

THE USE OF UNIVERSAL TERMS IN THE LXX AND THE NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE LIMITED ATONEMENT DEBATE

John Fraiser
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Advocates of Limited Atonement have historically advanced two different interpretations of the controversial universal passages in the New Testament.¹ Arthur W. Pink insists that what Scripture means by God loving the world and giving his son for it (Jn 3:16-17) is that God loved the world of his elect people.² This interpretation is clearly absurd. It has no warrant from the text. It has simply been loaded onto the text due to previous theological commitment.³ While this view is easy to dismantle, it does not represent the best interpretation of the controversial passages from a Limited Atonement standpoint. The more common and more defensible approach takes these passages as a reference to God's love or Christ's atonement for people groups, or Gentiles as opposed to Jews alone. While this approach agrees with the previous one that God loves only the elect, it does not think one can use these passages to prove it.

Much of the exegetical argument in favor of a Limited-Atonement reading the controversial passages focuses primarily on the immediate literary context of the passage. So for example, Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Robert Letham comments that this verse is within the context of:

Christ's intercession for God's elect (vs 33f.) and God's own fore-ordination of his people (verse 28-30). The letter itself is written to the church. The reference of the pronoun 'us' in verse 32 is certainly not universal; the frame of reference of the context is to Christ's own people.⁴

¹ I take many of the controversial texts to *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* to be Jn 1:9; Jn 3:16-17; Jn 12:47; 2 Cor 5:14-15, 19; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim 2:3-6; Heb 2:9.

² Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 53.

³ Norman Geisler rightly criticizes Limited Atonement on this view (*Chosen But Free*, 193-94). See also Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991), 246-47.

⁴ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 241

While the immediate context should undoubtedly be a starting point for determining the meaning of the phrase “gave him up for us all,” there are other passages relating to the extent of the atonement where the context is not as clear, and thus, making it more difficult to determine the particular meaning of those universal terms. In Hebrews 2:9, one does not have the luxury of a word like *hēmōn* to further define the meaning of *pantos* (as in Rom 8:32). Here the phrase is simply “all/every” (*pantos*), which does not make it clear whether it is referring to people groups or every individual. There is nothing in this particular passage which exegetically prevents a universal atonement reading of the text.

If one is to answer whether in Hebrews 2:9 *pantos* means all without *exception* or all without *distinction*, she must look at the broader context of *pas* and *pas anthrōpos* in the New Testament and even more broadly still in the Greek literature of this time period. However, on both sides of the debate, very little if anything is ever said about how people of the first century might understand universal phrases such as “the whole world” and “all men.” How commonly do Greek authors of this time period and subsequent periods use these universal phrases to mean “without exception” and “without distinction?” Norman Geisler says that the “plain meaning” of *pas anthrōpos* is every member of the human race. However, without examining more broadly how this phrase is used in the rest of the New Testament and the contemporary Greek literature, it is simply an unfounded assumption to assert this as the “plain meaning” of the phrase.⁵ While the immediate context should always be the deciding factor for interpreting the sense of *kosmos* or *pas anthrōpos*, if one can discover the commonality of a particular sense of these phrases in Greek literature, it will give confidence to one’s interpretation of an individual New Testament text, and provide a more definite context when the immediate context is not enough to argue for a specific meaning.

“*Kosmos*” and “*Oikoumenē*” in the Septuagint

⁵ Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 203.

Kosmos has a very broad usage in Greek literature with at least nine definitions. It is infrequently used to refer to the heavenly bodies (Gen 2:1; Deut 4:19). It is commonly used to speak of one's garments or apparel (Jdt 10:4; 12:15; Sir 6:30; Isa 3:18, 19, 20, 24).⁶ In other places *kosmos* means the beauty or glory of someone or something (Jdt 1:14; Prv; 20:29; Sir 26:16; 43:9; Nah 2:10; Isa 40:26), and occasionally speaks of the decoration of a building or structure such as a temple or palace (1 Mac 1:22; 2:11; 2 Mac 5:3; Sir 22:17). The Wisdom of Solomon usually uses *kosmos* to speak of the created order or material order, while other texts speak of it as goodness or blessing (4 Mac 8:23; 16:18; Prv 17:6; 28:17). Strangely enough, the LXX only uses *kosmos* twelve times to refer to humanity, and uses both senses of "without exception" and "without distinction," with some texts being simply unclear on which sense is meant. The texts that are clear are split almost evenly between these two senses. 2 Maccabees 3:12 speaks of the temple being honored "over all the world," which clearly conveys exception, while Wisdom 14:6 speaks of Noah and his family as "the hope of the world," which likely means to include every individual in all places.

