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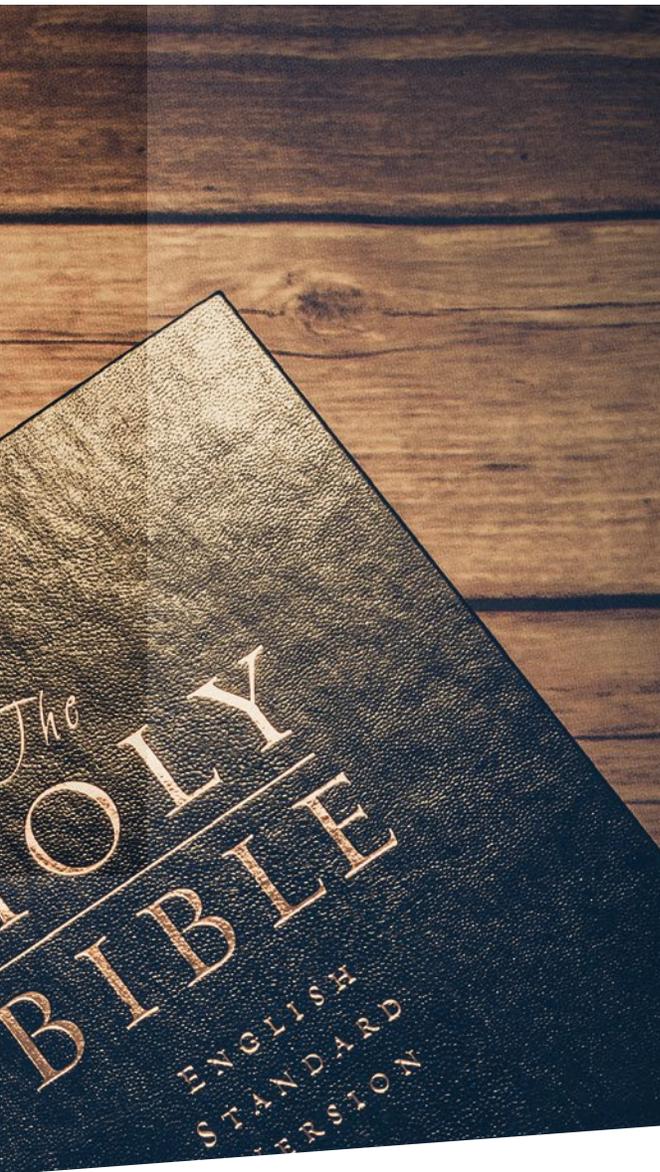
We Believe in the Exclusivity of the Gospel

by Jon Wood

There is a reality about the world that troubles me deeply. Of the 7.2 billion people on the planet, more than three billion are “unreached.” The unreached are peoples around the world who do not have access to the knowledge of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that they may place their faith in Him and repent from their sin. These unreached exist within tribes or ethnic “groups” who share a common culture and language. There are nearly 10,000 people groups around the globe, with more than 4,000 unreached, according to joshuaproject.net/global_statistics.

With this in mind, evangelical leader John Stott once quipped, “We must be Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.” Yet, God’s concern for the lost among the nations is set within a single context: His redemptive plan of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. There are not many roads leading to eternal life, but only one way, one truth, and one life.

A question often raised in this discussion centers on the proverbial “Average Joe,” living in a distant land and dying without hearing about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that makes salvation possible through faith in His name. What happens to Average Joe, and on a much larger scale, the three



billion people who, if they died today, would never have had access to the Gospel? This question is not just an intellectual exercise, but represents a powerful motivation for evangelism. In what follows, we will see the answer Scripture provides concerning the unreached and consider how this answer fuels missions at Cedarville University.

JESUS CHRIST: THE ONLY WAY

The storyline of Scripture points to Jesus as the only way for salvation. From the early moments following the Fall, God makes a plan to save the people He created in His image. Eve, who rebelled against God's command, would one day, through her offspring, bear a child who would crush the head of the serpent, and whose

heel would be bruised in the process (Gen. 3:15). This promise of a serpent-crushing Messiah signaled the first indication of the power of God for salvation that would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Bible, there is an array of verses that demonstrate that the early promise in Genesis of salvation through a Messiah was fulfilled exclusively in Jesus Christ. For instance, the idols and gods of the nations failed to provide a way of salvation compared to the spiritual power and deliverance found in the God of Israel (Ps. 96:5; 97:7). Jesus' claim for Himself is that He alone is the means to salvation: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). In his bold sermon delivered

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before the council in Jerusalem, Peter claimed, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And finally, the Apostle Paul made clear that Jesus Christ is the exclusive fulfillment of the law, making salvation available in Him alone (Rom. 10:1–4).

