

Does “All Men” Mean Every Single Person Without Exception?

(A Study of I Timothy 2: 1-8)

1 Timothy 2 is an extremely important passage to us who live in this, the “dispensation of the grace of God”. This is implied in verses 6 and 7.

This passage states that God “will have all men to be saved” and that Christ “gave himself a ransom for all”.

The difficulty in this passage is that some insist that all men must mean all men without exception. Among other arguments some assert that:

1. “all, without distinction” is a misuse of the English language.
2. If God only meant “all kinds” He should have used the words “all kinds”.
3. “all, without exception” includes “all, without distinction” but not the converse.
4. Other verses such as Heb. 2:9 and John 3:16, 17 clearly state that God loved the “world” and that Christ tasted death for “every man”.
5. That I Timothy 2:4 is talking of God’s desire (thelo) not His resolve (bulimia)

The Meaning of All

To insist that all must always mean totality is, at the very least a naïve approach to language. This is particularly true of the Hebrew and Greek language as we shall see.

However, even in English, universal terms are not always to be taken as meaning totality. For example, we could truthfully state that, ‘everyone knows Irving Kaplansky’ and that he is a “world famous” mathematician. Yet, very few (percentage wise) actually know him. Here, it merely means that men all over the globe know him.

Indeed, the Random House Dictionary gives as one of the meanings of “all” “every: all kinds, all sorts, and all manner of men”. Checking the dictionary on other universal terms will show that each has a large variety of meanings.

In fact when a person says “all men” means “all men”, he has said nothing at all. Such statements are usually intended to appeal to the emotions rather than to the mind.

But, what is the meaning of the word 'all' in the Greek New Testament. The Arndt & Gingrich lexicon (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament) is the recognized standard among one volume lexicons. Its definition of 'pas' (the Greek word for 'all' in I Timothy 2:1-8) includes the meaning 'every kind of, all sorts of' and, among others, it lists Matt. 4:23: 23:27.

Let us consider Matt. 23:27. Here, our Lord refers to sepulchres in which are dead men's bones and all uncleanness. There is nothing in the context to indicate that it means 'all manner of uncleanness' and it is not so translated. Thus if arguments 1, 2 and 3 are valid, there must be 'every single uncleanness without exception' in a sepulchre. But, from OTHER THINGS WHICH WE KNOW ABOUT SEPULCHRES, we know that this is simply not the case. Simply because we are reading scripture does not mean we turn our minds off. We know that many unclean things are not in sepulchres so we understand it to mean 'all manner of'.

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Another interesting use of this word is Acts 10:12. In this verse, even the translators translated 'pas' by 'all kinds' or 'all manner'. Furthermore, in the King James Version, the additional words are not in italics. They did not consider them to be added. Clearly Peter did not see all animals on the sheet. Indeed, he did not see any clean animals. Had he seen a clean animal, he would not have responded as he did. No, he saw only unclean animals. Yet, the Holy Spirit uses 'pas' to describe what he saw.

We next turn to I Timothy 6:10 where we are told that, "the love of money is the root of all evil." Remember, we are concerned with the meaning of 'all' in scripture. What does it mean? Those who argue that 'all' must mean 'all' (whatever that means) are forced to the fantastic conclusion that the love of money is the root of every single evil without exception! Certainly, if we think at all, we know that often evil is not the result of greed. For example, adultery is often not the result of greed. Yet, there is nothing in the context of this verse to so indicate. However, from OTHER THINGS WHICH WE KNOW ABOUT EVIL, we know that this is simply not the case. Once again, we profited by meditation on the meaning of the verse.

Another interesting example is Ex. 9:6 where we are told that all of the cattle of the Egyptians died and yet their beasts are mentioned in verses 22 and 25.

In fact, this very use of 'all' or the Greek 'pas' is clearly indicated in I Timothy 2:8. Here, we are told literally that men are to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands. But, there are some places where men can't pray and lift up holy hands for these places are most unholy.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger in Figures of Speech used in the Bible refers to I Tim. 2:6 on pages 31 and 32 and mentions that here 'all' means 'all kinds of'. He further states that this is the figure synecdoche. Under his discussion of that figure (on page 638) he lists John 3:16; 12:19; Rom. 1:8; I John 2:2 as further examples of this figure of synecdoche. More can be found in his discussion under the figure metonymy and on pages 616 and 617 where I Tim. 2:4 is mentioned.

The naive use of language that insists that either each word must have only one meaning (which has led to some bad 'concordant' type translations) or that there are no figures of speech (which, has led to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation) must be rejected by the student of the Word.

