

# Biblical Notes – 1 Timothy 4:10

"Paul and his company labored and strived. This was no cheap grace they were saved by. Nor was it a lazy grace either. They exerted themselves (forced labor, 1 Cor. 4:12; Eph. 4:28; 2 Tim. 2:6; cf. the noun in 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8) in the work of bringing the gospel. They warred against principalities and powers (Eph 6:12). They suffered (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7; Col. 1:29; 4:12. 1 Thess. 2:2, etc.).

The phrase, "who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:10) has caused some confusion for those who do not look at the full context of Paul's thought, the definition of words, etc. Some assume that Jesus as Savior has done something for all humanity, though it is less in degree than what he has done for those who actually believe. An illustration may help. In high school I served as a lifeguard. Suppose two people were drowning and I threw each a life ring buoy. One man takes the buoy and is saved, but the other refuses the buoy and drowns. How I am I the savior of either man? One man drowned, so I'm definitely didn't save him. Didn't the other man save himself by grabbing the buoy? Oh yes, I assisted, but he saved himself! As one sees this Arminian interpretation does violence to the text, and does away with Christ as savior! Christ secured an actual eternal salvation for his people, not just its potential (Isa 53:11; Matt 1:21, et. al.).

There are some other more scriptural interpretations. First, as we see in 1 Timothy 2:4, 6 the word "all" can mean "all sorts of," as it does in 1 Timothy 6:10. Combining this with an alternate definition of the Greek word malista, which can mean "especially," but also "namely" or "that is," we could paraphrase the text as, "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all types of people, namely those who believe." This would be consistent with the rest of Scripture.

The second, and more probable interpretation is to realize that the Greek word soter (Savior) more than likely is not even speaking of the atonement at all. While in numerous texts soter can mean Savior (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; Tit 2:13), in other texts it can refer to God as preserver or deliverer (Judges 3:9; 1 Sam 2:6-8; Neh. 9:27; Psa 106:21. God's mercy is to some extent over all his creation (1 Sam 2:6-8; Psa 145:9; cf. Matt 5:45; Phil 4:19, etc.). We remember that God delivered Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt. God had been "the savior of all, but specially those who believed," because only with the latter was God "well pleased" (1 Cor. 10:5). All Israel was delivered from Egypt, but not all entered Canaan (cf, Heb 3:18-19). So, in the first part of the verse common grace is the topic and in the second half special or saving grace.

So, the term soter can refer to God's providential preservation! This is consistent with the fact that the gospel is to be shared with all without distinction (Matt 28:18-20). So, then to once again to paraphrase Paul, we could say, "For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior (preserver in a general or providential sense) of all people, especially of those who believe (in a soteriological sense).

The ESV Study Bible (Crissway, 2008) states;

... The statement that God is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe could seem to teach universalism, that every person will eventually go to heaven. However, the rest of Scripture clearly denies this idea (see note on 1 Tim. 2:4). There are several other possible explanations for this phrase: (1) It means that Christ died for all people, but only those who believe in him are saved. (2) It means he is offered to all people, though not all receive him. (3) It means "the Savior of all people, namely, those who believe" (a different translation of Gk. malista, based on extrabiblical examples). (4) It means "the helper of all people," taking Greek Soter, "Savior," to refer not to forgiveness of sins but to God's common grace by which God helps and protects people in need. (5) It means "the Savior of all kinds of people, not Jews only but both Jews and Greeks." ...

1 Timothy 4:10 does not conflict with limited atonement, rather it affirms it."

Website Reference: <http://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/45603>