

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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EXCURSUS: CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM (Part VIII)

We examined last week the immediate context of I Tim. 4:10 – which begins at 3:16. The Apostle is highlighting the need for a strong confessional Christology especially in light of the pervasive apostasy that threatened the first century Church. We looked at the soteriological implications of interpreting this verse along the lines advanced by Arminians and found that approach decidedly unhelpful. How else can we interpret Paul's language?

I. **First**, the sense of the words *to save*, *savior* and related words. It is clear from the Old Testament verb *yasha'* that its essential meaning is *to deliver* from external evils, such as in battles, only rarely from moral troubles. Physical rescue is prominent in its usage. Cf. Ps. 36:6. In NT times, the same sense is often found in the literature, although in the NT the spiritual sense is the more common. It is not surprising, then, that so many commentators give "Savior" the sense of preserver or something very similar in our text,¹ as Baugh,² Barrett,³ Dibelius and Conzelmann,⁴ Fairbairn,⁵ Fee,⁶ Guthrie,⁷ Hendriksen,⁸ J. N. D. Kelly,⁹ William Kelly,¹⁰ Kent,¹¹ Lock,¹² Simpson,¹³ Vine.¹⁴ It is, of course, the common secular sense of the words. In addition to Psalm 36:6, a text which in its context is written with Noah and the beasts of the field in mind,¹⁵ to which reference is made above, one might refer to Judges 3:9, where the term "deliverer" (NKJV), referring to Othniel, is in the Hebrew text *savior* (YASHA). Other texts include Judges 3:15, Nehemiah 9:27, Obadiah 21, Psalm 104:27-28, 106:21, and 145:9, 16, 17. Jonah 4:10-11 is especially touching concerning God's kind concern for His creation. He is its Preserver and Deliverer, its Savior.¹⁶ The same sense of God's kindness, love and mercy to His creation is found in the New Testament (see Matt. 5:45; Luke 6:35; Rom. 1:21; Acts 17:25, 28; 27:31, 44 (the root of *to save* is found here).¹⁷ It surely is agreed that the common secular sense of the term *to save* and *savior* refer to the secular meaning of *to deliver* or *to preserve*, if the saving is an extended saving. Does the context of I Timothy 4 support the sense of *to preserve* or *to deliver*? My late professor of theology, S. Lewis Johnson convinced me that this is exactly how we are to understand Paul's teaching.¹⁸ The context deals with the apostasy to come "in latter times" (1), characterized by the activity of "deceiving spirits" (1) and demonic doctrines. Hypocritical "lies" (2) are the words of the apostates and their aides as they speak from "seared" consciences (2). Among their teachings are attacks upon the providential care of the creator God, for they command abstention by believers (3) from His provision of food (3). All of our Creator God's created things are good, and should be received with thanks (4). The brethren should be so instructed (6). "Fables" are to be rejected, and one's exercise should be toward "godliness" (7), which has promise for the present life (8) as well as the future,--a trustworthy saying (9). The apostle speaking for the saints, says we labor and suffer reproach from the worldlings, since our trust is in "the living God" (10), the latter term of broad significance, which includes His work of saving in restraint of sin from the perils of life since the Fall (10). The living God is the Preserver of all men, even the ungodly, but He is such "especially of those who believe." It is clear that the context is broad and inclusive of all God's saving and preserving work as "the living God."

