

1 Timothy 2:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. This verse explains why praying for all people is acceptable to God: He "will have" (thelei, θέλει)—desires or wishes—"all men to be saved" (pantas anthrōpous sōthēnai, πάντας ἀνθρώπους σωθῆναι). The word "all" is comprehensive—God's saving desire extends to all humanity without exception, not merely to some preferred group. "To be saved" encompasses full salvation—deliverance from sin's guilt, power, and eventual penalty, reconciliation to God, and eternal life.

Salvation involves coming "unto the knowledge of the truth" (eis epignōsin alētheias elthein, εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν). The compound epignōsis (ἐπίγνωσις) means full, precise knowledge or recognition—not merely intellectual awareness but personal acquaintance and experiential understanding. "The truth" (alētheia, ἀλήθεια) refers to gospel truth revealed in Christ (John 14:6; 18:37), contrasted with the false teaching Timothy was combating.

This verse raises theological questions about divine will and human salvation. God genuinely desires all people's salvation, yet not all are saved. This apparent tension is resolved by distinguishing God's revealed will (what He commands and desires) from His decretive will (what He sovereignly ordains). God desires all to be saved in the sense that He finds no pleasure in the wicked's death (Ezekiel 33:11) and offers salvation freely to all. Yet in His mysterious sovereignty, He has chosen to save some through electing grace while leaving others to their chosen rebellion.

Historical Context

This verse directly counters any notion that God's saving purposes are limited to a particular nation, ethnicity, or class. Against Jewish exclusivism that saw salvation as primarily or exclusively for Israel, Paul affirms God's universal saving will. Against Gnostic tendencies that viewed salvation as esoteric knowledge for spiritual elite, Paul declares God desires all to know truth. The gospel is universal in scope and offer.

The connection between salvation and knowing truth reflects biblical epistemology: salvation isn't merely forgiveness of sins but transformative knowledge of God through Christ. This knowledge is personal and relational (knowing God, not merely facts about Him), experiential (tasting and seeing that the Lord is good), and transformative (knowing truth sanctifies, John 17:17). False religion substitutes human speculation for divine revelation; true religion receives God's self-disclosure in Christ.

In Timothy's context, where false teachers promoted speculative myths and genealogies rather than gospel truth, Paul's emphasis on "knowledge of the truth" had immediate application. Salvation requires true gospel content, not any sincere religious conviction. This exclusivity isn't narrow-minded bigotry but recognition that truth is objective—there is one gospel, one mediator, one way of salvation (v. 5; John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's desire for all to be saved affect your prayer life, evangelistic efforts, and support for missions?

2. In what ways do you ensure your gospel presentations communicate true biblical content rather than generic spirituality?
3. How do you balance urgency in evangelism with humble recognition that God alone grants salvation?

Interlinear Text

ὅς	πάντας	άνθρώπους	θέλει	σωθῆναι	καὶ	εἰς
Who	all	men	will have	to be saved	and	unto
G3739	G3956	G444	G2309	G4982	G2532	G1519
ἐπίγνωσιν	ἀληθείας	έλθεῖν				
the knowledge	of the truth	to come				
G1922	G225	G2064				

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 18:32 (Parallel theme): For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

2 Peter 3:9 (Parallel theme): The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Ezekiel 18:23 (Parallel theme): Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?

Titus 2:11 (Salvation): For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

Ezekiel 33:11 (Parallel theme): Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

2 Timothy 2:25 (Truth): In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

1 Timothy 4:10 (Salvation): For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

Isaiah 45:22 (Salvation): Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Matthew 28:19 (Parallel theme): Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Luke 24:47 (Parallel theme): And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

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