⁶ In the New Testament this use of *kosmos* occurs only in 1 Pt 3:3.

The more common word for humanity or the inhabited world in the LXX is *oikoumenē* with seventeen occurrences with this sense. In none of these occurrences does *oikoumenē* appear to be used to mean humanity without exception. Furthermore, the seven occurrences of *oikoumenē* in the New Testament appear to have the same meaning as in the LXX.⁷ The only difference between the New Testament and the LXX in this respect is the frequency of *oikoumenē*. When speaking of the inhabited world without distinction the LXX prefers *oikoumenē*, while the New Testament typically uses *kosmos* to convey this idea. This may indicate that by the time of the New Testament *kosmos* is replacing *oikoumenē* as the dominant word for the inhabited world.⁸ Liddell and Scott's lexicon states that in later Greek *kosmos* and *oikoumenē* share a high degree of overlap.⁹

What does this mean for the extent of the atonement debate? The fact that *kosmos* is used only a few times to refer to people groups or humanity without distinction in the LXX but frequently used in this sense in the New Testament can be explained by the use of *oikoumenē*. As we come to the time of the New Testament, *kosmos* is most likely taking on a meaning close to that of *oikoumenē* and thus this gives strong support for reading passages such as John 3:16-17 with a similar definition as *oikoumenē* (which is always used to mean “world without distinction” or “people throughout the inhabited world”).

⁷ *Oikoumenē* in Lk 2:1 could possibly be understood as exceptionless when Augustus took a census of the entire Roman world (*pasan tēn oikoumenēn*). While the very nature of a census seems to require *oikoumenē* to refer to every individual, given its strict usage in the LXX and other NT passages (Acts 11:28; 17:6, 31; 24:5) as humanity without distinction, it is more likely that the idea of every individual without exception comes from “census” (*apographō*) rather than *oikoumenē*.

⁸ To avoid loading the frequency of *kosmos* to mean humanity without distinction, I have excluded any controversial passage on the atonement in my count of *kosmos* in the NT. Even if all of the controversial passages were read with an Arminian or Amyraldian interpretation, *kosmos* without distinction would still outweigh all the occurrences of *kosmos* without exception.

⁹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s. v. “κοσμος.”

Already this should be enough to demonstrate that the plain meaning of *kosmos* is not always or even frequently exceptionless. It by no means has a fixed definition, rather it is a very broad and elastic word in Greek literature with a variety of meanings that are being narrowed diachronically in later Greek literature.

“*Pas Anthrōpos*” in the Septuagint

The use of *pas anthrōpos* in the Septuagint is of lesser importance than *kosmos* in the debate on the extent of the atonement. The occurrences are split nearly evenly between an exceptionless sense and a distinctionless sense. There is, however, one notable difference in the occurrences that convey an exceptionless sense of *pas anthrōpos*. Over two-thirds of the approximately 42 occurrences of *pas anthrōpos* with an exceptionless sense are found in a command or a decree. For example, Lev 22:3 says that, “Every man (*pas anthrōpos*) throughout your generations, whoever of all your seed shall approach to the holy things, whatsoever the children of Israel shall consecrate to the Lord, while his uncleanness is upon him, that soul shall be cut off from me: I am the Lord your God.” However, in the LXX and the New Testament, there are only about three occurrences of *pas anthrōpos* meaning all without distinction that are part of a command.

While one should be cautious in making a strong conclusion based on these data, the *high* number of occurrences in a command or decree of *pas anthrōpos* meaning without exception and the *low* number of occurrences of in a command or decree of *pas anthrōpos* meaning without distinction suggests that the exceptionless sense is usually required in cases of a command. Thus, in cases where there is no command or decree, there is more evidence in favor of reading *pas anthrōpos* as all without distinction (context permitting, of course) than there is for reading it as all without exception.

