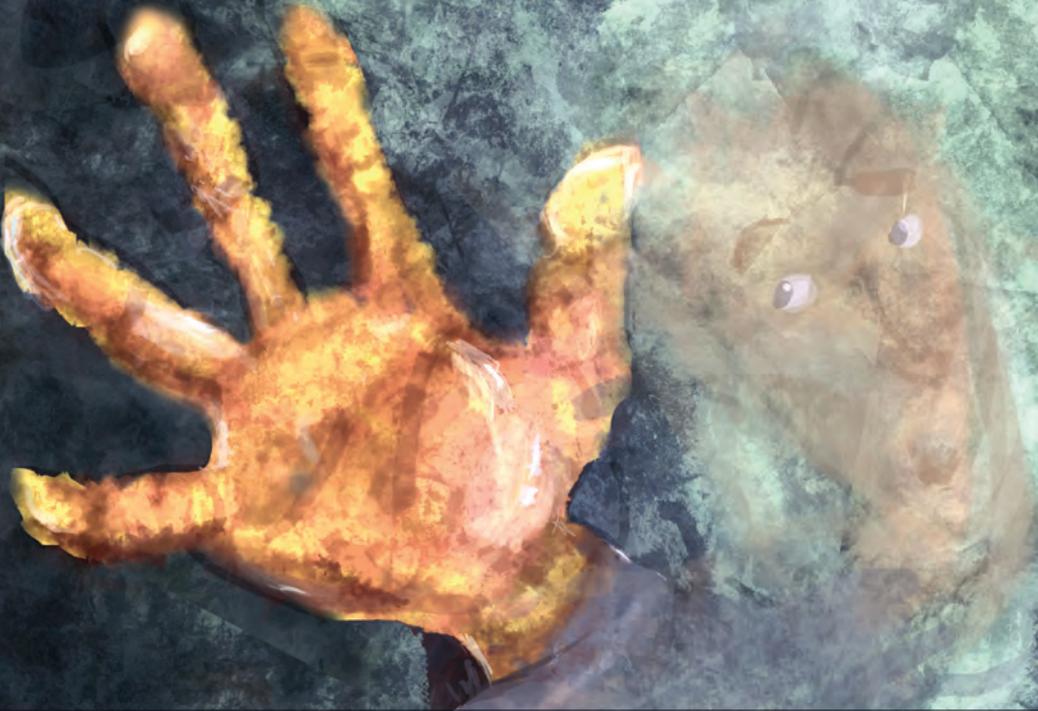


# It is God's Will that We Must Be Saved

KO LINGKANG



For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

## Introduction

John 3:16, probably the most famous verse in the Bible, tells us of the love of God. It was a love so great that He was willing to send His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to this world to die for our sins, in order that we may be saved. All we have to

do is to believe in Christ and we will have the gift of eternal life.

Having gone through the trouble to execute the entire plan of redemption, it is certainly God's desire for us to be saved. The Bible clearly states that God loves the world,

and this universal love that God has is what spurs Him to ensure that man in his lost and sinful state will have a way back to God. Furthermore, He did not just leave it to us to decide whether we want to be saved, for in our depraved state, we would never willingly seek after God (Romans 3:10-18). By His grace and mercy, God chose us even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5), and then called us by His irresistible grace to lead us to salvation (Romans 8:14, 29-30). From start to finish, God alone was responsible for our salvation. Surely, having done all that, God has shown His desire for us to be saved!

This is what we see being explained in this passage before us. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”. What we see expressed here is God’s desire – not just for us who are already saved, but for all men! In this we see the infinite love of God shown to us, for in His goodness and compassion, He desires that all the people in the world would come to the saving knowledge of Him.

Yet, we know that although this is described as God’s will, the fact of the matter is that not all men are saved. There are many who would go through their whole lives without ever repenting of their sins and believing in the Lord. The Bible is clear that the fate of these unregenerate people is eternal judgment in hell. Does this then contradict 1 Timothy 2:4? If it is God’s will for all men to be saved, why is it that not all are saved? What aspect of God’s will is Paul talking about in this verse?

## Are You Saved?

However, before we wade into the theological debate over God’s will, we must first address a more fundamental issue – “Am I saved?” If it is God’s will for all men to be saved,

shouldn’t we be concerned whether we are counted among this domain of “all men”? Surely, we must consider this most crucial point first, i.e. whether we ourselves have fulfilled this aspect of God’s will, namely that we are saved and have come to the knowledge of the truth.

God, the author of our salvation, is the one who is responsible for our salvation from the beginning to the end. While we commonly refer to Christ Jesus as our Saviour – for it is through His life, death and resurrection that we are saved – yet we must also remember that God the Father has a very crucial role to play. It is “the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man” (Titus 3:4; 2:10-11) that has extended His grace towards us, to elect us, call us, and forgive us of our sins. God the Father is the source and architect of our salvation, for it is by His sovereign decree that He chooses us unto salvation.

