

All? or Just Some?

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The Bible contains many direct references to the salvation of ALL! Yet, because we have been taught that some would not be saved and would spend eternity in hell, most Bible teachers find it necessary to restrict these “ALL” verses, even though the context does not make any restriction. If we do not restrict the “ALL,” then there are contradictions within God’s Word (as commonly translated), and this cannot be. We determine that because there is eternal punishment for some, the ALL passages cannot really mean ALL, but only “all who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior in this lifetime.” In other words, we eliminate the contradictions within God’s Word by placing restrictions on some passages.

The Greek *aiōn* should not be translated as “eternal,” but as “eon” (or “age”). Hell as found in the Bible is not the place of eternal punishment we had been led to believe; and we have seen that God’s punishment is really a remedial discipline, not to torment but to correct.

So, when the Bible uses the word “ALL” maybe that is exactly what is meant: **ALL**, without any restriction whatsoever.

Let’s consider some of these passages.

THE SAVIOR OF ALL

We read in I Timothy 4:9-11,

We rely on the living God, Who is the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers.

This passage clearly tells us that God is “the Savior of ALL mankind, not just believers! Some say that the word especially restricts the “ALL” to believers, but this clearly is not what the writer is expressing, or he would have simply said that God is the Savior of all who believe.

The word “*especially*” is *malista* in the Greek. We also find this word in Galatians 6:10.

Consequently, then, as we have occasion, we are working for the good of all, yet especially for the family of faith.

Do we interpret this verse to mean that we are not to work for the good of ALL, but ONLY for those within the family of faith? Certainly not! We are instructed to work for the good of ALL, and in a special way, or perhaps even giving a priority to those within the family of faith.

Likewise when we read that God is the Savior of ALL, and *especially* those who believe, we see that while God is truly the Savior of ALL, there is something special or unique about those who believe in this present age. Certainly there is, for believers are those who have, by faith, been saved already in receiving the evangel (gospel) in this lifetime. Their reward will be “*eonian life*” and not the second death. Yet there will come a time, at the end of the ages (as seen in I Corinthians 15), when death will be abolished and when God becomes “*All in all,*” and ALL will be saved.

GOD’S WILL AND HIS OPERATIONS

We read in I Timothy 2:4,

God, Who wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth.

Some will say that, while it is God’s will that all mankind be saved, since He has given us free will it may be possible that some will reject Him and will not be saved. In other words, God’s will cannot be realized because the will of mankind to reject Him, or the will of Satan to deceive, will overcome God’s will to save all mankind.

Assuming that we have “free will” (and that we do not simply think we have the ability to freely choose at every turn), consider this: When God created man in that perfect Garden of Eden, evil was already present. Man did not even have the ability to exercise his free will on neutral ground, but was tempted and enticed by the serpent who was also in the Garden.

Man disobeyed and was expelled from the Garden. The consequence was the process of dying, leading ultimately to death. Yet Scripture tells us that God knew that the cross would be necessary even “*before the disruption of the world*” (see I Peter 1:19-21). In other words, God knew that man would sin, and that death would enter the scene.

However, what if God could, through the course of time (the *eons*), in His infinite wisdom and power and love, find a way to save ALL of mankind?

Consider the life of Joseph. He was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, framed by Potiphar’s wife, and jailed. Yet, ultimately, God used all of this to accomplish His purpose. Despite the “free

will” of Joseph’s brothers who sought to harm him, or Potiphar’s wife who sought to frame him, or anyone else who may have entered Joseph’s life, still God was able to accomplish His purpose.

And you, you devised against me evil, yet the Elohim [God] devises it for me for good, that it may work out as at this day, to preserve alive many people (Genesis 50:20; Concordant Version).

God’s purpose was to save His people when the famine struck (and in the process to save the Egyptians as well). He selected Joseph as His instrument. Despite the “free will” exercised by those who would thwart Joseph (or thwart God’s will), God’s will prevailed.

Consider Ephesians 1:11, which speaks of God as

The One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will.

If it is God’s will that ALL mankind is saved, and if God is truly operating ALL in accord with the counsel of His will, who can thwart His plan?

I think of the power of advertising, which has become a detailed science. Billions of dollars are spent on advertising, toward the objective of influencing our decisions. Advertising gives us the desire to buy things we didn’t know we really needed or wanted. Our “free will” has not been removed, yet we often make decisions because of the influence of advertising.

