

An Exegetical Study of Titus 2:11 **(A Doctrinal Study on the Extent of the Atonement)**

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Preface

The purpose of this doctrinal tract is to set forth, in a readable outline form, a positive polemic for the doctrine of definite atonement — a doctrine which the author is firmly convinced glorifies the triune Jehovah to whom salvation belongs.

An outline method is used to assist the reader in his study of three theologically controversial verses in the Pastoral Epistles on the "salvation of all men." The outlines which follow were originally prepared as separate theological tracts in conjunction with an exposition of 1 Timothy and Titus at Grace Reformed Fellowship in 1974-1975.

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance received from William Hendriksen's *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* — an excellent work by one of the foremost, if not the foremost, sovereign grace, New Testament commentators in our generation.

Titus 2:11

**AN OUTLINE OF THE THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS CONCERNING
TITUS 2:11: "FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH SALVATION
*HATH APPEARED TO ALL MEN" (A.V.) — "FOR THE GRACE OF GOD HAS
APPEARED, *BRINGING SALVATION TO ALL MEN" (NASB).**

THE THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN TITUS 2:11.

Does this verse actually teach that the saving grace of God has appeared (been manifested) to each and every member of the human race (all mankind without exception), or to all classes of mankind without distinction (i.e., all men without distinction of age, sex, or social position)? As a result of this problem, two related questions arise: first, has or does God's saving grace really appear to all men without exception or all men without distinction: second, does this verse support universal redemption (indefinite atonement) or particular redemption (definite atonement)?

I. THE UNIVERSALIST INTERPRETATION.

A. The grace of God has appeared merely to assist all men in helping them to restore themselves to full favor with God because external evil influences have caused them to come into varying degrees of disfavor. Man is innately good. There is no hell or eternal punishment. All mankind will live in eternal bliss and favor with God.

B. Objection. No orthodox believer holds this interpretation simply because universal salvation has absolutely no biblical foundation

II. THE ARMINIAN INTERPRETATION.

A. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all mankind without exception if they will only receive it. Through the merits of Christ's death, God's grace enables each and every individual to receive the saving benefits of Christ's atonement when they hear and believe the gospel by the exercise of their own free will. God's saving grace is truly universal for all men, but it may be effectually resisted by the obstinacy of man's sinful heart.

B. Objections.

(1) Logical. It makes little difference whether "the grace of God bringing salvation to all men" refers to the bestowal of salvation upon each and every person if they will receive it, or if it means the preaching of the gospel to all mankind without exception. "In either case it is impossible to make 'all men' mean 'every individual on the globe without exception'" (William Hendriksen, "Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles"). Strictly speaking, the Arminian interpretation views the grace of God in this verse as enabling grace, not saving grace.

(2) Theological. The term "all men" must be theologically understood in a relative sense like in I Timothy 2:4 (cf. notes on this verse). Furthermore, it is not true that God's grace, in Christ, brings salvation to all mankind absolutely. Myriads have lived and died and have never heard of Christ, let alone heard and rejected the gospel

(3) Biblical. "The context makes the meaning very clear. Male or female, old or young, rich or poor: all are guilty before God, and from them all God gathers his people. Aged men, aged women, young women, young(er) men, and even slaves (see verses 1-10) should live consecrated lives, for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to men of all these various groups or classes. 'All men' here in verse 11 = 'us' in verse 12. Grace did not bypass the aged because they are aged, nor women because they are women, nor slaves because they

are merely slaves, etc. It dawned upon all, regardless of age, sex, or social standing. Hence, no one can derive, from the particular group or caste to which he belongs, a reason for not living a Christian life" (Hendriksen).

III. THE MODIFIED OR FOUR-POINT CALVINIST INTERPRETATION.

A. The grace of God has appeared, providing salvation to all mankind without exception upon the condition that each one believes in Christ. The benefits of Christ's redemption are universally provided for all mankind, but they are only applied by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit to God's elect upon the condition of faith.

B. Objections.

(1) Logical. There is no theological disagreement within orthodox Christianity that the grace of God, in this verse, refers to God's saving grace through Christ (although the Arminians, in practice, interpret it to mean enabling grace). The modified Calvinists say that this verse teaches a provisional universal redemption (indefinite atonement) for all mankind without exception, to be applied upon the condition of faith. Consequently they interpret "all men" in an absolute sense. (See the logical objection to this interpretation of this term in the Arminian interpretation above.)

