

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**)

2. Is God fair? (the challenge of **pluralism**)

Is Christianity exclusive of those who do not believe in Jesus and if so what does that tell us about God?

Is it fair and consistent with a God of love to torture forever those who do not respond to him in a prescribed way?

Three postures toward culture

Transcribers

The Biblical message is applied **literally** to modern society with little or no attention to the differences between modern culture and Biblical culture.

We simply transcribe the Biblical text in a literal way to our present situation.

Translators

The Biblical message is applied in **principle** to modern society giving careful attention to the unique cultural settings of both the Biblical text and the present.

We translate the Biblical message in a way that directs its principle teaching to our present situation.

Transformers

The Biblical message is freely **altered** to fit the values of modern culture.

We change the Biblical message or select only portions of it that seem to fit the common sense of the modern situation.

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Reaction

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."

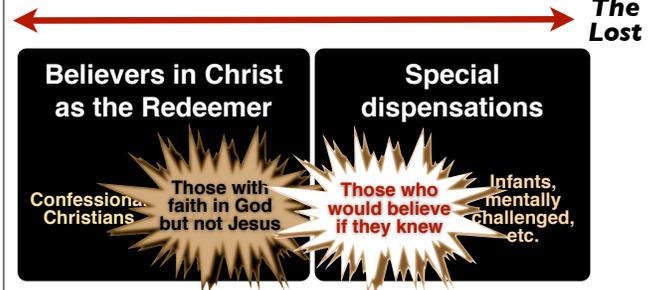
All evangelicals do not agree that:
Salvation comes only to those who place direct faith in Jesus.

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.”

Most evangelicals do not agree that:
Saving faith can be implicit as well as explicit.

The Saved



“I have never been able to conjure up (as some great evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but who will inevitably perish. On the other hand, as I have said, I cannot be a universalist. Between these extremes I cherish the hope that the majority of the human race will be saved.”

John Stott

Essentials: a Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue p327

John Wesley believed that through *prevenient (preceding or common) grace* God offers every human being the possibility of being associated with the mystery of salvation, even if the “how” of this is known only to God.

Alister McGrath notes: “God is not inhibited from bringing people to faith in him even if that act of hope and trust may lack the fully orbed character of an informed Christian faith.”

Implicit faith?

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

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”

But

John 3:36

“Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see that life, for **God's wrath remains on him.**”

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 union with 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.**"

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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 basis 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 Mysteries

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?