While some argue that those who are well intentioned and seeking God will be saved based on humanity's universal access to God's general revelation in nature, this notion misses the biblical picture that general revelation is inevitably suppressed (Rom. 1:18–23). For example, in the one New Testament example where an individual responded to the limited revelation he had, God did not regard that response as sufficient for salvation, but supplied further specific revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ alone (see the story of Cornelius in Acts 10–11). The teaching of the Bible, though sometimes hard for people to accept, is that "no one seeks for God" (Rom. 3:9–12). Apart from the Holy Spirit's ministry of conviction and illumination through the Word of God, we do not seek God (1 Thess. 1:4–5; 1 Cor. 2:1–5). The image of the unregenerate heart is not one of a well-intentioned wanderer seeking truth, but of an idol factory producing false worship.

FUEL FOR THE MISSION: THE ONLY TRUTH

As the commitment to the exclusivity of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ goes, so goes the missionary impulse of the people of God. The New Testament motivation for evangelism is for the glory of God as well as the spiritual need of the lost. The command to go and

preach the Gospel flows naturally from the requirement of conscious faith in Jesus for salvation. On the other side of the equation, the assertions of universalism and inclusivism — that some, if not all, will be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ — undermine the command to go and preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth

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(Matt. 28:18–20). The God of Christianity is not the same as the gods of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, secularism, or any other belief system that denies the divinity of Jesus Christ, and this distinction carries an immense implication for humanity. As theologian Carl F. H. Henry once noted, “The Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”

The Apostle Paul makes this quite clear in Romans 10:14–15. First, faith in Christ comes only when the good news of Jesus Christ is understood and is met with the response of personal belief. Second, the unreached are not able to believe in Jesus Christ if they have not heard of Him. Third, the only way the unreached can hear the good news of the Gospel is if someone goes to proclaim it to them. Fourth, if they are not sent, the proclaimers of the Gospel will not reach those who have not heard. This golden chain of God’s design for saving sinners from among the nations is why Cedarville University makes taking the Gospel to the unreached our utmost priority.

Theologian J. Gresham Machen captured the missions impulse resulting from the exclusive nature of salvation when he wrote, “In answer to the objection [that exclusivism is too narrow], it may be said simply that the Christian way of salvation is narrow only so long as the Church chooses to let it remain narrow. The name of Jesus is discovered to be strangely adapted to men of every race and of every kind of previous education. And the Church has ample means, with promise of God’s Spirit, to bring the name of Jesus to all. If, therefore, this way of salvation is not offered to all, it is not the fault of the way of salvation itself, but the fault of those who fail to use the means that God has placed in their hands.”

PLAN OF ACTION: TRAINING FOR LIFE

In light of our commitment to the exclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ and God’s promise to provide all we need for His global mission, Cedarville University has strategically provided a multitude of missions-minded opportunities to our student body.

- We consistently and intentionally train students how to share the Gospel. Students are provided regular opportunity to gain training through our Global Outreach department and Bible minor classes, in order to deepen their Gospel understanding and become equipped in evangelism and apologetics.
- We work hard to provide students with opportunities to go off campus to share the Gospel during the semester. Whether it is going to other college campuses, partnering with local churches, visiting local jails, or serving in a variety of mercy ministries, students are consistently on the go sharing the Gospel.
- We cultivate international missions partnerships and send students around the globe to share the Gospel. Each year Global Outreach sends several hundred students around the globe to evangelize the lost, encourage long-term workers and indigenous believers, and imprint on the hearts of students a burden for the unreached.

In the late 19th century, famed students from Cambridge University, known today as “The Cambridge Seven,” sparked fervor for missions by yielding their lives to the God of the nations during their college years. Included in this group was famed British athlete C.T. Studd. When Studd engaged the message of Scripture and the lostness of the unreached, he reoriented all of his gifts and abilities from athletic success to the priority of God’s agenda. Studd and his classmates serve as an example of what is possible when college students connect the exclusivity of the Gospel and the state of the unreached to a burden for taking the Gospel to the nations.

Just as the combustion of the dual realities of salvation in Jesus Christ alone and the desperate situation of the unreached peoples around the world led the Cambridge Seven to mobilize to reach the nations, so the Lord is working at Cedarville University. Every year, Cedarville launches students from more than 100 courses of study into the world, each one with a burden for those who have never believed or heard the name of the serpent-crushing Messiah. Just as C.T. Studd confessed, may the heartbeat of our cry be, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

Jon Wood is Vice President for Student Life and Christian Ministries at Cedarville University. He earned his Ph.D. in systematic theology.



To watch Thomas White’s chapel messages on this topic, visit cedarville.edu/jesusunonlyway or cedarville.edu/atonementofchrist.