

# **DOES GOD DESIRE THE SALVATION OF ALL MEN?**

by

**Jack A. Werth**

**Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church - Reformed**

**Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania**

## **PART TWO**

**I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;**

**2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**

**3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour:**

**4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**

**5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;**

**6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.**

**7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity" - I Timothy 2:1-7 KJV**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**A grandmother took her grandson to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. She showed him various parts of that magnificent structure. Finally, they arrived at the altar. Under here," she said, "is where all the cardinals are buried." He looked in amazement**

and asked, "You mean the whole team?"

There are two ways to understand the meaning of "all men" in I Timothy 2:4 just as there are two ways to think of the term "cardinals" in the story above. Many people point to this text claiming that God desires the salvation of every human being. But like the young grandson they have entirely misunderstood what was intended.

A common understanding of the text is:

"God wants (desires) all men without exception to be saved. However, in the case of some, His will is resisted through obstinate unbelief because man has a free will and God will not force His will upon man...." <sup>1</sup>

However, the Biblical understanding of the text is this:

"God wills [thelo] to save all men without distinction. He does this by bringing them unto a saving knowledge of the truth through the 'one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a [substitutionary] ransom [antilutron] for all mankind without distinction [i.e., all men regardless of rank, station, race, or nationality]..." <sup>2</sup>

Thus the question here is whether the words all men are used in the sense of all men without exception (every human being) or all men without distinction (people of every race, rank and nationality).

"The whole strength of this argument lies in the ambiguity of the word all, which being of various significations, and to be interpreted suitably to the matter in hand and the things and persons whereof it is spoken, the whole may be granted, or several propositions denied, according as the acceptation of the word is enforced on us. That all or all men do not always comprehend all and every man that were, are, or shall be, may be made apparent by near five hundred instances from the Scripture. Taking, then, all and all men distributively, for some of all sorts, we grant the whole; taking them collectively, for all of all sorts, we deny the minor, - namely, that God will have them all to be saved." <sup>3</sup>

## I. THE DISTRIBUTIVE USE OF THE WORD ALL

In the Bible the word "all" is used in two different ways. The COLLECTIVE USE involves the entire number of persons or things. It means all without exception. If you purchased the entire set, all 62 volumes, of Charles H. Spurgeon's sermons you would possess every book of the series. None would be missing. You would have the entire collection. The DISTRIBUTIVE USE involves some of each kind or type. If you judged a bake-off contest you would taste (sample) a bite of each cake or pie in the contest. Yet you would not eat

every single piece of each pie or cake. In the Bible the most common usage of the word "all" is the DISTRIBUTIVE USE.

**Luke 11:42 "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and passover judgment and the love of God..."**

The actual words in this text are "all herbs" [pan lachanon] but the translators have correctly rendered it all manner of herbs" because that is the real essence of what the words mean.

**Acts 10:12 - "Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air."**

The actual words here are "all fourfooted beasts" [panta ta tetrapoda]. The translators have correctly grasped the actually meaning and rendered it "all manner of fourfooted beasts".

**Romans 14:2 "For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs."**

Paul means here all sorts of things. Obviously, some things are not edible - i.e. crowbar, book, hat, etc.

**I Corinthians 6:12 "All things are lawful unto me."**

Paul simply is implying that he may do all kinds of things. He has freedom in Christ. He may marry or eat pork or even partake of meat offered in sacrifice to an idol. But obviously Paul doesn't mean that he can do sinful activity! It is not lawfully for him to commit sexual sin or to lie, cheat or steal. There are all kinds of things which are, however, lawfully permissible.

**Mark 1:37 "And when they [disciples] found him [Jesus], they said unto him, All men seek for thee."**

Were the American Indians seeking after Christ? Were the Chinese? How about those who lived in Spain? Clearly not every individual of the human race is meant, but simply all sorts of people. Great multitudes from all walks of life were seeking the Lord.

**Luke 7:29 "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John."**

Did every single person who heard Christ justify God and become a baptized disciple? This must mean people from all classes and walks of life. The very next verse says, "But the Pharisees and lawyers...[were] not baptized of him."

**John 12:32 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto**

me."

Again this cannot mean every man, for millions have never even heard of Christ. Multitudes have perished without being drawn to salvation in Christ. The text means all types of men will be drawn to the Savior - i.e. Jew and Gentile alike (see John 12:20-21). Didn't Jesus say of some, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (John 5:40)?

These examples will have to suffice. The reader is challenged to explore the matter in more detail himself or herself.

Summary: The Bible often uses the term "all" in the distributive sense meaning all sorts of, all kinds of, some of each type.

