

1. How does anyone - Jew or Gentile - come into the goodness of God's salvation? (Read through verses 1-13 again, and write as full an answer as you can in your notebook.)
2. According to verse 17, what must happen before someone comes to faith and is then able to 'call on the name of the Lord' (verses 13-14)?
3. Read Jesus' words in Matthew 28:18-20. What do you think is the weak link in the chain of events in Romans 10:14-15?
4. Verse 18 refers to God's self-revelation in his creation. In itself this is insufficient for salvation. According to Romans 1:19-20, though, this general revelation does have an important consequence for everyone. What is it?

Have you ever read Ezekiel 3:16-21, or Ezekiel 33:1-9, where God speaks to the prophet about the responsibilities of a watchman? Could it be that we Christians have a similar responsibility towards those who have not yet heard about the Lord Jesus, or who are trapped in false religion?

Weekend

1. You may like to re-read Romans 1-5 to broaden your understanding of the gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone. Alternatively, you may like to study Ephesians 2 to see what God has done in bringing complete outsiders into the full benefit of a new relationship with himself. Don't forget: the God who by sheer grace saved the formerly pagan Ephesians - and you! - can do the same today as the gospel comes to people of other religions and to those who are until then unevangelized.
2. Try to get hold of a copy of, or read the relevant chapters of Dick Dowsett's book, '**God, That's Not Fair!**' (available second hand from Amazon) for a missionary's eye view of the problem of the unevangelized and other religions - and what to do about it!
3. If you are unsure about the Christian claim that Jesus provides the only way to God, you should read '**Who Does He Think He Is?**' by John Marsh and David Watson, or else read right through the John's Gospel.

Notes



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Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 32: What about other religions? (An issue study)

It is clearly a dreadful thing to reject God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. But what about the people who have never had a chance to say 'no' - who have never even heard the gospel? Will a God of love and justice condemn them to an eternity in hell?

Then there are those who are faithful members of other religions. Are they excluded from salvation if they do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord?

Many sincere people would shudder at the suggestion that the un-evangelized, and those who adhere to other faiths, are lost. Your task this week must be to discover what the Bible actually says in answer to these questions - and it says much! The notes select passages which represent the main thrust of the Bible's teaching, but you may want to read more widely. (Use cross references in your Bible, or a concordance, to help you find relevant passages.)

To speculate further than what the Bible actually says is dangerous. But you can always trust what you find in its pages, and you can be assured that God, as Judge of all the earth, will always do right (see Genesis 18:25).

Day 1. No other God

Isaiah 45:5-25

1. As you read through verses 5-19, write down the ways in which the Creator God is distinct, and differs from the gods men create.

It is not necessary to worship a physical idol to be guilty of idolatry. Worship of any invention of man's mind, or any created being, is idolatry. Exodus 20:1-6 and Romans 1:18-25 spell out the consequences of idolatry. (Look up these passages and make a note of what they say, if you have time.)

2. What hope of alternative means of salvation through other religions is given by the Lord in verses 20-25? How does this unique Saviour-God describe himself, and what response does he require from every man?

It will not do to say that members of other religions who do not worship the God who reveals himself in the Bible are worshipping the same God in their own way. The Bible's condemnation of all other gods is sweeping and universal.

As an act of worship, read (aloud if you can) Isaiah 40:9-31, then go on to express in your own words your worship of this God who is uniquely and supremely great.

Day 2. No other way

John 10:1-18

Jesus Christ is unique - and made outstanding claims about himself. Either he was an ego maniac, or his claims were true! None of his claims are more egocentric than the 'I AM' sayings in John's Gospel. Today's study looks at some of these exclusive claims of Jesus.

1. Look over the passage and note down those characteristics which mark out Jesus' sheep. How do your notes compare with verses 25-30? In contrast, what does Jesus say about those who are not his sheep (see verse 26)?
2. Jesus speaks slightly of other would-be rivals for the affections of his flock. How are they described? Why do you think he is so critical of others - who may well have been well-intentioned religious leaders?
3. Verse 10 shows Jesus' purpose over against that of the 'thief'. How is the qualification of faith in Jesus as the only way to eternal life with God confirmed in John 14:1-7, John 3:16-21 and Acts 4:12?

Verse 16 must be carefully understood as it might be misread to mean that 'other sheep' from other religions might find their way into Jesus' fold. Clearly, Jesus is talking to Jews and saying that he has other, non-Jewish sheep. But notice the qualifying characteristic of all his sheep: 'they will heed my voice'.

Are you willing to be as extreme in your faith in Jesus as he was in his claims about himself?

Day 3. No racial barriers

Acts 10

1. As a strict Jew, Peter would have been concerned to obey the Old Testament food laws, and he would not have had any social contact with people of other races on religious grounds. Summarize in your notebook how God prepared him for the visit of the messengers from Cornelius and note his response to them.
2. How had God prepared Cornelius to receive the good news about Jesus? Write down especially your observations about the parts played by (a) his awareness of the God of the Bible through his contact with Jewish religion, and (b) the ministry of angels.
3. This story has been used by some people to justify the view that God will accept 'men of good faith' no matter what their race or religion. To what extent does that view accurately reflect the text of verses 34-35? From the rest of Peter's talk, what condition must be met to receive forgiveness of sins, and

how did Cornelius and the others with him show they had met it?

Write down the names of any people you know who have a background in a religion other than Christianity. Start to pray for them that God will prepare them to receive the message of Jesus. Go on to pray that you - and perhaps other Christians - will find opportunities to tell them the good news.

Day 4. No justice

Romans 2:1-16

1. In the last study you saw how God does not show partiality on the basis of race. How do verses 6-11 back up this view of God's fairness?
2. What is God's standard of righteousness according to verses 12-13? When judged by this standard, who deserves eternal life? (When you have written down your answer, a glance into chapter 3 and especially verses 9-20 will confirm if you have got it right!)

Verses 14-15 show that even those who don't know what the Bible says have an innate knowledge of God's basic requirements. Their conscience approves them when they do right and accuses them when they go wrong.

3. On the basis of your understanding of human nature as well as what the Bible says, how likely is it that anyone will be able to stand before the Lord Jesus with a clear conscience (see verse 16)?

'Surely God won't condemn a man to hell just because he hasn't heard the gospel.' If you haven't heard - or thought - something like that, you certainly will sooner or later! God's righteous judgment (and his condemnation of all men as sinners) is on the basis of works - not on whether we have had an opportunity to respond to the gospel. His salvation, on the other hand, is totally a matter of grace on the basis of the work of Jesus, and is to be received by faith.

When you have time, either now or at the weekend, why not read on in the letter to the Romans - at least to the end of chapter 5? Review the notes that you made on the earlier studies of Romans - 'Paul's manifesto', Weeks 26 and 27.

Day 5. No shirking

Romans 10

Isn't the gospel **GOOD NEWS**? No more need we fear condemnation under the law because we fail to observe it (verse 5). God has his own way of putting us in the right through faith in Christ alone (see verse 4). Romans 10 is set in the context of God's dealings with the people of Israel, but its principles bear wider application.