LINKS DAILY DEVOTIONAL BIBLE STUDY | NOVEMBER 13TH, 2026

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QUESTIONS ENCORE
WILL GOD JUDGE PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD OF JESUS?

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1–3, ESV)

"God is there, and he is not silent." —Francis Schaeffer

Few things provoke a golfer's sense of justice more intensely than discovering that someone has cheated in a tournament.

A player who repeatedly improves his lie and wins the club championship has violated the rules of golf. When the deception is discovered, the committee disqualifies him and bans him from tournament play.

He knew the rules, deliberately violated them, and posted a fabricated score. The committee made the right decision.

As golfers, we understand that justice requires holding cheaters accountable. Yet when we turn to questions about God, our thinking often gets fuzzy.

One question that has caused many to scratch their heads goes something like this: "How could a loving God send an innocent person to hell who has never heard about Jesus?"

It is certainly true that millions have lived and died without hearing the gospel. So how could God condemn someone for not believing something they have never heard?

One way to begin unraveling this issue is to examine a few assumptions. First, no one is innocent before God. Second, no one is ignorant of God and his moral demands. Third, people are not condemned simply because they have never heard the gospel, but because they sin against the God they already know.

Paul explains that God has revealed himself to all humanity through creation. His eternal power and divine nature are clearly perceived in what he has made (Romans 1:19–20). God has also given people a conscience that bears witness to his moral demands (Romans 2:14–16).

Paul is not merely arguing that people could discover God if they examined creation carefully enough. He explains that people already know God through what he has revealed yet refuse to honor him as God or give him thanks (Romans 1:21). Thus, the claim to innocence and ignorance are non-starters.

Our deepest problem is not lack of intelligence or information. It is moral resistance. Paul says that we "suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). Put simply, we resist what God has made known—and that makes us guilty.

We enjoy God's creation while denying his authority over our lives. We demand justice when others wrong us but plead for mercy when we are the guilty ones.

This, of course, is not merely a description of atheists or agnostics. Paul's argument includes everyone, religious and irreligious alike. All have sinned (Romans 3:23), and God's witness in creation reaches everyone: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

The crucial distinction is this: People who have never heard the gospel are not condemned for rejecting a message they have never received. They are condemned for their sins against the God who has already made himself known.

Paul closes off every avenue of self-defense. Humanity is without excuse, and the whole world stands accountable before God (Romans 1:20; 3:19). That is grave news.

Is there any good news? Amazingly, yes! God has done what guilty humanity could never do for itself. The God whose justice we question has provided the way for sinners to be forgiven.

In Romans 3:21–26, Paul explains that God sent Jesus Christ to bear the penalty for sin, demonstrating both his perfect justice and his extraordinary mercy.

At the cross, God does not ignore our guilt. Jesus willingly bears the judgment sinners deserve so that those who trust in him can be reconciled to God.

Rather than asking, "Would God condemn innocent people who have never heard of Jesus?" we should ask, "Why would a perfectly holy God offer forgiveness to people who have knowingly rebelled against him?"

The wonder of Christianity is not that God judges the guilty. It is that God offers mercy to the guilty—and that includes every one of us.

Creation reveals God's existence and power, and conscience bears witness to our guilt, but the gospel announces the Savior we desperately need.

Prayer: Father, by your grace, humble us before you. Help us honestly acknowledge our willful disobedience and seek your forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

READING: Psalm 19:1–3, ESV

1. When someone cheats in golf, why do we want the rules enforced?

2. Read Romans 1:18–21 and Romans 2:14–16. What do creation and conscience reveal, and how do we resist what God has made known?

3. How does the cross demonstrate both God's justice and his mercy? How should this shape our response to God and to people who have never heard the gospel?

NOTES

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