

Do all non-Catholics go to Hell?

No...

...well now that this one is solved I guess it's time to move on.

Now of course a question as important as this one deserves a solid and thorough answer, and I'll try to provide one of those.

We need to remember that Jesus said "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) St. Peter said of Jesus that "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)

We need to be very clear that there is no other way into Heaven apart from Jesus. People get into Heaven through Jesus, or they don't get it into Heaven. There is no getting around this. It is a central and nonnegotiable truth of the Catholic faith.

So does this mean all non-Catholics, or at least all non-Christians, go to Hell? No. To figure out how this works we turn to Acts 17:22-:31, which tells us about a speech St. Paul gave while in Athens:

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, I observed the objects of your worship. I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance by raising him from the dead.

Paul was talking to people who were truly ignorant of the one God of Israel. Yet he gives them credit for unknowingly worshipping God, and says that God can overlook the fact that people are ignorant of him. They do not have to be condemned for failing to worship him, if they are not responsible for being ignorant about him. This is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church can say, in paragraph # 847:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience-these too may achieve eternal salvation.

Those who are truly not responsible for failing to be Catholic have a chance to be saved.

We should note several things. CCC 847 says that those who are "moved by grace" may be saved. Non-Christians are not saved because they are nice people or because they are good enough. Like everyone else who is saved this only occurs through the grace of Jesus Christ.

It also says they "may achieve salvation." It doesn't say they will. Just because someone isn't responsible for the fact that they are not a Christian does not mean they are automatically guaranteed to not be responsible for any of their sins. St. Paul talks about how even those pagans who lived during the time of the Old Testament and did not have God's law revealed to them faced the real danger of being condemned for their sins, because:

Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a

result, they have no excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened. While claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes. (Romans 1:20-:23).

This is echoed by the Catechism which says:

Very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasonings, and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and served the creature rather than the Creator. Or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. (CCC 844)

So everyone is accountable to God. More is demanded of those who have truly encountered the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But everyone, no matter how little or how much they know about God, can turn towards him and be saved or turn away from him and be condemned.

So this means non-Catholic Christians who are not responsible for their failure to be Catholic can go to Heaven. This means non-Christians who are not responsible for their failure to be Christian can go to Heaven. But we must remember it is impossible for those to be saved “who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse to enter it or remain in it.” (CCC 846) And we can never know for certain who is, and who isn’t, responsible for not being Catholic. We should never grow indifferent to sharing the truth of Christ and his Church with others. Jesus *ordered* us to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) and we cannot let the *chance* that non-Catholics will be saved lead us to fail to share the fullness of Christ’s truth with others. We must always do this respectfully and lovingly, but true love for our neighbor means we are obligated to share with them the fullness of God’s truth which is possessed by the Catholic Church.