If advertising executives can influence our “free will” in this way, why do we question God’s ability to allow “free will,” but ultimately to bring all mankind to the point where He is recognized, and that every knee bows before Him?

CONTRAST BETWEEN ADAM & CHRIST

There are a few instances in Scripture where Adam is directly contrasted with Christ.

For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class (I Corinthians 15:21-23).

G. Campbell Morgan, preacher, teacher, evangelist and “prince of expositors” says of this passage in his *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*,

In the program of God all are to be made alive in Christ.

Does this passage tell us that ALL die in Adam, but only those accepting Jesus Christ as Savior in this lifetime will live in Christ? Unless we restrict the ALL who die in Adam, how can we restrict the ALL who will live in Christ?

Consequently, then, as it was through one offense for all mankind for condemnation, thus also it is through one just award for all mankind for life’s justifying. For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of

the One, the many shall be constituted just (Romans 5:18-19).

Again, this is a direct comparison between Adam and Christ. If we could make a case that ALL did not die in Adam, we could make a case that ALL will not be constituted just; but there is nowhere in Scripture any limitation on those who die in Adam. Likewise, there is no restriction found in Scripture that would limit salvation. The only limitation has been placed there by the mistranslation and misinterpretation of Scripture.

Let us consider Christ's purpose!

Lo, the Lamb of God, which is taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

One Mediator of God and mankind, a Man, Christ Jesus, Who is giving Himself a correspondent Ransom for all (I Timothy 2:6).

Every knee should be bowing ... every tongue should be acclaiming (Philippians 2:9; Isaiah 45:23).

For even as you once were stubborn toward God, yet now were shown mercy at their stubbornness, thus these also are now stubborn to this mercy of yours, that now they also may be shown mercy. For God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all (Romans 11:30-32).

Where is the restriction on the ALL or EVERY in these verses? Again, we have placed the restriction there in our thinking, so as to reconcile these passages with those who talk about eternal condemnation. Yet once we recognize that there are no biblical references that teach eternal condemnation (but only age-abiding correction), we can see these wonderful passages for what they really are.

I, if I should be exalted out of the earth, shall be drawing all to Myself (John 12:32).

William Barclay, respected teacher and commentator, says of this passage,

The word "all" means all. It is not possible for the word "all" to mean anything else, but all. Part of the trouble in the interpretation of Scripture is the refusal of people to take it at its face value which is nearly always right.¹

I am in no way mitigating Christ's work on the cross. Christ's death and subsequent resurrection were very necessary in order for us to be granted salvation. The only question is the *scope* of Christ's work on the cross. Does it have effect only for those who believe on Him in this lifetime, or will there come a day when ALL are saved by His work on the cross?

Consider very carefully Colossians 1:16-20.

For in Him is all created, that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities, all is created through Him and for Him, and He is before all, and all has its cohesion in Him. And He is the Head of the body,

1. From *Universal Reconciliation, a Brief Selection of Pertinent Quotations* compiled by Michael Phillips, page 26. This quotation came from a letter directed to Mr. Phillips by William Barclay.

the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens.

ALL is created through Him, and ALL will be reconciled. Consider the global nature of this passage. ALL CREATION will be included – visible and invisible. He is the Firstborn from among the dead. In Him the entire complement delights to dwell (the body of Christ – those believing in this present age), and through Him ALL will be reconciled.

THE CONSUMMATION

The Bible clearly tells us that those who believe are saved; but if all mankind is to be saved, when will this take place? We look to I Corinthians 15:21-28.

For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet. Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him. Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.

This is the grand conclusion of the ages. Some think that because Revelation is the final book in the Bible, it represents the final conclusion of all things. It clearly does not. This description provided by Paul takes place after the final chapters of Revelation.

Let us consider what this wonderful 15th chapter of I Corinthians tells us. God has taken what mankind (and Satan) have intended for evil, and He has used it to achieve good. He has operated ALL in accord with the counsel of His will to achieve His will that ALL mankind be saved. Some have recognized the greatness of God, and the work of the Savior, in this lifetime, by faith. Others have taken longer, but now find salvation also. Every knee is now bowing in subjection before Him. Every person has found salvation. Every lost sheep has been found. The purpose of the eons has been achieved, and God is now “*All in all.*”

THINK ABOUT I CORINTHIANS 15:28, WHEN GOD BECOMES “ALL IN ALL”

As long as there are souls being tormented “forever and ever” can we say that God is “*All in all*”? The standard response is that God is love, but that He is also just. Therefore God can save some, but must torture others because He is just. Yet, for those souls being tortured, can we say that God is “*All*” in them as they are being tortured?

