

The Fate of the Unreached: Are They Lost Without Special Revelation?

■ "If we argue that there must be a way of entrance into the Kingdom of heaven other than the way of faith in Christ for those who have never heard, then we cut away the ground except that of philanthropy, from beneath all vital missionary enterprise." J. Oswald Sanders

By Jack Cottrell and Stephen E. Burris

Introduction

This paper seeks to lay a firm theological foundation from the epistle of Paul to the Romans for missions in the future. It is intended to address the debate that is currently taking place among evangelicals over the final destiny of the unreached. This is not a discussion of what God can or will do about those who haven't heard. Romans does not support some type of "religious pluralism," "universalism," or a "neo-universalism." The epistle to the Romans clearly indicates there is no salvation outside of Christ. Therefore, we assert that Romans is the missiological response to a passive attitude about frontier missions.

Background

Clark Pinnock summarizes the current debate clearly in the following terms:

A majority of evangelicals today are hardline restrictivists in my estimation. The only possibility for encountering God and receiving salvation in this view is to exercise explicit faith in Jesus Christ in this earthly life. General revelation is not sufficient; all must receive God's revelation in Christ. Outside of this special revelation, there is near-total darkness. Other religions are error and falsehood and non-Christians with few exceptions are on their way to hell. The main motivation for missions is to rescue people from this fate... A middle path has been developing between the two extremes, a megashift in Christian thinking moving us in the direction of greater theological globalism.... I refer to a greater appreciation of how wide God's mercy is and how far-reaching God's salvific purposes are. (Pinnock 1992:12)

This "middle way" Pinnock describes lies somewhere between restrictivism—the belief that acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the basis of salvation—and inclusivism or universalism—the belief that a loving God will find a means to save every-

one. John Sanders gives additional helpful insight into the debate:

Proponents claim that universalism is the only legitimate means by which to harmonize God's universal salvific will with the plight of the unevangelized. Why, they ask, should people be condemned just because they were never able to hear of Jesus? (Sanders 1992:81)

Pinnock goes on to state the "middle way" position in the following:

If God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, it follows logically that everyone must have access to salvation. There would have to be an opportunity for all people to participate in the salvation of God. If Christ died for all, while yet sinners, the opportunity must be given for all to register a decision about what was done for them (Rom. 5:8). They cannot lack the opportunity merely because someone failed to bring the Gospel of Christ to them. God's universal salvific will implies the equally universal accessibility of salvation for all people. (Pinnock 1992:157)

General Revelation

This raises the question of whether any knowledge of God as Redeemer, or only knowledge of redemption as such, is available via general revelation.

The Form of General Revelation

That a general knowledge of God is revealed in a general way to all mankind is a fact well attested in Scripture. This knowledge comes both from created nature external to man and from within man's own nature as created by God. Regarding the former, the classic passage in the Old Testament is Psalm 19:1-6. This Psalm makes it clear that the created universe, especially the "starry heaven above," reveals to us the glory of its Creator. Indeed, the more data we become aware of, the more glorious does the Creator appear to our minds.

Along the same line, the most specific reference to general revelation is in Romans 1:18ff., where Paul is speaking of those who (unlike the Jews, for instance) do not have the benefit and blessing of God's special revelation. Truth and knowledge about God are available to the whole ungodly race, says Paul, "for God made it evident to them." How long has it been available? Ever since the creation of the world. And in what way is it made available? It is "understood through what has been made" (verse 20).

We should not be surprised, then, that even a pagan such as Aristotle could make the following statement: "Though God is invisible to every mortal creature, He is visible from His very work." Cicero says virtually the same things: "You do not see God, and yet you learn to know God from His works." (Pieper 1950:371-372) Honest observation of the creation can lead to no other conclusion, as Paul affirms in Romans 1:20.

In addition to the revelation from creation around us there is also an element of general revelation in the heart of every man. It is present there by virtue of the creation in that man is created in the image of God.

