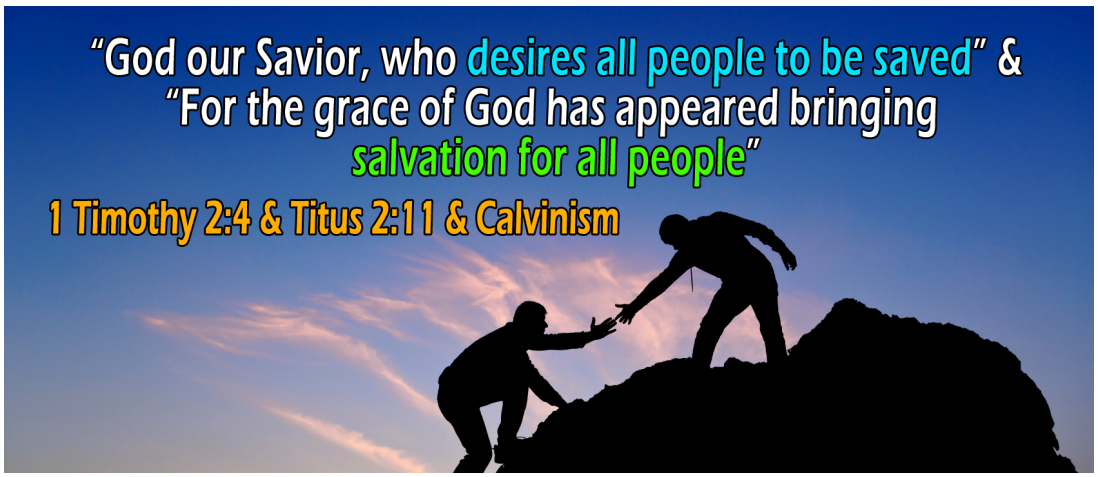
1 Timothy 2:4 & Titus 2:11, 'desires all people to be saved'

Published: Sunday 7th of September 2014 16:04 by Simon Wartanian
URL: https://www.thecalvinist.net/post/1-Timothy-2:4-Titus-2:11-desires-All-People-To-Be-Saved



1 Timothy 2:1-6 & Titus 2:11[1]

> *First of all, then, I urge that **supplications**, **prayers**, **intercessions**, and **thanksgivings** be made for **all people**, 2 for **kings** and **all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who **desires all people to be saved** and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who **gave himself as a ransom for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6, ESV)*

(For a better and a more recent defense of 1Tim 2:4 see here.)

This is one of the "**Arminian Big Three"** which you will get almost in every conversation about Calvinism in real life or online. Usually verses 3-4 are just quoted to make the case that God wants to save every single individual. The question is, does "**all"** in context really mean "*every single individual in the world"*? Or is this talking about God's desire not His sovereign decree?

Will of Desire interpretation

There are some people who understand this passage and other passages like 2 Pet 3:9 to refer to God's will of desire. God's will of desire being, God's desire that people should not murder, lie, steal, commit adultery or have other gods before Him (Ex 20), but He doesn't decree that it should be done so. It is also called His *will of precept.*

So God's will of desire refers to the things that God has not decreed in His sovereign plan before the foundation of the world, yet desires. In this interpretation, God would desire that all be saved, but He has not decreed that all should be saved, because He wants to show the full measure of His glory (Rom 9:22-24). I don't find this interpretation compelling and I believe the following interpretation is more compelling.

The "all kinds of people" interpretation

The major Reformed interpretation takes the position that the word "**all**" in this context means "***all kinds of people,***" not every single individual, why do we say that? Because there are times in Scripture when "**all**" is used in the sense of "every single individual in the world", but there are times which it isn't used like that, but limited according to the context. Let's look at a few verses, shall we? The portion we're going to look at is in Titus 2. Here we see that Paul is telling Timothy to teach "sound doctrine." Then we see him list types/groups of people:

2. Older **men** are to be sober-minded…

3. Older **women** likewise…

4. so train the **young women** to love their **husbands** and **children**

6. …urge the **younger men**

9. **Slaves**

11. For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for **all people,**

12. training us to **renounce ungodliness**…

13. waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of **our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,**

14. who **gave himself for us** to **redeem us** from all lawlessness and to **purify for himself a people** for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

We see that Paul in verse 11 says that salvation has been brought for *all people*, but considering the context we can safely say that it means "**all kinds of people,**" since in the previous verses he was talking about kinds of people (men, women, slaves, etc..). We can reasonably say that what Paul is saying through "*all people*" is "**all kinds of people,**" (as we understand that in our individualistic society) just as those kinds whom he mentioned in the passing verses. Further, verse 14 makes it clear that God has redeemed "**us"** and that Jesus has purified for Himself a people, not all people, but **a people.**

