

### **Scenario 3: The Question Posed as a Sincere Inquiry About the Fate of the Unevangelized**

NON-CHRISTIAN: It sounds like you're saying that anyone who hasn't heard about Jesus is going to hell. That doesn't sound fair.

CHRISTIAN: You're right. It doesn't. But maybe there's another way to look at this question.

NON-CHRISTIAN: How?

CHRISTIAN: Your question presupposes two things. One is that there actually is a message to hear. The second is that some people haven't heard it.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Right.

CHRISTIAN: The Bible would say yes to the first presupposition – there is a message to be heard. But the Bible would say no to the second presupposition – there really aren't nay people who haven't heard it.

NON-CHRISTIAN: You've got to be kidding me. There are millions of people who haven't heard about Jesus.

CHRISTIAN: Let's take one thing at a time. The Bible says there certainly is a message that everyone must hear. I'd summarize it in four points.

1. There is a loving, righteous, knowable God.
2. There's something about us that separates us from that God.

3. God has provided a means to reconcile us – Jesus’ death on the cross.
4. Each person needs to trust in that means of reconciliation for him or herself.

NON-CHRISTIAN: I agree that summarizes the Christian message. I don’t know if I buy it, but I think it’s accurate. But how can you say that everyone’s heard that?

CHRISTIAN: Don’t get ahead of me. Make sure that you see what’s behind this message. God has provided the means to reconcile people to Him. It’s not people earning their way to God based on what they do. This is what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions.

NON-CHRISTIAN: I see that.

CHRISTIAN: The Bible says that every single person on the planet already knows the first two points of this four-point outline. They see evidence of God in nature or in their own hearts (see Rom. 1:19-20; Ps. 19:1-2; Acts 14:15-17; Eccl. 3:11).

NON-CHRISTIAN: Okay. But what about points three and four?

CHRISTIAN: This requires a little bit of putting two and two together. But I think the Bible say that everyone either rejects or accepts points one and two. People look either at the stars or in their hearts and wonder, “Is there some kind of creator behind it all?” or they don’t. They also look in their own hearts and say either, “I’m in trouble” or “I’m okay.”

NON-CHRISTIAN: Where are you getting this from?

CHRISTIAN: I think that the best place to study this is in the first two chapters of Romans in the New Testament. Maybe you should read it for yourself before we continue this conversation.

NON-CHRISTIAN: I will read it. But I'd like you to go on.

CHRISTIAN: Okay. I think that these two chapters argue that some people reject this little amount of revelation (that there is a God and that we fall short of His perfection) by suppressing it. If that's true, then its not God who rejects them but they who reject God. It says that they are without excuse.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Why would they suppress it?

CHRISTIAN: For the same reason that anyone rejects God. He's holy, and we're not. We'd rather not deal with a God who makes demands on us. That's why people like other gods – the ones that aren't so holy or so demanding, or the ones that say we're not accountable.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Okay. Stop your preaching. Suppose they don't suppress it?

CHRISTIAN: I don't think God explicitly tells us how He's going to handle every situation, because that's His job, and he doesn't need to consult with us on anything.

NON-CHRISTIAN: That's a good way of putting it.

CHRISTIAN: It makes sense to me if I think of it like this:  
“Revelation rejected brings darkness; revelation received brings light.”

NON-CHRISTIAN: You might have lost me there.

CHRISTIAN: If people reject the first two points of revelation, God is simply giving them what they ask for – a life separated from Him – darkness. They’ll stay in darkness unless something radical happens. But for the people who say, “Yes, there must be something bigger than me, and I don’t match up,” I think God will get the rest of the story to them.

NON-CHRISTIAN: If they say yes to points one and two, he’ll send them three and four?

CHRISTIAN: Yes

NON-CHRISTIAN: Where does the Bible say that?

CHRISTIAN: Lots of places in the Bible say things such as, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13), or “You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Ps. 9:10; see also 1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:2; 16:9; Ps. 145:18; Luke 19:10).

NON-CHRISTIAN: So, how does God get points there and four to them?

CHRISTIAN: Most of the time it’s through other people, but God is also capable of bringing the rest of the story any way he wants – through visions or dreams, for example.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Or other religions?

CHRISTIAN: I don't think so. If those other religions proclaimed these four points, well, then they wouldn't be other religions – they'd be Christianity! If they proclaimed something else, they'd be saying that it was some form of self-effort. That's exactly the opposite of Christianity.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Buddhism is self-effort?

CHRISTIAN: Yes. You achieve Nirvana by meditation or some other discipline. Every religion says some form of "Do this and you'll get there." They might describe "there" differently, and they have different lists of what to do, but it's all self-effort.

NON-CHRISTIAN: Okay. You already gave me that works-versus-grace sermon.

CHRISTIAN: The bottom line is that I don't really know how God will get points three and four to someone, but His usual plan is for people to tell people. That's why there's so much in the Bible about people going all over the world to announce this message. That's why I'm telling you all of this.

NON-CHRISTIAN: I think I'll have to read that book of Romans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People's Hearts the Way Jesus Did*. (Grand Rapids, MI; Kregel Publications, 2004), 96-100.