Romans 2:14-15 teaches us two things about general revelation. First, it teaches an inborn knowledge of God's law. The second thing is that each person has a conscience which reacts to that law.

The Content of General Revelation

The question then is: exactly what knowledge is actually received by man through these general means? Two issues are at stake here. One is the question whether any knowledge *at all* is received; the other is whether any *saving* knowledge is received.

The key passage is Romans 1:18ff. Verse 20 does not simply say that God's eternal power and divine nature are revealed through creation; it says they are actually seen and *understood*.

The word translated as "understood" is the Greek verb *noeo*, which means "to perceive with the mind, to have understanding, to think upon, gain an insight into" (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.* by Arndt and Gingrich) Thus the truth about God actually registers in the minds of all men. This terminology shows that man is clearly in possession of the truth at one point but rebelliously rejects it in one way or another.

We may ask at this point concerning the content of the knowledge received through general revelation. Romans 1:19 speaks of "that which is known about God," while verse 25 speaks of the "truth of God" (see verse 18). What is this truth? First of all, the very reality or existence of God, since God "did not leave Himself without witness" (Acts 14:17). The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1); his own "divine nature" is clearly seen (Romans 1:20). Thus the existence of God is known, even though he is invisible (Romans 1:20). Also known is the fact that the invisible God is the Creator as distinct from his creatures (Romans 1:25). Revealed as well are his glory (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:23) and his power (Romans 1:20). His eternity and immortality are also known (Romans 1:20, 23). His goodness is seen from his works (Acts 14:17). Also understood is our duty as creatures to worship and serve the Creator and to give him thanks (Romans 1:21, 25; Acts 14:17). The general revelation also includes the basic moral law (Romans 1:26-31; 2:14-15), and the knowledge that one ought to do right (Romans 2:15). Finally it includes the knowledge that God is a righteous judge (Romans 1:32). Most of these items are summed up in the term "divine nature" (Greek—theiotēs) in Romans 1:20.

The second question is whether any *saving* knowledge is received through general revelation. This is not necessarily the same question as to whether any heathen will be saved. Whether "the heathen" or even some heathen are saved is not the main question we are addressing here. Our question is whether general revelation contains any knowledge that can lead to salvation. Can a person be saved through what he knows about God from general revelation alone?

The answer is that Scripture gives us no basis for such a conclusion. General revelation simply does not give us any knowledge of redemption or of the Redeemer. In other words if someone is going to connect salvation with general revelation, he must be able to appeal to something more specific than the *fact* of general revelation alone.

Some ask, "What kind of God would

give man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him?" This question assumes that general revelation should have or is somehow intended to have something to do with salvation, and it suggests that if it cannot redeem then somehow God has failed or been unjust. But herein lies the basic fallacy, the basic error of this whole way of thinking, namely, the notion that general revelation is a work of God the Redeemer. The fact is that it is not. General revelation grows solely out of the works of creation and providence. It is a revelation of God as Creator and Ruler, not God as Redeemer. It speaks to man as creature, not to man as sinner. This is how it was intended to function from the beginning, and this is how it still functions. From the beginning man has been able to respond either positively or negatively to this revelation. By responding positively man is able to avoid condemnation. By responding negatively man comes under God's condemnation. The fact is that mankind uniformly responds negatively and thus all are "without excuse." Does this mean, then, that general revelation has only a negative function—that it only damns and cannot save? No. To put the question in this way is to renew the fallacy that such revelation is not a function of creation but somehow has an intended purpose for a post-Fall world. The point is that general revelation was not intended either to save (positive) or to condemn (negative). It was intended only for the positive purpose of declaring the glory of the Creator and giving general guidance to the creature.