Furthermore, the frequency of *pas anthrōpos* as all without distinction is important. It is used in this way roughly as many times as the absolute universal sense. Thus, there is no warrant for thinking that absolute universal sense is the default reading or the “plain meaning” of a given text. Words derive their meaning from how people use them, and if *pas anthrōpos* is frequently used to mean “all without distinction,” then this meaning of the phrase is *prima facie* as legitimate as the exceptionless sense. Thus, it proves nothing when Arminians claim that “all means all,” or when Robert Culpepper contends that “there are clear assertions in Scripture that Christ died for all (II Cor. 5:14), that he gave he himself a ransom for all (I Tim 2:6), that he is the expiation of the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2), and that he tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9),” and that “the arguments advanced for a Limited Atonement are easily answered.”¹⁰ Similarly, Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell argue that “these restrictive interpretations of *all* require such textual gymnastics that they condemn themselves as invalid.”¹¹ But there is no linguistic ground for this claim when we consider how frequently *pas* is used to convey exception. Walls and Dongell should only reach their conclusion after demonstrating that the context of each New Testament occurrence of *pas* necessitates a meaning of “all without exception,” but they can make no valid conclusion based on any intrinsic meaning of *pas* itself. While the use of *pas anthrōpos* in the LXX in no way means “all men without distinction” in every case, neither does it mean “all men without exception” in every case either. It has a high frequency of both senses which indicates that there is no default definition of the phrase, as there might be if only one sense was ever used or was used much more extensively than another.

“*Kosmos*” and “*Pas Anthrōpos*” Beyond the Septuagint

¹⁰ Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 125.

¹¹ Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I am not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2004), 52.

The linguistic support for a Limited Atonement reading of the text does not stop with the LXX, the conclusions made above are only further confirmed as one explores other works of Greek literature. In Josephus' *Antiquities*, Daniel says that while Nebuchadnezzar desired in a dream to know who would succeed him in the government of the whole world (*holou kosmou*), it was God who desired to show him what it meant (Ant 10:205). But Josephus (and Daniel) clearly knew that Nebuchadnezzar did not rule the entire world. As Josephus continues to tell of the history and wars of the Jews he is acutely aware of nations who threatened Nebuchadnezzar's power and of the Persians eventually overcame him.¹² In this context, the meaning of *kosmos* clearly implies exception.

The non-literary papyri offers a substantial amount of evidence for taking *kosmos* to mean exception. A manuscript from BCE 9, hails the birth of Augustus as the beginning of good news (*euangeliōn*) to the world (*kosmōi*). Likewise, in CE 67, a manuscript describes Nero as "Lord of all the earth" (*ho tou pantos kosmou kurios Nerōn*). A second-century letter speaks of an Alexandrian bishop as one whose reasonableness is known throughout the whole world (*ton kosmon holon*).¹³ None of these texts permit an interpretation of *kosmos* as world without exception. They mean to speak only of a generalized view of the world as a whole or of a region.

Each of these texts has a close parallel with several New Testament passages. The Augustus text is akin to Mark 16:15, where Jesus commands his disciples to go into all the world (*ton kosmon hapanta*) and preach the gospel (*to euaḡelion*) to all of creation. The Nero text is similar to Revelation 11:15 where the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of our Lord. And perhaps the closest parallel is the Alexandrian bishop text and Rom 1:8. Here, Paul says of

¹² See *Antiquities of the Jews* 10:9ff, where Josephus recounts the story of Nebuchadnezzar's fall from power.

¹³ James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-literary Sources* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1930), s. v. "κόσμος."

the Roman church, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of through the whole world” (*en holō tō kosmō*). These similarities are not only common at the semantic level, but also at the structural and thematic level.

Perhaps the papyrus text that brings the most to bear on this discussion because of its religious themes comes from *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. Mss 1380 is a 2nd-1st century BCE text most likely written by a priest or priestess of the Egyptian god, Isis, who is referred to as “the ruler of the world” (*oikoumenē*).¹⁴ The translation reads:

Lady of increase and decay and of... thou didst establish shrines of Isis in all cities for all time; and didst deliver to all men [*pasin*] observances and a perfect year; and to all men [*pasi*]... in every place; thou didst show... in order that all men [*pantas anthrōpous*] might know that thou...; thou didst establish thy son Horus Apollo everywhere [*pantē*] the youthful lord of the whole world [*pantos kosmou*] and... for all time.¹⁵

The emphasis here is clearly on the extent of Isis’ reign. When the priest or priestess says that Isis has established a shrine in all cities, he/she does not have in view every single city without exception. Rather, a generalization is in view to show the extension of Isis’ reign. Because of the broken text there are several places where the meaning is unclear. It is impossible to say with certainty the way in which *pantas anthrōpous* is intended, but the context seems to indicate that all men is meant with exception.