## **II. "ALL MEN" IN I TIMOTHY 2:4 MUST BE UNDERSTOOD IN THE DISTRIBUTIVE SENSE**

### **1. PRAYER AND THANKSGIVING ARE TO BE MADE FOR ALL SORTS OF INDIVIDUALS (Verses 1 and 2)**

"Paul definitely mentions groups or classes of men: kings (verse 2), those in high position (verse 2), the Gentiles (verse 7). He is thinking of rulers and (by implication) subjects, of Gentiles and (again by implication) Jews, and he is urging Timothy to see to it that in public worship, not a single group be omitted. In other words, the expression 'all men' as here used means 'all men without distinction of race, nationality, or social position,' not 'all men individually, one by one.' <sup>4</sup>

You are commanded to pray for all types of men. Obviously, the "all men" in verse 1 cannot mean every single human being. Billions of people have died and entered into eternity. The Bible doesn't recognize praying for the dead! Those in hell cannot be helped by prayer and those in heaven do not need it! Nor should you pray for those who have sinned "the sin unto death" (I John 5:16). Jeremiah the prophet was forbidden to pray for the rebellious Jews.

"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee" - Jeremiah 7:16.

Besides you are commanded to also "give thanks" for all men. Does this mean you should give God thanks for wicked men? Are you to express thanks in your prayers for murderers, thieves, adulterers, persecutors, heretics and child molesters? When is the last time you thanked God for Nero, Hitler, or Saddam Hussein? The conclusion is self-evident!

**"[T]he apostle exhorts, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all in authority; which was contrary to a notion that obtained among the Jews, of whom there were many in the primitive churches, that they should not pray for heathens and heathen magistrates." <sup>5</sup>**

**So, while there are many people whom you should pray for, including the wicked, not every human being is in view. You must not pray for the dead or for those who have committed the "sin unto death". And certainly you cannot give thanks for every human being. So, it is best to understand the "all men" in verse 1 in the sense of all kinds and types of individuals instead.**

## **2. GOD' S WILL IN SALVATION IS FOR ALL SORTS OF INDIVIDUALS TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH (Verses 3 through 5)**

**The reader is referred to the study on II Peter 3:9 (PART ONE) with regard to God' s will and the salvation of every human being for further detail.**

**"If the will of God be taken for his efficacious will, the will of his purpose and good pleasure (as truly to me it seems exceedingly evident that that is here intended, because the will of God is made the ground and bottom of our supplications; as if in these our prayers we should say only, ' Thy will be done,' - which is to have them all to be saved: now, we have a promise to receive of God ' whatsoever we ask according to his will,' I John iii.22, v.14: and therefore this will of God, which is here proposed as the ground of our prayers, must needs be his effectual or rather efficacious will, which is always accomplished); - if it be, I say, thus taken, then certainly it must be fulfilled, and all those saved whom he would have saved; for whatsoever God can do and will do, that shall certainly come to pass and be effected. That God can save all (not considering his decree) none doubts; and that he will save all is here affirmed: therefore, if these all here be all and every one, all and every one will certainly be saved. ' Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow, we shall die. ' Who hath resisted God' s will' ?' Romans ix. <sup>19</sup>."**

**It is God' s will that all TYPES and KINDS of people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. This is why the Great Commission was given. And this is what Peter had to understand when he was first sent to a Gentile, Cornelius, to preach the Gospel of Christ.**

**"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him" – Acts 10:34-35.**

**There is not one God for the Jewish nation and another God for the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians or Chinese. There is one God only. Salvation comes only through this "one God".**

**"Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith" - Romans 3:29-30.**

The context is not addressing the issue of creation but that of redemption. Thus Paul immediately proceeds to speak of Christ being the Mediator and providing a ransom. Not everyone can say with the disciple Thomas, "My Lord and my God". The apostle speaks of "God our Saviour" (verse 3) and therefore the point is that there is only "one God" for all who desire salvation from sin. It doesn't matter what their nationality, race, or background is.

**"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" - Romans 10:12-13.**

In the book of Ephesians, Paul demonstrates that Jews and Gentiles are now "one body". The middle wall of partition has been torn down (See Ephesians 2:11-22). His conclusion is that believers of all sorts and types have the same God.

**"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"  
- Ephesians 4:6.**

### **3. CHRIST' S RANSOM WAS MADE FOR ALL SORTS OF INDIVIDUALS (Verses 6 and 7)**

Why did Jesus say, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for MANY" (Matthew 20:28) when Paul says that Christ was "a ransom for ALL"? "Many" cannot be stretched to mean every human being. Is there a contradiction in the Bible? No, this cannot be! Any difficulty is immediately erased if "all" is taken in the DISTRIBUTIVE SENSE - i.e. people from all races, colors, backgrounds, nationalities, etc.

That this is exactly what Paul means is certain from the next verse where he immediately proceeds to say that he was ordained a preacher, and an apostle.. a teacher of the GENTILES..." (verse 7). This indicates that God' s will concerning salvation and Christ' s ransom was not confined to the Jews. The Savior died for individuals of all nations, not merely for Israelites. And the Lamb of God did indeed ransom some from all the people of the earth.