We conclude, then, that general revelation as a function mainly of creation gives an abundance of knowledge about the Creator and his expectations with regard to his creatures. We note sadly that none of us has lived up to these expectations. Every individual has broken the law he knows; even those under general revelation alone are lawbreakers and are thus condemned. Does this mean that the heathen are lost? Yes, that seems to be the very point Paul is making in Romans 1:18ff. And general revelation cannot provide enough knowledge to save them. Does this mean, then, that God is the kind of God that would give man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him? *Of course not.* God has gone "above and beyond the call of duty" to accomplish redemption through Jesus Christ and to provide us with a whole body of knowledge about that redemption through special revelation.

One final thing is worth noting about general revelation. Although it provides

knowledge about the Creator, rebellious man alters and distorts this knowledge and even rejects it and replaces it with lies of his own making. We are not talking here about a simple sin against what one knows to be the truth; we are talking about an alteration of the truth itself—a willing, knowing, sinful alteration of the truth. Romans 1:21-25 shows how men have created their own false philosophies and false religions even in the face of revealed truth.

In conclusion to this first section we would call to mind the inscription on the Athenian altar, "To an Unknown God" (Acts 17:23). Quite correctly it did not say "To an Unknowable God," since the true God *can* be known. But sadly the true God is *unknown* to those who rely on general revelation alone. This is why we rejoice that God has also given us special revelation. This special revelation begins with Adam himself and is climaxed in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer.

Special Revelation

The difference between these two kinds of revelation is evident from their names. General revelation is that which is immediately available to all men in general and which gives us a general knowledge of God. Special revelation, on the other hand, is revelation given to a specific individual or group of individuals at a specific place and a specific time, and which may include knowledge that is more specific and detailed than could be given via general revelation. It is particular, not universal.

The Form of Special Revelation

The three main forms of special revelation consists of the mighty acts of God, the spoken words of God, and the visible presence of God.

1. *The Mighty Acts of God.* The first of these is a rather broad and nebulous category which serves to include those forms which do not properly belong to the other two. It embraces all those occasions in which God miraculously intervenes in history in order to work a specific work or accomplish a specific purpose. Sometimes this intervention is only in the mind of an individual, while most of the time it is an action performed on the objective stage of history.

Sometimes God reveals himself by acting upon the mind of a person in order to produce a dream or a vision which does not in itself contain any word revelation. The events acted out before the mind's eye may be real or they may be symbolic; in any case the sole purpose is to reveal something to the recipient of the dream or vision. Ex-

amples are the dreams given to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1-7) and interpreted by Joseph (Genesis 41:25-36), and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar interpreted by Daniel (Daniel 2:26-45).

More often, however, when we refer to the "mighty acts of God," we are thinking of the actual deeds and accomplishments of God performed before the eyes of many observers in open history. Some of these may be small and have a very limited purpose, e.g., the urim and thummim (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21) and the guiding of lots (Acts 1:26). Sometimes the revelation is in the form of a non-verbal theophany, as the pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21-22). More often the revelation comes through a mighty and marvelous miracle which displays the power of God before all who witness it or hear of it. Primary examples are the ten judgments (plagues) on the false gods of Egypt and their worshipers, and the opening of the Red Sea for the deliverance of the people of Israel (Exodus 7-14).

A point that needs to be emphasized very strongly is that although all such acts of God in history serve to reveal His nature or his will to some extent, revelation is not the primary purpose of most of them. For instance, the main purpose of a miracle is evidential, that is, it serves as proof or as a sign that the message of the miracle-worker is an authentic message from God. It is a sign that bears witness to something beyond itself. In other words the mighty miraculous acts of God are revelatory only in the secondary sense that they are *pointers* to the more specific word of revelation which they are designed to confirm. Also, the main purpose of the mighty redemptive acts of God, e.g., the cross and the resurrection, is to *save*, although they do in fact reveal much about God's nature.

We conclude therefore that the "mighty acts of God" are the least effective form of special revelation and are designed primarily for this purpose only when a very simple message is to be communicated. In most cases the acts of God are not intended primarily for revelation but are meant to accompany or be accompanied by the more specific form of revelation through words. This conclusion is quite traditional, but it stands in direct opposition to the modern theological trend of locating all revelation in God's mighty acts.