- II. **Second**, how shall the interpreter handle the words, “all men”? It is likely that the expression in 2:3-4, where it occurs two times, refers to all men without distinction, not all men without exception. The note of distinction is sounded in verse 1, continued in verse 2 and in the concluding verse of the section, verse 7, where Paul calls himself a “teacher of the Gentiles.” The strength of the opposing argument, namely that Christ died for all without exception, lies in the ambiguity of the word *all*,¹⁹ In our text the argument does not turn on the sense of all as being all without distinction as it does in 2:3-7, that is, some of all sorts. We may take the “all men” here to mean all without exception, that is, all of all sorts in the light of the fact that the text speaks of God’s common grace, His care and provision for all His creation.
- III. **Third**, what is the sense of the adverb *MALISTA*, rendered by “especially”? The English word, “especial,” with its synonym of “particular,” denotes a distinction among other examples of the same general category: notably unusual (suffered from measles of *unusual* severity), or an individual member of a subclass in logic.²⁰ If this is the meaning of “especially,” then the believers belong to a subclass of “all men.” The living God is the Savior of all men, among whom are those who believe.²¹ There is an impossible difficulty here. In the sense in which God is the savior of beliefs, that is, giving in grace eternal life to them through the Son’s atoning sacrifice, He is not the Savior of any others. He only saves believers in that sense. As Ralph Wardlaw, an Amyraldian, says, “He saves none but them that believe. He does not save them especially and others partially or conditionally: He saves them exclusively.”²² In the realm of divine care and preservation of His creation there is an “especially.” The living God preserves and cares for His whole creation in common grace, but especially extends such care to His eternally beloved saints, the lovers of His Son, the justified ones. It is clear from the adverb, “especially,” that “Savior” cannot be given the sense of eternal salvation the guilt and penalty of sin.²³ Calvin is right, God’s kindness extends to all men, and “if all share in God’s kindness, how much more shall the godly know it . . . In short, will He not keep them in all things safe to the end?”²⁴
- IV. **Finally**, what does history have to say concerning the text and its interpretation? First, a comment concerning the relation of the text to secular history. The term *SŌTER* was in common use in both classical Greek and Koine Greek as a title of the heathen gods (Zeus, Apollo, Hermes, Asclepius, etc.), of the Roman emperors, and many leading officials. They were viewed as delivering men from calamities and supplying various physical needs having to do with man’s general “well-being.”²⁵ It is striking that Paul uses the term *SŌTER* of God the Father only in the Pastorals (I Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tit. 1:3; 2:10; 3:4). Elsewhere the term is referred to Christ (I Cor. 1:21; Eph. 2:4, 5, 8; Phil. 1:28). It seems clearly possible that the more Paul came into contact with the Roman world, the more likely he might be to use the term *SŌTER* in the sense in which it was commonly used, that is, of God as the God of common grace, the Preserver and Deliverer of His creation, “both man and beast” (Psa. 36:6; Acts 17:28). Baugh is of the opinion that I Timothy 4:10 is “a polemical aside aimed at the false veneration of men who were no longer living,” the “gods” and “saviors” of ancient Ephesian inscriptions.²⁶ Second, a comment from the history of the Christian interpretation of the text under discussion here. Turretin points out that Chrysostom, Oecumenius, Primasius and Ambrose say, “He is the Savior of all at present” (i.e., as far as regards the present life), but of believers only ‘in the future’ and as to eternal life; cf. Thomas Aquinas on the passage—‘who is Savior of the present and future life because he saves with a bodily salvation as to all, and thus he is called the Savior of all men. He saves by a spiritual salvation also as to the good and is hence said to be the Savior especially of them that believe’ (*Angelici Doctoris Divi Thomae . . . Commentaria in Epistolas omnes D. Pauli*, II/V [1856], p. 34 on I Tim. 4:10).²⁷

CONCLUSION: This interpretation of I Tim. 4:10, as advanced by S. Lewis Johnson and Steven Baugh, fits the semantic use of *SŌTER* and is supported by its historical circumstances. Furthermore, as Baugh points out, “it fits the flow of thought that the apostle is developing in the passage equally well. In 4:6-8, Paul had alluded directly to Timothy’s historical circumstances when confronted with the keen interest in bodily exercise shown by the Ephesians, indeed, by all Greeks. He points out the small return that an investment in bodily exercise yields in relation to the great profit godliness brings, ‘not only in the present life, but also in the life to come’ (v. 8). Hence, Paul shows in v. 10 that God is the provider of earthly beneficence, even for people absorbed by physical discipline which relates to ‘the present life’ (v. 8). But God is especially beneficent to those who train themselves in godliness, because he not only cares for the earthly needs of believers, but also for their needs in ‘the life to come.’ Taken in this light, I Tim. 4:10 is revealed to be a polemical aside aimed at the false veneration of men who were no longer living, yet who were publicly honored as gods and saviors upon the Ephesian inscriptions. As such, the phrase, ‘Savior of all people, especially of believers,’ should not be interpreted as teaching a universal atonement. It is an assertion of the deity of the true and living God in the face of pagan notions of deity; and it asserts that the saviors looked to by the peoples with whom Paul and Timothy associated daily could not be compared with the true Benefactor of all people, the Living God, whose common grace embraces the whole world.”²⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. BDB, 446-47. The verb *SŌZŌ* generally refers to deliverance, help and salvation for persons in situations resulting from hostile intent of others (TDNT, VII, 973). In the NT *SŌZŌ* is used of the saving of physical life (Matt. 8:25; 14:30; Mark 15:30). “Many Gk. Gods, and exp. Zeus, are *SŌTERES*, not just as helpers in distress but as ‘protectors’ and preservers’ of the *polis* and its citizens” (*ibid.*, 1005). As one can see the senses of *preserver* and *deliverer* are very common in NT times.