Defending the Comparison of the LXX and Papyri to the New Testament

But perhaps the whole project of examining the senses of *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* outside the New Testament is irrelevant in the first place. So what if *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* are used in a corporate sense outside the New Testament. Perhaps the way the New Testament authors use these phrases is simply different than the way other Greek authors use it. After all, it

¹⁴ *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, ed., Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, vol. 11 (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), [mss 1380]: 199.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

is well-documented that the Greek of the New Testament is different in its syntax as well as its vocabulary from other bodies of Greek literature.¹⁶

Undoubtedly, this is true of the New Testament with regard to Attic Greek. The study of Greek linguistic history has shown that there have always been numerous dialects of Greek, but within the Attic or Classical period of Greek (sometimes called the “Age of the Dialects”) the number of localized dialects heightened. Even though it became dominant in literature and high society, Classical Greek represents only one of these localized dialects from that period. Naturally, as Attic Greek came into contact with other dialects over time it underwent significant changes. Thus, it is no surprise that by the first century Attic Greek has changed both diachronically and geographically to become *Koinē* Greek.¹⁷ But the texts we have been using to compare to the New Testament are neither from the Classical dialect nor the Classical period. In fact, many scholars argue that the Septuagint has more linguistic similarity to the New Testament than all other documents. As Moisés Silva notes, “Research into the LXX vocabulary is of fundamental importance for New Testament lexicology, not only with regard to theological terms (though foremost here), but also in connection with more general usages that may have affected certain stylistic decisions.”¹⁸ The link between the LXX and the New Testament is so strong that it prompts Silva to say, “Even if the New Testament writers had never read the LXX, that document would still have profound significance for New Testament lexicology.”¹⁹ But the LXX is not the only similar document to the New Testament. Beginning with the twentieth century, scholars became aware that the New Testament bears a high degree of similarity in its

¹⁶ Stanley Porter discusses this view and others in a concise and lucid discussion of the New Testament’s literary style in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove: IL, InterVarsity Press, 2000), s. v. “Greek of the New Testament,” by Stanley E. Porter.

¹⁷ David Alan Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 151-52.

¹⁸ Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 68.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

literary structure and vocabulary to the non-literary papyri of the 1st century BCE-2nd century CE. In spite of this discovery, numerous scholars proposed several theories to explain the uniqueness of New Testament Greek in comparison to Classical and even *Koinē* Greek. Some proposed that the differences should be attributed to the fact that the New Testament authors did not speak Greek as a first language and that the New Testament is a direct translation of an Aramaic text. Others went so far as to claim that the differences could be explained by the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the text as if God has a Greek dialect of his own. Recent scholarship (both New Testament as well as Hellenistic) has seen a return to the theories of J. H. Moulton and George Milligan that explained that New Testament Greek is quite similar to the everyday-conversation style of the non-literary papyri.²⁰ In addition, and as argued above, the LXX plays a prominent role in explaining both the vocabulary as well as the literary structure of the New Testament. All of this is to say that one can make a strong case for comparing New Testament vocabulary and structure with that of the LXX and the papyri. We should expect that *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* would share both similarities and differences with the LXX and that the use of these words in relevant texts would shed light on their New Testament usage.

“*Kosmos*” and “*Pas Anthrōpos*” in the New Testament

Aside from its relationship with other bodies of Greek literature, the New Testament bears out on its own what I have already argued about *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos*. I have deliberately excluded all of the controversial texts in weighing the evidence in favor of a Limited-Atonement reading. Both of the phrases under consideration occur in enough texts to sufficiently establish the most common way in which they are used. Aside from these controversial texts, *kosmos* is overwhelmingly used in a corporate sense rather than an individual

²⁰ Stanley Porter, “Greek of the New Testament,” 430. See also, G. Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers* (London: Longmans Publishing Company, 1997), 92-95.

sense in the New Testament.²¹ A representative text might be Rom 11:12. Speaking of the Jews, Paul says, “But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” There can be no ambiguity about the way in which Paul intends *kosmos* to be used. His distinction between Jews and the world is an ethnic one. Paul includes a parallelism that makes it even clearer. The failure of the Jews brings riches to the Gentiles. In this context, *kosmos* simply refers to non-Semitic people groups. Paul continues his line of thought further in 11:15. “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”