2. *The Spoken Words of God.* The second form of God's special revelation is the spoken words of God. The Creator is a God who speaks as well as acts, and he speaks verbally through human

language. His words may come to man in a number of ways. Many times God has spoken orally and audibly from heaven. Sometimes the Lord himself does not speak audibly but uses a messenger or spokesman to speak his words for him.

Verbal revelation may be given in other forms. Instead of being delivered audibly the words may be written. Verbal revelation may also be given wholly within the mind, as in the case of a dream or vision in which God delivers a message to the recipient.

3. *The Visible Presence of God.* The third form in which God gives special revelation is through his own visible presence. This form usually embodies one or both of the above (divine acts and/or divine words) as done or spoken by God himself as visibly present. Certain Old Testament theophanies fall into this category. The spiritual theophany in Exodus 24:10 probably did not involve accompanying words or deeds, but it was nevertheless a revelation of God through his visible presence. The Lord's appearance to Abraham in Genesis 18 included word revelation, as did his communion with Adam and Eve implied in Genesis 3. The "Angel of the Lord" appearances usually involved word communication and sometimes marvelous deeds (see Judges 6:21; 13:19-20).

Theophanies such as these appear to be a kind of prelude to what is usually regarded as the highest form of revelation, the visible presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus as the Incarnate Logos is the climatic and clearest revelation of God. The very heart of God is revealed by his personal presence—his character, his attitudes, his priorities, his spirit. Since Jesus is God in the flesh, his acts are the acts of God and his words are the words of God. Thus he reveals God in the other two forms while adding the third form of personal, visible presence. Kenneth Kantzer describes this aspect of the work of Jesus in this way:

The consummating mode of revelation in all Scripture, which serves to tie all other modes together, is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ differs from other modes in that he is not so much a mode of the divine communication as he is the divine being Himself, communicating to man directly in and through His incarnation in the human race. Jesus Christ combines both the act of revelation and the word of revelation. He is God acting; and when He speaks, He is in turn, God speaking with divine authority and divine infallibility. (Kantzer 1968:76)

When we understand that redemption is Christ's primary purpose, we see that his *uniqueness* lies in this area and not necessarily in his revealing activity. There is a kind of uniqueness about Christ as a form of revelation, of course, since he is the only incarnate Son of God. But we do not have to exaggerate this uniqueness in order to preserve his uniqueness as such, since the latter lies in his redemptive work. Though his revelation truly outshines all others, it in no way impinges on the authority of the other forms of revelation. Christ did not nullify that which went before him, and he did not make other forms of revelation obsolete.

This leads us to the following conclusions. (1) Jesus Christ is not the *only* form of special revelation. There is valid special revelation outside of Jesus Christ, including the writings of the Old and New Testaments. (2) The revelation in Jesus is not a higher form of revelation in the sense that it has higher authority than other revelations from God. All revelation has the same authority since it all comes ultimately from the same source, namely, God himself. This does not mean that it is all equally applicable in every age; we must retain the distinction between the two covenant eras, for instance. With regard to inherent authority, though, the revelation in Christ is no different from the book of Isaiah or I Corinthians. Jesus Christ is not an epistemological norm for knowledge of God; this idea is the essence of the Christological fallacy. (3) Jesus Christ in his earthly ministry is not the *final* revelation. Revelation was given to apostles and prophets in the decades following the resurrection and ascension; indeed, Jesus promised his apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth, truth which was ultimately from him (John 16:13-14). Certain of the miraculous spiritual gifts were revelatory in nature (e.g., prophecy and knowledge). The canonical writings known as the New Testament came into being after Christ's ministry on earth. These are all valid revelations and are equal in authority with Jesus' own words. They follow the revelation of the earthly Christ and are interpretive of his work. Finally, (4) Jesus Christ is not a higher form *than* word revelation; he is simply the highest form *of* word revelation. In fact, words in themselves constitute in a real sense the personal preference of their author.