² Baugh, p. 338, “Benefactor,” a polemical aside aimed at gods and saviors upon the Ephesians inscriptions.

³ C. K. Barrett, The Pastoral Epistles in the New English Bible (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 70. He expands the term *Savior* to “whom he preserves in life, making the sun to shine and the rain to fall on good and bad alike.” The term refers to the Father in 1:1, 2:3 and here according to Barrett.

⁴ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastors Epistles (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), pp. 68-69. They comment. “For Paul all men are, theoretically, capable of becoming believers” (69).

⁵ Patrick Fairbairn, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956 [orig. ed., 1874], p. 184. He defines the term as “the deliverer and preserver of life.”

⁶ Gordon D. Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984). Fee’s comment after “Savior” is, “that, he would save (give life to) all people . . . , but his salvation is in fact effective especially for those who believe” (p. 106). His theological position is clear!

⁷ Donald Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary (London: The Tyndale Press, 1957). Guthrie says that “Saviour” must be understood in its common meaning of ‘Preserver,’ although, as Simpson points out, ‘Christianity raises the word to a higher plane’” (p. 96).

⁸ William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957). He prefers “Preserver” or “Deliverer” (p. 155).

⁹ Kelly, *op. cit.* The statement, he believes, repeats the thought of 2:4, “where it is affirmed that God wills the salvation of all men” (p. 102).

¹⁰ W(illiam) Kelly, An Exposition of the Two Epistles to Timothy (London: C. A. Hammond, 1948 [orig. 1889]). He takes “Savior” to refer to God as preserver, elaborating, “It is of the living God as such that the apostle speaks (chap. Vii.20). God’s providential care and government are before us, wherein nothing escapes His notice. So he clothes the herbage of the field and nourishes the birds of heaven which sow not, nor reap, nor are gathered into granaries. So He makes His sun ride on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. How much more prized are not His own than many sparrows, even the hairs on their heads being all numbered!” (pp. 87-88).

¹¹ Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958). Kent’s “temporal-eternal interpretation” is essentially that of most Calvinists. The word *savior* is given a temporal sense of preservation and benefactor, and the *malista* (NIV, “especially”) clause refers to a special call for believers involving spiritual life.

¹² Walter Lock, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1924). Lock’s words are, “The difference of treatment lies not with God, but with men themselves. He is always Father and Saviour; but they who trust Him as such and accept the revelation through His Son, know that He is such and gain a fuller life” (52). Savior in the redemptive sense is his view.

¹³ E. K. Simpson, The Pastoral Epistles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954). He writes, “*SŌTER* here plainly bears its usual Greek meaning of Preserver (cf. Ps. Xxxvi. 6); but Paul pointedly employs it with a double significance; for Christianity raises the word to a higher plane” (69).

¹⁴ W. E. Vine, The Epistles to Timothy and Titus: Faith and Conduct (London: Oliphants Ltd., 1965). Vine takes the meaning of “Savior” to be Preserver. He also cites Heb. 1:14 in connection with the believers.

¹⁵ Leupold calls Psa. 36:6 “a brief reminiscence” of Noah and the beasts in the ark. Cf. H. C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), p. 295.

¹⁶ Cf. Hendriksen, pp. 154-56.