Thomas Allin states in his *Christ Triumphant* (page 1),

All forms of partial salvation are but so many different ways of saying that evil is, in the long run, too strong for God.

Through the work of Christ on the Cross, believers agree that God has provided for the salvation of sinners. The difference is that the “orthodox” belief is that this salvation applies only to those who believe *in this lifetime*. Is God unable to overcome the evil that exists within the many others of His creation?

Is God not able to lead even the worst of sinners – even the most rebellious of His creation – to the point where they, too, are finally reconciled to Him? I tell you, this is *exactly* what the Bible tells us God is in the process of doing.

Revisit those passages in the Scripture that say “eternal” or “endless” in your translations, and recognize that the proper translation is “*eonian*” or “*age-abiding*.” Once we make this small correction, we can begin to see God’s wonderful plan. The painful discipline that is experienced by mankind is not a *final* condition, but a *process with a purpose*.

I am not saying that “anything goes” in terms of our behavior and lifestyle. Most certainly the Bible speaks of behaviors that are acceptable, and those that are not. There are consequences to our every word and action – both in this present life and in the age to come – but these consequences are *temporal*, not *permanent*. They have purpose, consistent with God’s purpose and will to save all mankind.

Your Bible teachers have taught you to restrict the “ALL” passages in the Bible, but consider these things. Read the Bible with this new “lens” – Is it really possible that God will ultimately save ALL? Study, and think for yourself.

DOES GOD SIMPLY “WISH” ALL MANKIND WOULD BE SAVED?

Consider two verses which, together, show God’s clear intent ultimately to save ALL mankind.

*God wills that **all** mankind be saved* (I Timothy 2:4).

*God is operating **all** in accord with the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11).

If it is, indeed, God’s *will* that ALL mankind be saved; and if He is operating ALL in accord with the counsel of His *will*, then should this not lead us to the conclusion that He will be *successful* in this endeavor?

Some will try to explain this away by pointing to a Greek word used in the I Timothy 2 passage. Instead of “will” the word means “*wish*,” some will say. So it is not a determined will that God has, but a wish that all mankind will be saved. Alas, this is not to be, since men possess a “free will” and some will continually reject God and will never be saved.

Let’s suppose the I Timothy 2 passage does carry the meaning “God *wishes* that all men will be saved.” Are we to say that something can stand in the way of God “getting His wish?” He is our Creator. He

knows us through and through. He knows all of the factors that influence us. Is He not able to lead us through every situation to the point where He gets His wish? I agree that we are not robots, and that we do have a will. Some even have a very stubborn and rebellious will; but is God not *in control* of the things that influence us, and could God really be satisfied with having created such fallible creatures as us, with such awful tendencies and desires of the flesh (flesh that He created), allowing us to wallow through life hoping we will make it, but knowing a large number of us will not?

If God wishes that all mankind be saved, and if He is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will, then it will be done, and nothing can stop even a single person from being saved – not Satan, nor the most rebellious of men.

Beyond these two verses, consider the large number of passages that clearly speak of God's plan to ultimately save all mankind. I have had some individuals tell me that there is no clear statement expressing universal reconciliation anywhere in the Bible. If such a clear passage can be provided, they will believe in universal reconciliation – so they say. This calls to mind the Pharisees asking Jesus for a sign, and with Jesus responding there would be no sign but the sign of Jonah (in other words, there had been many signs, but they went unrecognized).

- What about the fact that Christ is described as a “*correspondent ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:6)?
- Or the parallels between Adam and Christ – all are dying; all will be made alive (I Corinthians 15:21-23)?
- Or Christ saying, “*if I be lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself*” (John 12:32)?
- Or the very global passage in Colossians 1:16-20 that clearly speaks of the universal reconciliation?
- Or I Corinthians 15:28 culminating with God becoming “All in all”?

These passages, and others not mentioned here, are clear statements; and they are seen only as being less than clear statements because of misunderstandings of other passages, or of simple concepts such as *aiōn* (“age,” not eternity) which have been clouded by poor translation.

Whether God wills that all mankind be saved, or if He simply wishes this will be the case, can anyone or anything prevent this will or wish from coming to pass?

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