(2) Theological. It may be asked: "If the grace of God brings salvation to each and every individual, then why are not all of them saved"? The answer given is that saving faith is the condition for salvation, but only the elect are enabled to believe by the Holy Spirit, not the non-elect. But, if "all men" means "all men," like the universal redemptionist says, why are not all men saved? The verse does not say that the grace of God provides salvation to all men upon the condition that they believe. It says that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. The issue, then, centers upon the meaning of the term "all men." The context alone must decide the biblical meaning of the term. (See the biblical objection to the Arminian interpretation above and the biblical proof for the Historic Calvinist interpretation below.)

(3) Biblical. (See the biblical objection to the Arminian interpretation above.)

IV. THE HISTORIC OR FIVE-POINT CALVINIST INTERPRETATION.

A. This interpretation is correct. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men without distinction of age, sex, or social standing. The term "all men," in this context, does not mean each and every individual, rather it "describes individual classes, or various ranks of life. And this is not a little emphatic, that the grace of God that let itself down even to the race of slaves; for,

since God does not despise men of the lowest and most degraded condition, it would be highly unreasonable that we should be negligent and slothful to embrace his goodness" (Calvin's Commentary on Titus 2:11). The grace of God is special and distinguishing, designed only for those chosen to be holy and without blame in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Christ's redemption is particular not universal, definite not indefinite, actual not hypothetical.

B. Proof.

(1) Logical. (See the logical objections to the above views and the logical proof for the Historic Calvinist Interpretation on I Timothy 2:4.)

(2) Theological. (See the logical objections to the above views and the theological proof for this interpretation on I Timothy 2:4. Also see the writer's book on Definite Atonement which is to be published in the Fall of 1975.)

(3) Biblical. The strongest biblical proof is the context. Who are "all men"? All mankind without exception, or all mankind without distinction? Each and every individual, or some out of every rank and class of mankind, which includes older men, older women, young women, young men — of all classes, even slaves. (See the biblical objection to the Arminian interpretation above.)

V. A SUMMARY PARAPHRASE OF TITUS 2:11 ACCORDING TO THE ABOVE FOUR THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS.

A. The Universalist Interpretation: "The grace of God has appeared merely to assist all men in helping them to restore themselves to full favor with God."

B. The Arminian Interpretation: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all mankind without exception if they will only receive it by an exercise of their free will."

C. The Modified or Four-Point Calvinist Interpretation: "The grace of God has appeared, providing salvation to all mankind without exception upon the condition that each one believes in Christ."

D. The Historic or Five-Point Calvinist Interpretation: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men without distinction of age, sex, or social standing."

VI. A PARAPHRASE OF TITUS 2:11-12a:

"The saving grace of God has appeared in the person and work of Christ. Indeed, it brings salvation (lit., is salvation for) to all classes of men without distinction of age, sex, or social standing. And one of the primary purposes of God's saving grace is to teach all of us to whom salvation has appeared (been manifested) to deny ungodliness and worldly desires .

GOD'S SAVING GRACE IN CHRIST EITHER BRINGS SALVATION TO ALL FOR WHOM IT IS INTENDED OR IT DOES NOT. IT EITHER PROVISIONALLY OR ACTUALLY SAVES, HYPOTHETICALLY OR CERTAINLY SAVES. BOTH CANNOT BE TRUE. IF IT IS THE FORMER, NO ONE WILL BE SAVED, IF IT IS THE LATTER, SOME OF ALL MANKIND WILL BE CERTAINLY SAVED (I.E., ALL MANKIND WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF AGE, SEX, OR SOCIAL STANDING), FOR THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED, BRINGING SALVATION TO ALL MEN"!

*The A.V. (KJV) translation connects the phrase "to all men" with the verb "has appeared," rather than the substantival adjective "salvation." In gender, "salvation" agrees with "grace" and, since it is used substantively as a predicate adjective, the connecting verb is understood, i.e., "the grace of God . . . , bringing salvation (lit., is salvation for) to all men." Principles of grammar strongly favor the NASB translation because of word order. (in the Greek text "salvation" is positioned next to the phrase "to all men," whereas the passive verb "has appeared" is the first word in the verse, occurring before the phrase "the grace of God" and is complete with or without the predicate adjective "salvation" and the following phrase "to all men." Therefore, it is best to connect the phrase "to all men" with "salvation" (like the NASB) not with "has appeared" (like the A.V.). The purpose of the predicate adjective is to present an additional explanatory statement concerning the grace of God which actually becomes the main point in the sentence. Hence, the nuance of verse 11 is this: "The grace of God has appeared; indeed, it brings salvation to all men." And the connection between verse 11 and 12 is this: "The grace of God has appeared, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires . . ."