

## ***God's Desire to Save***

*"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." - 1 Timothy 2:3-4*

Believers are not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2), a principle seen in Paul's admonition to pray for rulers (1 Tim. 2:1–2). The Empire was moving toward caesar worship, and people had begun to revere the emperor as humanity's savior. The apostle's order that Christians pray for the king, besides showing goodwill toward potential foes, subverted Roman values. Praying for the caesar implied that he is not supreme — not one to whom people should pray. Praying for our leaders, 1 Timothy 2:3–4 explains, is also good because it is in keeping with the desire of "God our Savior," who wants "all people to be saved." Since prayer is one of the means through which the Lord affects His redemption (Luke 10:2), we see how intercession conforms to His saving purpose. But what about Paul's statement that God wants everyone to be saved? If not all people will be saved (Matt. 25:31–46), do Paul's words contradict the truth that no purpose of the Lord's can be thwarted (Job 42:2; Matt. 19:26)? Or must we embrace a universalism in which God will one day redeem hell itself? Let us consider two answers to these questions. First, if "all people" means everyone without exception, the Lord's will is not ultimately done when people reject Him. Yet as Reformed teachers have often said, the Greek word translated "all people" can mean all kinds of people — leaders, followers, rich, poor, Jew, Gentile, and so on. This interpretation makes good sense, as Paul lists a certain class of people — rulers — when he tells us to pray for "all people" (1 Tim. 2:1–2). John Calvin says that God's desire for the salvation of all "means...there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation." Second, if "all people" refers to every person without exception, then universalism is our conclusion only if God's desire to save is absolute. But the Lord desires one thing more than the salvation of all — His glory (Isa. 48:11). In one sense, God can truly want all who have ever lived to be saved; however, this desire always defers to His will to glorify Himself, the will in view when the Bible says His will is always done. The Lord is glorified when sin is punished in hell, and so God's supreme desire is met even when people are not redeemed.

### ***Application of God***

Part of our imitation of Christ includes a desire that all people come to salvation. Too often we lack this desire because we have not considered how terrible hell will be and have not remembered often enough that eternal punishment is the fate of all those who are apart from the true God. Let us pray daily that the Lord would give us a desire for everyone we know to be saved, even those people who can be considered our enemies.

### ***Passages for Further Study***

Ex. 14:4, 18, 30–31

Ezekiel 33:11

Jonah 3–4

John 11:4