While here again Paul contrasts Jews and Gentiles in his definition of the world, one can also make an argument for Limited Atonement from theology as well. There seem to be only two theological options with respect to the extent of the atonement in this verse. If *kosmos* is conveying exception then it favors a Limited-Atonement reading, but if *kosmos* is conveying absolute universality then it is teaching universalism in salvation. The Arminian view is not an option in this text. If *kosmos* is exceptionless then Paul is saying that every individual *without exception* is reconciled to God.²² But this conclusion would be clearly unwarranted just from other parts of the book of Romans itself (Rom 2:1-14; 3:1-10; 8:1-5).

Aside from any theological argument, there are several cases in which a certain text parallels a controversial text and help clarify whether the author intends the passage to mean without exception or without distinction. For example, in Mark 16:15 Christ commands his disciples to go to all the world (*ton kosmon hapanta*) and preach the gospel to every creature (*pasē tē ktisei*).²³ Does Christ intend to say that the disciples are to preach to all people without

²¹ The most common use of *kosmos* in the NT conveys the idea of an evil, fallen culture/society that is hostile to God.

²² For other examples of texts that permit only Limited Atonement or universalism, see Robert Letham’s *The Work of Christ*, 235-37.

²³ Possibly rendered “all creation” which would only make the point here even stronger.

exception when he speaks of “all the world” and “every creature”? Acts 1:8 recalls the same event using different words. Here, Christ tells his disciples that they are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and all the earth (*gē*). Christ’s emphasis is not on each individual without exception but on each individual without distinction. The disciples do not have the impossible task of preaching to all people without exception, rather, they are to branch out beyond Jerusalem and preach in all parts of the world. The emphasis in both Mark 16 and Acts 1 is on preaching to people groups throughout the world rather than simply the Jews of a localized region. Matthew 28 also supports this interpretation of Mark 16. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (*ethnē*). This is equivalent to Jesus’ words in Mark 16 to go to “all the world” and preach to “every creature.”

As far as *pas anthrōpos* goes, 2 Thessalonians 2:14-16 demonstrates unambiguously that the phrase does not always convey absolute universality. “For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men (*pasin anthrōpois*) in their efforts to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. The way in which the Jews show hostility to all men is in their efforts to keep the gospel from going to the Gentiles. What Paul means by “all men” is qualified by the context and here refers to Gentiles, whom Paul mentions in the following phrase.

The Religio-Cultural Context of the Atonement in the First Century

The endeavor on the part of the Jews to stop the Gospel from going to the Gentiles raises an important issue in the Limited Atonement debate. The passion of the New Testament writers is clearly the spread of the Gospel throughout all parts of the world (Matt 28:20; Mk 16:15; Acts

1:8; Rom 10:18; Col 1:6). This mission is highly controversial among the Jews. In Acts 13 the Jews of the synagogue were encouraging Paul and Barnabas to continue in the grace of God on the Sabbath, until Paul pushed to include salvation to the Gentiles apart from the law. Then they turned against him and ran him out of the city. The same issue arises in chapter 14 at Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In Acts 15, the matter is not even settled among the church where at the Jerusalem council they wonder whether there can be salvation for Gentiles apart from the Law. After much debate, Peter reminds them “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of God and believe” (15:7). Finally, only after more debate, James concludes that it is his judgment that the church should accept “those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles” (15:23). All of this indicates just how controversial a gospel for all the nations was in the Jewish culture of the first century.

Acts 10:45 tells of the astonishment of “those of the circumcision” at seeing the Holy Spirit given to the Gentiles. In Acts 11, the church of Judea hears for the first time that Gentiles are believing in the Gospel. When Peter gives a report of Gentile conversions to the church at Jerusalem they respond with amazement. “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (11:18). In his defense before Agrippa, Paul defends a universal gospel when he says that he declared “*even to the Gentiles* that they should repent and turn to God...*It was for this reason* that the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death” (26:20-21). While under house arrest in Rome, Paul preached to the Jews that “this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen” (28:28).