God's Desire versus God's Resolve

Some who have studied 1 Tim. 2:4 have concluded that the key to the passage is the use of the Greek word 'thelo' for the English word "will". They argue that I Tim. 2:4 merely tells us that it is God's desire for all men without exception to be saved. However, they hasten to mention that God has not resolved this for had this been true, He would have used the Greek word "boulomai".

One thing that is shocking about this view is that it presents God as wanting something so badly that He sent His Son to die on the cross and yet God does not save all for He has not resolved it. This is presented even though, our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." Anything that God truly wants He gets. Many other scriptures can be presented

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to show this. Indeed, this is an important basis for prayer we pray to a God Who can do whatever He pleases.

But, there is more much more. In II Peter 3:9, we are told that, "(God is) not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Here, the word for 'willing' is 'boulomai'. And, we are clearly taught in Romans 9:19 that none can resist God's will (boulomai). The only conclusion if 'all' means 'all without exception' is that all men will someday be saved! However, the scriptures often speak of those who will never be saved. The only way to understand II Peter 3:9 without contradicting OTHER THINGS WE KNOW FROM SCRIPTURE is to appreciate that 'all' here (Greek 'pas') does not mean 'all without exception'.

There is still much more to say on the comparisons between these two Greek words. The word 'thelo' is used in Romans 9:18,22 where it is clear that God fully intended to accomplish His desire. Read Romans 9:22!

What Is A Ransom?

The specious reasoning that has led some to conclude that 'all men' in I Timothy 2:1-8 means 'every single person without exception' has forced some strained teachings about the word 'ransom' in verse 6.

The Greek word translated 'ransom' is 'antilutron' and is found only in this verse. However, it is composed of the two words 'anti' and 'lutron'. The Arndt & Gingrich lexicon gives the meaning 'ransom' and lists the expression 'lutron anti panton' as an essentially equivalent expression. This expression is actually stronger than the corresponding one with 'lutron' in the place of 'antilutron'.

The word 'lutron' means 'price of release, ransom'. It is used in Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45 only. The verb 'lutroo' means 'redeem' and is used only in Luke 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12. A careful perusal of all of these verses will convince anyone that some men are definitely not ransomed.

The reader who wonders why Eph. 1:7 is not in the above lists should note that the word there is 'apolutron'.

One more comment about the meanings of words. A word always has a region of meanings rather than a point of meaning. The more common a word the larger (normally) is the region. In other words, the common word 'all' would be expected to have more meanings than the uncommon word 'ransom'.

Furthermore, think of the doctrinal implications of teaching that Christ's death is a ransom for every single person who ever lived. All men then would stand before God as redeemed and saved. Such reasoning implies the serious error of universalism.

For Whom Do We Give Thanks (I Tim 2:1)?

Does this verse teach that we give thanks and pray for every single person without exception? There are four billion people alive today so clearly no person could even begin to obey such a command. It is impossible.

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Or, perhaps, we are to do this collectively. This would be contrary to the rest of the passage. Whatever these verses mean they mean people as individuals.

No, we are to pray for all kinds of people. I Timothy 2:2 mentions a kind of men we often omit and gives a compelling reason to pray for them.

For Whom Is Christ A Mediator?

A mediator is one who interposes between two parties. One party is God. The question is, “Who is the other party--all without exception or saved men?”

The Greek word is 'mesites' and comes from 'mesos'. It is used in Gal. 3:19, 20 I Tim. 2:5, Heb. 8:6, 9:15: 12:24.

Romans 2:34 makes it perfectly plain that the other party in Christ's mediation is the elect. He certainly does not make intercession for any but those who are saved.

Concluding Remarks

There is no question that all who love the Lord should put aside all prejudice about I Timothy 2:1-8 and read it as God's word to us.

Certainly, the chief doctrine that set Paul's ministry apart was that taught in Ephesians 3:1-9. The fact is that God is today saving all kinds of men alike and placing them in the Body of Christ. When we read I Tim. 2 we do not set aside his doctrine.

The Bible further sets those who are redeemed apart from those who are not redeemed. We do not set aside this doctrine when we read 1 Tim. 2

The Bible further sets those for whom Christ intercedes apart from those for whom Christ does not intercede. We do not set aside this doctrine when we read I Tim. 2.

We further know that we are not to simply read a passage but to study it thoroughly. Only then are we God's approved workmen. We do not set aside this doctrine when we read I Timothy 2.

Let Us Thoroughly Study I Timothy 2:1-8.