God our Saviour is emphatically portrayed as a God who “will have all men to be saved”. This intimates how believers are delivered from the power and corruption of sin, and granted the promise of eternal life. This happens when men “come unto the knowledge of the truth”. The word for “knowledge” (*epignosis*) carries the idea of a full and precise, experiential sort of knowledge. It is far more than just an intellectual comprehension of the gospel; it speaks of a complete assimilation and understanding of God’s truth as found in His word. When we believe in the Lord and profess faith in Christ, this is what happens. Not just with our mind but with our whole heart, we understand, assent and embrace the truths of all that Jesus Christ has done in order to save us.

Yes, this is what God wills, because God our Saviour wants all of us to be saved and come unto the knowledge of His truth. The

most important thing for us is to make sure that we ourselves understand this first. Are you saved? Have you come to the knowledge of the truth?

## Will All Men be Saved?

Yet the question still remains: will all men be saved? If that is God's desire, wouldn't He be able to fulfil it? Now, we must understand the matter is not about a question of God's power. Can He save all men? Surely He can! The infinite value of the Blood of Christ is enough to cleanse the sins of every single person who has ever lived and will ever live. Yet we know that it is not in God's plan to do so, for there are many who reject the knowledge of the truth and will never be saved. The question which we should ask is: why is that so? Why is it that even though it is God's will that all men be saved, yet not all men are saved?

At this juncture, we must understand the difference between the desire of God and the decrees of God. These can be seen as two distinct but not contradictory wills of God. This is explained clearly by Rev Timothy Tow in his book, "Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God". In it, he explains how there are various facets of the will of God. It is only when we understand each aspect better, that we can have a clearer perception of the complete will of God.

On the one hand, we have what is known as the desiderative will of God. This describes the longings or desires that God has, which He reveals to us through His word. Alongside our Scripture text at hand, God also reveals His desiderative will through passages like Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 2 Peter 3:9. In each of these passages, God describes how He has no pleasure in the perishing of the wicked, but desires that they should repent and live. As Rev Tow explains: "It is of God's character not to exult like Nero

in the torture and death of his Christian subjects, nor like Hitler exterminating six million Jews with a stone-dead heart, but the very opposite. God is good, God is love. So it is in Himself to see sinners turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish."

On the other hand, while it is in God's desiderative will that all men be saved, it is however not necessarily so in His eternal decrees, what Rev Tow describes as God's decretive will. In God's perfect wisdom and eternal will, He has ordained that there would be some who are predestined to be saved. These are the ones whom the Bible describes as the elect, and are the ones who will certainly be called by the grace of God. How about the others who are not predestined? John 3:18 tells us "he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Does this then make God unjust, and contradict His desiderative will? Certainly not, for there can be no evil or error in God! While He has a desire for all to be saved, it is also entirely His prerogative not to act on that desire. Instead, for reasons known only to Him, He has decreed that only some would be saved while the unrepentant would be judged and condemned.

We must understand and be very clear that even though it is God's choice as to who will be saved or not, the blame is not on God, but on the sinner. As Romans 9:19-23 explains, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known,

endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory"? Our sovereign God has every right to do as He wills, and He has in His perfect plan decreed that not all men will be saved. Yet the fault lies not in God, but in sinful men who reject God. All this is done "according to the good pleasure of his will" – and the aspect of God's will here is His decretive will.

So, while God in His desiderative will has a desire for all men to be saved, His decretive will is such that not all will be saved. This is a mystery which, though humanly difficult to comprehend, can nonetheless be humbly accepted and acknowledged, as highlighted by Paul in Romans 11:33-36, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

## Do You Care for Others to be Saved?

So having understood what this verse is referring to, the final issue that we ought to address is: what then should our response be?

In the context of this passage, we realize that it is actually Paul's exhortation to Timothy concerning prayer, that his "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). We are taught who and what to pray for, in accordance with God's will. If we know that it is His will that all men be saved, then surely we ought to pray for

that. Having understood this to be God's desired will, should it not then be the topic of our earnest prayers? Just as God cares for the unsaved, we too must have a heart and passion for lost souls around us, and pray for their salvation.

Aside from praying for the salvation of the lost, there is also much that we can do to actively go out to win the lost. The great commission to every believer is to "go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This is certainly a command that is very much in line with God's desire for all men to be saved. Rather than debating on whether a person is elect or not, and then wondering if we should share the gospel to him, we ought instead to remember God's desiderative will. When we go out to preach the gospel and witness to the people around us, we are doing the will of God, and bringing glory and pleasure to Him.



"It is of God's character not to exult like Nero in the torture and death of his Christian subjects, nor like Hitler exterminating six million Jews with a stone-dead heart, but the very opposite. God is good, God is love. So it is in Himself to see sinners turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish."

- Timothy Tow -