The Content of Special Revelation

At this point we will present a brief survey of the content of special revelation, especially to see how it correlates with and complements general revelation. We note at the outset that the con-

tent of revelation is not just God himself in encounter, but also and primarily truth, truths about God and his creation. This truth will be discussed in two main categories: 1) truth about God and man; and 2), truth about sin and redemption.

1. *Truth About God and Man.* In the first place, there is no doubt that special revelation contains truth about God and man. Regarding the former, it gives us a rather detailed knowledge of God. We learn about his works, and we learn about his nature. We learn about his basic nature as the Creator, and we learn about his work of creation. It is significant that special revelation should give us some of the details of the creation of the universe. From general revelation we may learn the *fact* that this is a created world and that the invisible Creator produced it by a stupendous act of power. But general revelation could not convey to us the data of Genesis one and two. This knowledge of pre-human cosmic history could come to us only through verbal revelation.

We find it ironic that some theologians who feel constrained to question the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis do so on the ground that there were, after all, no human observers there to record these events. It is said that origins have no history; thus our historical research draws a blank about the "stories" in early Genesis.

Now, obviously, Bible believers throughout history have been aware of the absence of a human observer during this period of origins, but by and large they have not felt it necessary to question the reality of the events on that account. Why not? Because they have recognized also the reality of word revelation. There is no reason why God could not have explained the details of creation first of all to Adam and Eve, and certainly to Moses. Special revelation is the key that unlocks the door to such knowledge of the Creator and his work of creation.

Also given through special revelation is more detailed knowledge about the Creator's will for his creatures. Ethics is grounded in creation and has to do with the creature's relationship to his Creator. Through special revelation God tells us what he wants us to do and what he does not want us to do. In other words, he gives us law. Some of it is universally applicable (the moral law), and some of it is intentionally limited in scope (positive laws).

We should note that data in these categories have been revealed both by general and by special revelation, some of the latter being given even before the entrance of sin. Even in the pre-Fall era, God did not intend to limit his revealing

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work merely to general revelation. Now that sin *has* entered the human situation, however, the need for special revelation is even more imperative. Even the data about God and man knowable through general revelation are republished and clarified in the special forms and are complemented by the addition of more details. The special revelation given to man after the Fall has been adapted to man as sinner. It is more than simply *anthropic*—accommodated to man; it is *peccatopic*, adapted to man as sinner. The fact that special revelation is adapted to sinners means that beyond the special revelation itself (e.g., the words of Scripture), no further special work of God is needed to enable the sinner to understand it and respond to it. The revelation itself impacts upon the sinner's heart and mind. There is no special need for regeneration, illumination, or the internal testimony of the Spirit to enable this revelation to do its work. As we will see later, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

2. *Truth About Sin and Redemption.* Secondly, special revelation also contains truth about sin and redemption. Of course, according to Romans 1:18ff., general revelation alone convicts the lawbreaker of his sin against God and of his liability to God's wrath and punishment. But through special revelation this basic knowledge of sin and sinfulness also is clarified and complemented, and is adapted to the minds of sinners. If the sinner can be considered without excuse on the basis of general revelation alone, he is all the more inexcusable in the light of special revelation.

The one area where special revelation breaks new ground has to do with the subject of redemption. As we have seen, the creation-knowledge says nothing about God as Redeemer. This then becomes the main theme of the special revelation. Here we learn aspects of the nature of God not included in the general forms. Here we learn of his loving-kindness and his grace, his patience and his willingness to suffer pain in our place to save us from our own folly. We learn that even though he has been sinned against, he is willing to forgive the sinner and to receive him into fellowship anyway.

