

Three intellectual challenges to the Christian Faith

- 1. Is God there?**
(the challenge of **naturalism**)
- 2. Is God fair?**
(the challenge of **pluralism**)
- 3. Does God care?**
(the challenge of **deism**)

All evangelicals agree that:

- 1. Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.**
John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.’”
- 2. Christ’s work on the cross is imputed to any and all sinners who will be saved.**
2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

All evangelicals do not agree that:

Salvation comes only to those who place direct faith in Jesus.

Acts 10:34-35

“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

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Reason #1 *Reconciliation was completed by Christ’s sacrifice without man’s faith.*

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

“All this is from God, who **reconciled** us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God **was reconciling** the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them”

Reason #2 *The Old Testament examples of God’s grace going beyond the Abrahamic covenant.*

- **Holy Pagans** - Job, Abimelech (king of Gerar - Gen.20:1-18), Jethro (a priest of Midian - Ex.18:1-12),
- Jews who lived before Jesus was born - **Abraham**.
- The people of **Nineveh** (Jonah) God received their repentance.
- **Abel, Enoch, Noah, Daniel** being neither Jews nor Christians, pleased God because they sought Him with the faith response which pleases Him (Heb.11:6)
- **Malachi 1:11** “From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among **the nations**, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering; for my name is great among **the nations**, says the Lord of hosts.”
- **Isaiah 19:25** “Blessed be **Egypt** my people, and **Assyria** my handiwork, and **Israel** my inheritance.”

Reason #3 *The New Testament examples of God's grace going beyond the Abrahamic covenant.*

- **Melchizedek** (a Canaanite priest - Gen.14:17-24) Heb.6:20-.
- The **Magi** (wise men) (Matt.2:1-12)
- **Luke 18:9-14** God forgives the publican who simply asks for mercy.
- **Matthew 10:15; 11:22; 12:41-42** Some of the unexpected inhabitants of heaven - the Ninevites, the queen of Sheba, the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah.
- **Acts 10:34-35** "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."
- **Acts 14:16-17** "In the past, He let all nations go their own way. Yet He has not left Himself without testimony."

Problems with this view

- **There is no hope outside faith in Christ.** Eph.2:12 "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **without hope and without God** in the world
- **Confession of faith in Jesus is essential.** Jn.3:17-18 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. **He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**"
Rom. 10:9-10 "that if you **confess with your mouth** Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and **with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**"

- **Many will not be saved.** Lk.13:22-30 "22 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. 23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "**Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.** . . . 30 Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."
- **The argument of the book of Romans**, which makes the following points clear.
 - a. All people have enough "light" to be responsible before God with respect to their sin.
 - b. It is by faith in Christ that sins are forgiven.
 - c. Faith comes by hearing the gospel preached.
 - d. Many people have zeal for God but are not saved.

- **There is no postmortem repentance.** Heb.9:27-28 "And inasmuch as it is **appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment;**"
- **The Jews of the first century** certainly seemed to fit the criteria for believing individuals who were not confessing faith in Christ yet they are condemned. Rom.10:1-2; Phil. 3:1-11. The same can be said of the religious audience in Athens. Acts 17:30-31.
- **The cases cited as biblical examples** of people saved through general revelation are, at best, ambiguous. We know little about Melchizedek's life experience for example. Cornelius (a "god-fearer") was not saved until he believed, Acts.11:14.

Is God's grace broader than we can see?

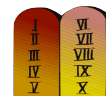
1. The revelation that we have clearly indicates that **outside confession of faith in Christ as savior there is no reason for hope.**
2. **This is the path we must take and proclaim.**
3. **The extension of God's grace beyond what we preach is possible but not known to us.**

Note

1. We know that the inclusion of Gentiles in God's grace was a mystery unknown to Israel before Pentecost.
2. We see subtle signs of "extended mercy" in Scripture.

The Lord of Mystery

Israel knew God's covenant
The mercies of the Lord divine
Not seeing clear God's mystery
Of Gentiles grafted to His vine.



But when the light of God's broad plan
The mystery hid in ages past
Is brought to light at Calvary
A new perspective then is cast.



So when we contemplate the host
Who know not Christ but fear God still
We can't but wonder at the thought
Is another mystery in His will?