What does this have to do with **1 Tim 2:4**, anyway? Well, we see in verse 2 kinds of people ("*kings and all who are in high positions*") being mentioned. What Paul was asking Timothy to do is pray for "**all**" people. How are we to understand the "**all"** here? Did Paul mean that Timothy should pray for every single person in the world? Surely we don't think that's the case, but we see that after Paul says that Timothy should pray for "**all**" people we see in verse 2 that Paul specifies, limits, clarifies, narrows his use of the word "**all,**" by saying that Timothy should pray "for kings and all who are in high position." So what Paul is saying to Timothy is this: Timothy, do not only pray for your brethren, who are those that are despised in the world, who are persecuted, who are hated, but don't forget Jesus' commandment to love our enemies. So, Timothy also pray for your persecutors that they may come to the knowledge of God, who desires to save all kinds of people, so that we may lead a peaceful life. Then it follows logically that if we accept the contextual meaning of "**all**" to mean "*all kinds of*" then the "**all**" in verse 6 also means that Jesus was a ransom for all kinds of people. Revelation 5:9 says that Jesus with His blood has ransomed a people for God from every tribe, language, people and nation; thus, Jesus has ransomed every kind of people, kings and servants, free and slaves, male and female, Jew and Gentile. Please note in Revelation 5:9, it says that our Glorious Lord ransomed with his blood **a people** for God **from** every tribe, tongue, people and nation, a specific people, not the tribes, tongues, peoples and nations.

And let us not forget the beauty of verse 5 where we are told that Jesus is the only **mediator between men and God.** A mediator is "one that mediates, especially one that reconciles differences between disputants."[2] Through Christ we have been reconciled to God (Col 1:21-22) and He is standing before the Father, as the Son interceding for us (Rom 8:26, 34; Heb 7:25), He is ***interceding for a specific people***, not every single individual in the world. This also brings the picture of Christ as High Priest, as seen in the book of Hebrews, He is the one pleading for His sheep to the Father.

Let's see what the Word of God says of the Lord's intercessory work. For whom does Christ intercede?

> **Heb 7:23-27** *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,* 24 *but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.* 25 *Consequently, he is able to* ***save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him****, since* ***he always lives to make intercession for them****.* 26 *For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a* ***high priest****, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.* 27 *He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since* ***he did this once for all when he offered up himself.***
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> **Heb 9:24-28** *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to* ***appear in the presence of God on our behalf****.* 25 *Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own,* 26 *for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has* ***appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin*** *by the* ***sacrifice of himself****.* 27 *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,* 28 *so* ***Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,*** *will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

In the book of Hebrews we see Christ's High Priestly work. We see also that Christ intercessory work is rooted in His cross-

work. He saves to the uttermost those who draw near to God, but then the question arises: Who draws near to God? The answer from Jesus' lips is recorded in John 6:44 – *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* And on their behalf does He make His intercessory work. Imagine the Risen Lord of Glory interceding for someone for whom He did not died and for a one whom the Father had no chosen, He would fail miserably, but it's impossible for the Lord of Glory to be rejected by the Father or for God to fail.

Commentaries

All Kinds of People

The **ESV Study Bible** explains: [3]

> **1 Tim. 2:4** Evangelistic prayer for all people is rooted in the fact that God **desires all people to be saved**. It appears that Paul is countering an exclusivist tendency in the false teachers or at least their downplaying of the importance of evangelizing the Gentiles (along with their emphasis on the Jewish law). This statement figures prominently in theological disagreements over the extent of the atonement. It cannot be read as suggesting that everyone will be saved (universalism) because the rest of the letter makes it clear that some will not be saved (4:1; 5:24; 6:10; cf. Matt. 25:30, 41, 46; Rev. 14:9–11). Does that mean God desires something (all people being saved) that he cannot fulfill? Both Arminian and Calvinist theologians respond that God "desires" something more than universal salvation. Arminians hold that God's greater desire is to preserve genuine human freedom (which is necessary for genuine love) and therefore he must allow that some may choose to reject his offer of salvation. Calvinists hold that God's greater desire is to display the full range of his glory (Rom. 9:22–23), which results in election depending upon the freedom of his mercy and not upon human choice (Rom. 9:15–18). However one understands the extent of the atonement, this passage clearly teaches the free and universal offer of the gospel to every single human being; "desires" shows that this offer is a bona fide expression of God's good will. **Come to the knowledge of the truth** highlights the cognitive aspect of conversion, i.e., individuals must come to understand key truths in order to be converted. "The truth" occurs often in the Pastorals as a synonym for the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 18, 25; 3:7, 8; 4:4; Titus 1:1, 14).

ESV Reformation Study Bible[4]

> **2:1 all people.** As can be seen from the next expression ("for kings and all who are in high positions"), this does not mean "every human being," but rather "all types of people," whatever their station in life.
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> **2:4 who desires all people to be saved.** This does not mean that God sovereignly wills every human being to be saved (i.e., that God saves everyone). It may refer to God's general benevolence in taking no delight in the death of the wicked, or to God's desire that all types of people (v. 1 note) be saved (i.e., God does not choose His elect from any single group).