We also learn the truth about how this is all accomplished, namely, through the incarnate Logos, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. From the very beginning of redemptive special revelation, the central theme is the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ (Genesis 3:15). *Here* then is the true

centrality of Jesus Christ, namely, as the subject-matter of revelation, not the mode; as the main content of this revelation, not the main form. Christ as Redeemer (not Christ as Revealer) is the central *theme* of special revelation. Here is the glory of special revelation, as well as the glory of Jesus Christ. He is not the only content of this revelation, but he surely is its main theme. We glorify him when we honor him thus as the central content of the Bible.

One other point that should be mentioned is that from special revelation we also learn how to receive the benefits of Christ's saving work, and we learn how to love and serve God not just as Creator but as Redeemer, too. Specifically we learn to serve him through the new motive of loving gratitude in response to the grace he freely gives us.

With this background perspective on general and special revelation we now turn to the question of the unreached peoples of the world and the implications for frontier missions.

How Lost Are the Heathen? (Romans 1:18—3:20)

We are using the term *heathen* in the sense of someone who has been exposed to general revelation only. The question is whether any or all heathen will be saved. If they are, it will be either by *law* or by *grace*, since these are the only two bases for judgement.

Will the heathen be judged and saved by LAW? Some believe that *ignorance* of the law could mean salvation, according to the principle in Romans 4:15. "Where there is no law" includes "where there is no knowledge of law." God judges according to one's conscientious response to available light. But this cannot apply to the heathen as a group, for they do have law. This is the point of Romans 1:18-32; 2:14-15. To whom, then, would Romans 4:15 apply? To those with *total* ignorance of the law: infants, the mentally handicapped. And, to those who have ignorance of particular laws.

Is it possible, then, that *knowledge* of the law could bring salvation to the heathen? Paul's whole point in Romans 1:18-32; 2:14-15 is that the heathen *do* have some law through general revelation, but that they have sinned against it and are therefore *condemned*. (See Romans 1:18, 20, 32; 2:12; 3:19-20, 23; 6:23.) "But what about the good heathen?" Paul's answer is that there aren't any: Romans 3:9-20, 23.

Some approach the question of the salvation of the heathen (and even salvation in general) in a way that is exactly opposite to Paul's approach. Their idea is this: "As long as there is a *little good*, (i.e., *some* obedience, *some* posi-

tive response to God) in a person, God will save that person." An example will suffice:

Any person upon the face of this earth ... who sincerely seeks the God of heaven and responds positively to any divine truth he discovers, whether through the revelation of creation or by means of special revelation, ... will be given eternal life. [This is based on Romans 2:7.] This includes Jews, Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Unitarians, Buddhists [sic], the non-Sunday school brethren, the non-instrumental Church of Christ, pagans, and all others. Anyone—now hear me correctly—anyone who seeks glory, honor, and immortality, and who sincerely responds to any divine truth to which he may be exposed, will be given eternal life—yea, even those pagans in the most remote sections of the earth who seek God and find him ONLY through the revelation of creation. If Paul is not teaching this principle in Romans Chapter 1, in referring to the pagans, I am at a total loss as to what he is teaching. (Scott 1988:11)

Paul's point is just the opposite: As long as there is a *little bad* (i.e., even just one sin) in a person, God will condemn that person, if indeed law (one's relative goodness or badness) is the standard of judgment and salvation. See James 2:10. The bottom line is that *no one*, including the heathen, can be saved when judged by law.

Will the heathen be judged and saved by *grace*? If any are saved, it will be only by *grace*—not law. Will some/all heathen be saved because of their *knowledge* of grace? No, the knowledge of grace comes only through special revelation. The heathen (by definition) have only general revelation, through which they know God only as Creator and Law-giver. "Knowing God" as such is not enough for salvation. E.g., to "find God" in the sense of Acts 17:27 is not necessarily to find grace.