Consider the song of the redeemed in heaven:

**"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" - Revelation 5:9.**

"[I]t should be observed...that this ransom is antilutron huper panton, a vicarious ransom, substituted in the room and stead of all, whereby a full price was paid for all, and a plenary satisfaction made for the sins of all, which cannot be true of every individual man, for then no man could be justly condemned and punished....It is better by all men to understand some of all sorts...and [this] well agrees with the matter of fact; since Christ has redeemed some of all nations, some out of every kindred, tongue, and people; and God saves and calls some of every rank and quality, as kings and peasants: of every state and condition, as rich and poor, bond and free; of every sex, male and female; of every age, young and old; and all sorts of sinners, greater or less." <sup>7</sup>

It would not be appropriate to address the whole matter of the extent of the atonement here. The reader is referred to THE DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST by John Owen for an extensive treatment of the topic. There is one argument given by Owen which has never been refuted and therefore it is included here to complete this point.

"The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and Christ underwent punishment for, either:

1. All the sins of all men, or
2. All the sins of some men, or
3. Some of the sins of all men.

If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved, for if God entered into judgment with us, though it were with all mankind for one sin, no flesh should be justified in his sight: ' If the LORD should mark iniquities, who should stand?' Psalm cxxx. We might all go to cast all that we have ' to the moles and to the bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty,' Isaiah ii.20,21.

If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ, in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world.

If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment due unto their sins? You will say, ' Because of unbelief; they will not believe.' But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or [He did] not. If so, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!" <sup>8</sup>

**Summary:** A careful analysis of the context of I Timothy 2:4 clearly indicates that "all men" must be understood in the distributive sense.

### **III. WHY BIBLICAL WRITERS USE GENERAL EXPRESSIONS LIKE "ALL MEN"**

#### **1. THE GREAT COMMISSION**

**In the Old Testament the truth of God and the way of salvation were largely confined to the nation of Israel.**

**Deuteronomy 7:6 "The LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a SPECIAL PEOPLE unto himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth."**

**Amos 3:2 "YOU [Israel] ONLY have I known [given My love and intimate fellowship] of all the families of the earth."**

**Even during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ you find Him saying to His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).**

**However, after the death of the Lord Jesus, the Great Commission was issued. God gave His express command to preach the Gospel to "every creature". The truth of God' s Word would not be confined to the nation of Israel as in the past. The Gospel was to go forth into all lands, as God providentially directed it. The rest of the world was no longer to be left in the dark spiritually.**

**This is why so many general expressions are used in Scripture - i.e. all men, world, whole world, etc. These terms indicate the removal of the BARRIERS which once barred the way for many Gentiles. National and racial distinctions are now abolished. All men (Jew, Greek, Roman, African, American, etc.) are to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. A sampling of people from every continent and nation will come to salvation in Christ for it is God' s will that it be so!**

#### **2. THE ERROR OF THE JEWS**

**The Jews had the proud notion that the promises of God' s mercy and grace belonged exclusively to them. The Gentiles were mere "dogs", unworthy of God' s attention. The Jews were the children of Abraham, or so they thought. They never dreamed that they would be "broken off", while the Gentiles were "grafted" into the Tree of TRUE ISRAEL [i.e. God' s Holy Nation] (Romans 11). This strong opinion even prevailed in the early Church. Peter had to account for his unprecedented action of going to the house of a Gentile, Cornelius (Acts 11:17-18). And so it is only appropriate for Paul to remind Timothy of the truth that God desires the salvation of "all men". God' s family is not**



confined to the nation of Israel. God' s people are scattered abroad in every nation under heaven (John 11:5 1-52).

**Summary:** General terms like "all men" are often used to reflect the truth of the Great Commission and to overcome the narrow-mindedness of many Jewish believers.

**MAIN CONCLUSION:**

The young grandson taken to St. Patrick' s Cathedral misunderstood the meaning of his grandmother when she said that all the cardinals were buried under the altar. There are many who misunderstand the term "all men" as it is used in II Timothy 2:4. The correct Biblical meaning of the text is this:

"God desires, in harmony with His eternal decree, to save all men without distinction (i.e., without respect to rank, station, race, or nationality) and bring them to the knowledge of the truth."<sup>9</sup>

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Gary D. Long, The Salvation Of All Men (Sterling, Virginia: Grace Abounding Ministries, 1975), 2.
  - <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5.
  - <sup>3</sup> John Owen, The Works Of John Owen, Vol. 10 (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 344.
  - <sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen, I-II Timothy and Titus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 94.
  - <sup>5</sup> John Gill, The Cause Of God and Truth (Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1992), 51.
  - <sup>6</sup> John Owen, The Works of John Owen, Vol. 10, 344-345.
  - <sup>7</sup> John Gill, The Cause of God and Truth, 51.
  - <sup>8</sup> John Owen, The Works of John Owen, Vol.10, 173-174.

**9 Gary D. Long, The Salvation Of All Men, 6.**

Return to **INDEX**

© Jack A. Werth, 1994-2000, All Rights Reserved.