NLT Study Bible[5]

> 1 Timothy 2:1 **all people**: The prayers of the false teachers and their disciples were evidently not consonant with God's will to save all kinds of people (2:3-4).
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> 1 Timothy 2:2 **all who are in authority**: Those who had the power to persecute or to protect the church (see also Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17). • **live peaceful and quiet lives**: The point was not for Christians to blend in and be unnoticed, but to display the beauty of the Good News and allow the church's mission to proceed without unnecessary complications (cp. 2 Tim 3:12;1 Pet 3:13-17). • The word ***godliness*** and its cognates (also at 3:16; 4:7-8; 5:4; 6:3, 5-6, 11) sum up the beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles that accord with right and reverential knowledge of God, obedience, and authentic worship.
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> 1 Timothy 2:5-6 Compact teachings, as in this passage, occur throughout the letters to Timothy and Titus (see also 3:16; 2 Tim 1:9-10; 2:8, 11-13; Titus 3:4-7). They might be adapted bits of creeds, hymns, or prayers that were known to the churches. The doctrines referenced probably relate to Paul's trouble with the false teachers; it appears that their teaching undercut the universal appeal of the Good News and the effectiveness of the Gentile mission. The false teachers also had a deficient understanding of Jesus and his salvation.

Will of Desire

God's will of desire: **ESV MacArthur Study Bible:**[6]

2:4 desires all people to be saved. The Greek word for "desires" is not that which normally expresses God's will of decree (his eternal purpose), but God's will of desire. There is a distinction between God's desire and his eternal saving purpose, which must transcend his desires. God does not want men to sin. He hates sin with all his being (Ps 5:4; 45:7); thus, he hates its consequences – eternal wickedness in hell. God does not want people to remain wicked forever in eternal remorse and hatred of himself. Yet, God for his own glory, and to manifest that glory in wrath, chose to endure "vessels...prepared for destruction" for the supreme fulfillment of his will (Rom. 9:22). In his eternal purpose, he chose only the elect out of the world (John 17:6) and passed over the rest, leaving them to the consequences of their sin, unbelief, and rejection of Christ, (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Ultimately, God's choices are determined by his sovereign, eternal purpose, not his desires. *See note on 2 Pet. 3:9* **the knowledge of the truth.** Meaning "to be saved." *See note on 2 Tim 3:7*

2:5 there is one God. There is no other way of salvation (Acts 4:12); hence there is the need to pray for the lost to come to know the one true God (cf. Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 45:5-6, 21, 22; 46:9; 1 Cor. 8:4,6). **Mediator.** This refers to someone who intervenes between two parties to resolve a conflict or ratify a covenant. Jesus Christ is the only "mediator" who can restore peace between God and sinners (Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). **The man Christ Jesus.** The absence of the article before "man" in the Greek suggest the translation, "Christ Jesus, himself a man." Only the perfect God-Man could bring God and man together. Cf. Job 9:32-33

2:6 a ransom. This describes the result of Christ's substitutionary death for believers, which he did voluntarily (John 10:17-18), and reminds one of Christ's own statement in Matt. 20:28, "a ransom for many." The "all" is qualified by the "many." Not all will be ransomed (though his death would be sufficient), but only the many who believe by the work of the Holy Spirit and for whom the actual atonement was made. *See note on 2:*9. Christ did not pay a ransom only; he became the object of God's just wrath in the believer's place –he died his death and bore his sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24). **For all.** This should be taken in two senses; 1) there are temporal benefits of the atonement that accrue to all people universally (*see note on 1 Tim. 4:10),* and 2) Christ's death was sufficient to cover the sins of all people. Yet the substitutionary aspect of his death is applied to the elect alone (*see above and notes on 2 Cor. 5:14-21).* Christ's death is therefore unlimited in it's sufficiency, but limited in its application. Because Christ's expiation of sin is indivisible, inexhaustible, and sufficient to cover the guilt of all the sins that will ever be committed, God can clearly offer it to all. Yet only the elect will respond and be saved, according to his eternal purpose (cf. John 17:12). **At the proper time.** At the appropriate time for God's redemptive plan (*see note on Gal. 4:4)*

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[1] http://youtu.be/oQXM3POx-6w

http://youtu.be/aLla5rHmpO4

http://www.objectivegospel.org/the-big-three

http://www.reformationtheology.com/2009/04/understanding_1_timothy_24_by.php

[2] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/mediator

[3] ESV Study Bible, 2008 (Crossway). Taken from the Online Version at www.esvbible.org

[4] R.C. Sproul, The Reformation Study Bible ESV 2005, Ligonier Ministries. Taken from the free online version at BibleGateway

[5] NLT Study Bible

[6] John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible 2010, Crossway. Taken from the online version at www.esvbible.org