Will some/all heathen be saved because of the *ignorance* of grace? This is probably the most prevalent opinion Christians have about the fate of the heathen. "Surely God will not condemn someone for not believing in Christ if he never even *heard* of Christ!"

The facts are otherwise, however. Despite their ignorance of grace—even though they are ignorant of grace, the heathen are condemned. This is the whole point of Paul's discussion of the heathen in Romans 1:18-3:20, and it is confirmed by the following Scriptures as well: John 17:3; Acts 16:31; 26:17-18; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 2:12-13; 4:17-19.

"But how can God condemn someone for not believing in Jesus, if that person never even heard of Jesus?"

This question misses the whole point. It is based on a false assumption, namely, that *not believing in Jesus* is the reason for this condemnation. But this is not the case. The heathen are not condemned for "not believing in Jesus." They are condemned rather for breaking God's laws, i.e., they are not judged (either for salvation or condemnation) in relation to that of which they are ignorant, but only in relation to that of which they have knowledge.

"But what kind of God is he who gives man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him?" (This question is asked by Dale Moody in *The Word of Truth*, pg. 59) As noted above, this question misses the whole point of general revelation. The light of general revelation was given neither to save nor to condemn. This puts general revelation in a false context. God does not give general revelation as Redeemer, but only as Creator and Ruler. It also ignores the fact that God *has* given us enough light to save as well as to damn. But he has given it in the form of special revelation, which must be taken by us to the heathen. See Romans 10:13-15.

The heathen will be saved by grace if someone takes them the gospel of grace and they accept it. We have no Biblical reason to think they will be saved by grace on any other basis.

The implication of this section of Romans for the necessity of frontier missions is obvious. As long as they remain heathen (without special revelation), the heathen will be judged and condemned by law. Whether they are judged and saved by grace depends upon our obedience to the Great Commission and their acceptance of the gospel.

To have the knowledge of Christ imposes upon us the inescapable duty to share that knowledge with every man without delay. To withhold it is a crime of infinite magnitude against that large portion of the human race which is still in midnight gloom.

The church and individual Christian will have much to answer for because they have withheld the saving truth from needy souls. Missionary history in all lands is replete with poignant incidents which underline the crime of delay. (Sanders 1972: 76)

The Means of Missions (Romans 10:13-18)

Paul connects salvation with calling on the name of the Lord. The answer to the series of questions Paul asks in these verses is that they can not. Then how can the unreached peoples be saved? They cannot unless a spokesman is sent to preach Christ. Then the

unreached will hear, believe, confess, be baptized and be saved. Hence the necessity of frontier missions.

The missionary functions as an "apostle" or herald. He/she is sent, not on his or her own authority, but to convey a message that Christ himself has authorized. To hear the herald is to hear the King. It is God's will that through the proclamation of the good news of Christ the unreached peoples of the earth will come to a saving knowledge and faith. The unreached are to call on God's mercy and grace in faith.

But how can anyone have faith in one of whom they have never heard? This faith can come in only one way: the missionary must make the unreached aware of their need for faith in Christ. This requires making God's special revelation known, to proclaim God as Redeemer not just Creator and Ruler.

There are two primary ways in which a person can learn of someone of whom they have never heard. Either the person himself speaks directly to the individual, or he sends his representative. The task that Christ has given His church is to make Him known to all peoples, *ta ethne*. The missionary works in partnership with Christ in proclaiming the good news of salvation. This is what the apostles did and what we are to do today. We are Christ's "apostles" through whom all peoples are to hear of Christ. The point this passage makes is that if the missionary is sent and he preaches Christ's good news some will hear, believe, confess and be baptized. The result will be the establishment of a church among every people, a church capable of evangelizing that people group and extending the good news of Christ to other peoples as well.

Verse 18 raises the question of whether every person had heard the good news preached. It seems reasonable to conclude that Paul is indicating that the gospel had been preached widely enough that representatives of peoples in the "known world" had heard it. Those who did not respond at least had the opportunity to hear and obey. Therefore, it is important to note that at the time Paul penned these words he was planning to go to Spain, a region where Christ was not yet known. (See following section.)

