoint believes that if a person has the heart to believe in Christ, God will give him the opportunity to do so. This group argues that God has revealed enough of himself for people to seek after him even if they have not heard the message of Christ. This is also called general revelation and is supported by Romans 1:20 that says God can be clearly perceived throughout the world. However, proponents of this view do not believe general revelation to be enough. They believe that God will send the Gospel message to those who believe the general revelation.

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7 Boyd and Eddy., Kindle location 3974
8 Ibid., Kindle Location 4004
9 Dan Story, "Defending Your Faith," (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997)., pg. 114
11 Blowers.
Like the Restrictivist view, there are arguments against the Universal Opportunistic view. One of the main arguments is that there is not enough Scriptural evidence for this view. Universal opportunists do not necessarily argue with this point but state that John 21:25 explains this saying not everything is recorded in Scripture.\(^\text{12}\)

The Universal Opportunistic view has been a long church tradition. Early adopters included Thomas Aquinas, Jacob Arminius, and John Henry Newman. Modern day advocates include Norman Geisler and Robert Lightner.\(^\text{13}\)

**The Postmortem Evangelist View**

The Postmortem Evangelist viewpoint believes that at the moment of death a person has an encounter with Jesus Christ that gives him an opportunity to accept or reject Him as their Savior. They admit that there is no Biblical basis for this viewpoint but they believe that this help reconcile certain Catholic presuppositions.\(^\text{14}\) Obviously, due to the lack of evidence in Scripture, many people attack the validity of this viewpoint.

Hebrews 9:23-28 is often used to combat against this viewpoint. These verses say that people are destined to die once and then face the judgment.\(^\text{15}\) Another argument is that it undermines the need for missions. However, those who favor the view argue that it does not as missions were given as commandment from Christ.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{12}\) Boyd and Eddy., Kindle Location 4045  
\(^{13}\) Ibid., Kindle Location 4025  
\(^{14}\) Blowers.  
\(^{16}\) Boyd and Eddy., Kindle Location 4115
There are not as many advocates of this viewpoint as the Universal and Restrictivist views. There is a lot of criticism, especially in evangelical circles. Therefore, the largest proponents of this theory come from the Roman Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{17}

**The Inclusivist View**

The last major view is the Inclusivist View. This theory says that a person only has to believe whether or not they know the name of Christ.\textsuperscript{18} This view is highly debated and controversial among Evangelicals. They believe that Christ is the only way but He can be known in many forms. Essentially it is a viewpoint that embraces general revelation as a sole means of Salvation. One support method for this is to say that Jesus taught in the temple to those who were consumed in Judaism. They were looking for the Messiah and believed, but did not realize that Christ was the Messiah Himself.\textsuperscript{19}

A common objection is that this view leans toward religious pluralism. In other words, this can lead to a belief that all religions lead to the same place.\textsuperscript{20} The *Encyclopedia of Apologetics* even lists Inclusivism under the heading of Pluralism.\textsuperscript{21} However, Inclusivists do not hold to any belief that does not include Christ as the redemptive factor in Salvation. They simply believe that God recognizes faith in a person that believes whether or not they know Christ specifically.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17} Blowes.
\textsuperscript{18} Boyd and Eddy., Kindle Location 4136
\textsuperscript{19} Charles C. Ryrie, "Dr. Ryrie's Articles," (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010)., pg. 62
\textsuperscript{20} Boyd and Eddy., Kindle Location 4184
\textsuperscript{22} Boyd and Eddy., Kindle Location 4194
Like the other viewpoints discussed, Inclusivism has been adopted by early church fathers and modern day leaders. Early adopters include Justin Martyr, John Wesley, and C. S. Lewis. Modern day advocates include Sir Norman Anderson, and John Sanders.23

Comparisons

All four of the viewpoints have a common theme. They all believe that Christ is the way to Heaven. However, all four have different beliefs and nuances on how that Salvation through Christ is achieved. Two of the four, the Inclusivist, and the Post Mortem Evangelical views, do not have any real Scriptural basis for their beliefs. One must always have Biblical support when forming theological viewpoints. Without the basis of Scripture, the theory or view is nothing but a manmade concept. Christians must always take extra care to make certain that they are not letting their finite minds stand in the way of the truth of the Word of God.

The Universal Opportunistic and Restrictivist views do seem to have ample Biblical support. Much of the belief system from either group stems from what one believes about predestination or election. However, that discussion is beyond the scope of this inquisition.

Conclusion

It is my conclusion that the best viewpoint is the Universal Opportunistic view. There is no doubt that Romans describes general revelation. If one can know God through this type of revelation, there must be a way for that person to be saved. However, it also seems to be accurate that one must actually hear the Gospel to make the volitional decision to follow Christ. If someone is seeking, it is my personal opinion that God will in fact make a way for that person

23 Ibid., Kindle Location 4184
to know the Gospel. As has been discussed this can come in many variety of ways. Who are we to limit God?

As was also discussed, this does not diminish the need for mission work. People need to hear the Word of God and we have been commanded by Christ to bring it to them. Therefore we must go into all the world and make disciples as He commanded.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.}, Matthew 28:19
References


Blowers, Laverne P. "Are They Really Lost?". Mishawaka, IN: Bethel College.