¹⁷ C. Derek Kidner’s note on salvation in Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), pp. 38-39. “The entrance of sin,” Kidner points out, “brings other aspects of grace to the fore, in God’s measures to preserve mankind at some level of decency and order, and to bring certain men into covenant with Himself, through who He will ultimately bless the world (18:18). As “Saviour” (i.e., Preserver) ‘of all men’ (a footnote refers to I Tim. 4:10). He is shown in Genesis restraining the corruption and anarchy of sin through the discipline of hardship and mortality (3:17ff., 22ff.), the constructive use of natural resources (3:21), the sanctions of law (9:4-6), and the power to recognize moral obligations (cf. Abimelech’s use of moral terms in 20:5, 9), as well as through the direct influence of His servants (e.g. 50:20). As Saviour ‘especially of those who believe,’ He reveals His grace in choosing and calling them, justifying them, bringing them into covenant and educating them in His ways.”

¹⁸ I am indebted to Dr. Johnson for the substance and distinctive features of these notes on I Tim. 4:10.

¹⁹ Cf. John Owen, The Works of John Owen, ed. By William H. Goold (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), X, 344. Owen’s words should be noted here, “That *all* or *all men* do not always comprehend all and every man that were, are, or shall be, may be made apparent by near five hundred instances from the Scripture. Taking, then, *all* and *all men distributively*, for some of all sorts we grant the whole; taking them *collectively*, for all of all sorts, we deny the minor,—namely, that God will have them all to be saved.” The argument he is referring to comes from the Rem. Act. Synod, “If God will have all men to be saved, then Christ died for all; but God will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth: therefore Christ died for all men.” Owen in refutation points out that the strength of the argument lies in “the ambiguity of the word *all*,” which may be taken *distributively* for some of all sorts or *collectively* for all of all sorts. He grants the former sense, but denies the latter. Owen contends that the most common sense of *all* is the latter, for many of all sorts, and that there is nothing in this context that should “in the least measure impel to another acceptance of the word, especially for a universal collection of every individual, we hold it safe to cleave to the most usual sense and meaning of it” (X, 345).

²⁰ Cf. Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, p. 847. Under “particular” it reads, “an individual or a specific subclass (as in logic) falling under some general concept or term.” “Especially,” the adverb, may be used as an intensive (an especially good essay) (nothing especially radical in the remarks). Barrett suggests for the term here, “above all” (op. cit., p. 70).

²¹ Marshall (p. 55) refers to T. C. Skeat’s article on MALISTA, in which Skeat suggests renderings of *namely, that is to say*, and *I mean*, or the like. Cf. T. C. Skeat, “Especially the Parchments”; A Note on 2 Timothy IV. 13” (JTS, New Series, April, 1979, Vol. XXX, Part I), pp. 173-77. Marshall suggests that this rendering is “decisive,” although he puzzlingly says that there is only a “possibility” of the rendering’s correctness. I cannot see how this rendering helps Marshall, for he is still left with the word *savior*, referring to effectual salvation. He must not defend the introduction of some such word as, “potentially,” or “conditionally.” Further, the use of MALISTA in the New Testament does not support Skeat’s suggestion (see Acts 20:38; 25:26; 26:3; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 4:22; 1 Tim. 4:10; 5:8, 17; 2 Tim. 4:13; Tit. 1:10; Phm. 16; 2 Pet. 2:10). The sense given above in the text is the sense of the Greek adverb.

²² Ralph Wardlaw, Systematic Theology, ed. By James R. Campbell (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1857), II, 477. When referring to salvation Wardlaw says the adverb has “no consistent application.” I presume he means that there are no degrees in genuine Christian salvation, no “especially.” All either have it all, or do not have it at all.

²³ White’s comments are a lesson in the victory of sentiment over exegesis. On the adverb MALISTA he says, “The *prima facie* force of MALISTA certainly is that all men share in some degree in that salvation which the PISTOI enjoy in the highest degree.” He goes on to say that the statement must be qualified to mean that “God is potentially the Saviour of all.” Thus, exegesis conforms to theology, and not theology to exegesis. Cf. Newport J. D. White, The Expositor’s Greek Testament, IV, 125.

²⁴ John Calvin, The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, ed. By David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. By T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 245.

²⁵ Cf. Hendriksen, p. 156.

²⁶ Baugh, p. 38.

²⁷ Turretin, II, 461.

²⁸ Baugh, p. 338.