To provide missionaries for every people is clearly needed today. It is God's will that the church faithfully proclaim the good news to all peoples and that this be accomplished through those who are sent, i.e., missionaries. This is the priority facing the church as we race toward the 21st Century.

There can be no other conclusion. God has given special revelation, and it

is His will that the content of that revelation be proclaimed to all peoples. All other ministries the church is to perform come as a result—and, in some cases, in support—of this priority.

The Strategy of Missions (Romans 15:20)

Pinnock's point is well taken when he states,

It is God's will that all the nations shall participate in the redemption and transformation of the world (Rev 7:9). Therefore, the central thrust of this present age is the ingathering of the Gentiles through the mission entrusted to us... What God began to do in the event of Incarnation has to be fully accomplished at the end of history. (Pinnock 1992:117)

Paul's priority was to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. I Corinthians 3:10 demonstrates that Paul's role as the master builder was to lay the foundation of Christ and to allow others to build on that foundation. Perhaps he saw this as a matter of personal honor. For whatever reason Paul's constant aim was to be a pioneer. His calling was to found new churches, as evidenced by his missionary journeys. This meant going to places where others had not been, not to go to places already penetrated with the gospel. Other apostles did likewise. It was in this way that the gospel extended so far in such a short period of time. The pressing needs of the unreached prevented Paul from building on another's foundations. Evidently Paul had no trouble finding places where Christ was not known. After all he was hindered many times from visiting the church in Rome.

If the church in history had followed Paul's example a great deal of overlapping of effort could have been avoided. Likewise, if more of today's missionaries followed the example of Paul and sought to take the gospel to those peoples where Christ is not known, all the peoples, *ta ethne*, would soon have the gospel.

Church history is sprinkled with examples of those who in fact followed the example of Paul. William Carey, Cameron Townsend, Hudson Taylor and others determined to go to those regions where Christ was not known. Carey's words "go to the difficult places and leave the easy places for some-

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one else" rings as a resounding challenge today.

Conclusion

We turn again to J. Oswald Sanders who has placed this whole discussion clearly in view.

It has been cogently stated that, even if we were academically uncertain about the probable fate of the millions who have never heard of Christ, the parable of the Lost Sheep lays down the principle that if we are convinced of the fate of even one per cent of mankind, we are under obligation to go, even at utmost peril and cost to ourselves, to seek that He may save... If we argue that there must be a way of entrance into the Kingdom of heaven other than the way of faith in Christ for those who have never heard, then we cut away the ground except that of philanthropy, from beneath all vital missionary enterprise. The idea removes all urgency from our task. We know the reality of hell, and we know the way of escape. How shall we escape if we neglect to warn and woo the unevangelized? (Sanders 1972:78, 80)

Ralph Winter places the remaining task in proper perspective when he states,

The task is not as impossible as it might seem. We must adjust our thinking so that we focus on penetrating people groups and planting evangelizing, indigenous churches. Then, instead of talking of evangelizing 2.1 billion individuals, we will talk of evangelizing 11,000 Unreached People groups.

If we were to assign one missionary to each of these unreached people groups, we would need at least 11,000 recruits, but this is only one new missionary from every 49,000 True Christians! Some frontiers involve millions of people, and obviously require more than one missionary or one couple. Yet today we have the potential of missionaries from all parts of the globe.

The job is large, but not too large for the church around the world. We are in a new era. Now every church in the world ought to be involved with the frontiers. New missionary recruits cannot come just from the West, nor just from Asia, Africa or Latin America. We must all work together to do this task. (Winter 1992:189)

We must complete the task. General

revelation is not sufficient, special revelation is required. The responsibility is ours. The unreached are waiting for an explanation of God's good news that they can understand and accept. An explanation which tells them of God the Redeemer. ■

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