Romans 3:23 which is frequently quoted to appeal to the absolute universality of every person as a sinner, is rather in the context of Jewish and Gentile identity. Previously, in 3:9 Paul

reminds his reader “We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles are alike under sin.” He offers Psalm 14 as proof of his point, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (3:10). Jew and Gentile alike are under sin, and God has made his righteousness known apart from law. It comes to *all* who believe (3:21-22). In this context, his statement in 3:23 that “all have sinned” is not focused on all without exception but all without national distinction. This does not mean that Paul intends to deny that all people—past, present and future—without exception have sinned, but only that this is not what he has in view. His attention is on the controversy over the identity and privilege of Jews over Gentiles. Paul is claiming that anybody—whatever their nationality—can be right with God apart from their identity in the law (3:28). Should this be any surprise to Jews? “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, even of Gentiles too” (3:29). James Dunn argues that Paul’s rhetorical question here is a play on a paradox in Jewish thought between God as creator and hence Lord of all and God as Israel’s Lord alone. Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai writing a century after Paul says that “God spoke to the Israelites: I am God over all who come into the world, but my name have I associated only with you; I do not call myself the God of the nations of the world, but the God of Israel.”²⁴ Sirach 17:17 speaks of God appointing the angels to rule over other nations, but being Lord of Israel himself. Dunn points out that a Jew would likely answer yes to Paul’s question, but follow with a qualifier that though he is God of all, he is Lord of Israel alone.²⁵ Paul’s statement seeks to undercut these Jewish assumptions. God’s lordship through creation is more foundational than Israel’s election and thus this relationship to creation is primary in salvation history.

It would be difficult to overemphasize just how revolting the idea of world-wide good news for all nations would be to a first-century Jew. Of course, it should not be, given the Old

²⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, The Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38a (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 188.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

Testament background for it (Ps 96:3; Is 42:1-4; 49:6; Jer 3:17; 4:2; Dan 7:14). Nevertheless, that God would save people of all nations without them becoming Jewish was clearly the most heated controversy of the religious culture of the time. The notion of a world-wide gospel may seem so common as to be uncontroversial to us today, but this is only because we are removed from the first century context and living in a time when global missionary efforts are quite common place.

If we are to discuss the extent of the atonement we cannot isolate the discussion from the cultural context in which the New Testament authors make these universal statements. We should not project our contemporary issues over the atonement onto these statements without taking thought of what the issues were of their day. *The rage in the first century was not over how God could love all Gentiles without exception, but how he could love any Gentile in the first place, and it is with this rage in mind that nearly all of the controversial texts are written.* The controversial texts of today were just as controversial when they were written, but for different reasons. Before, the church could get to the point of considering the question of whether Christ's atonement was meant for each *individual* it had to first address the issue of whether it was even meant for anyone who was not Jewish or had not become Jewish. While the church has long since settled this question of Gentile-inclusion and moved on to "bigger and better" questions, we have to allow that in the first-century they had not. Gentile-inclusion may seem like such an inconsequential matter today, but such was not the case in the period of the New Testament.

If we are to expect the text to answer our questions of the day, we must first let it answer theirs. In light of the fact that these universal texts were intended to answer different questions we should realize that we can only draw implications from them to answer our questions. This does not mean that their questions are unrelated to ours, but only that they are not identical. It is

far too simplistic and error-prone to say that “all means all” without giving due consideration to the both the historical and cultural contexts. Unless we know how the biblical writers are using universal language, it does us no good to use it ourselves.

Undoubtedly, some might feel that these considerations detract from the profundity and richness of texts such as John 3:16-17. That God loves everyone without exception seems much more significant than his love for only certain people scattered throughout the world. We must be careful, however, that we do not make an agenda for God which he has not made for himself. If after careful study we arrive at a conclusion which we believe to be the most faithful to the text but which leads us in a theological direction we do not wish to go, we should wonder if some parts of our theology have not been developed apart from the text.

Summary and Conclusion

Kosmos and *pas anthrōpos*, like all words and phrases, have no inherent meaning. They derive their meaning from their usage. Thus, the meaning of a particular word can change over time as people use it in new (or nuanced) ways. It is simply bad linguistics to argue what the writers of the New Testament must have meant when they use a particular phrase without examining how the phrase is used elsewhere. Clearly, the immediate context is the primary factor in determining how a word is used, but when several interpretational options are available, we must broaden the context if we are to gain more information for making a decision.

Kosmos and *pas anthrōpos* in several of the controversial texts seem to have numerous valid interpretations within the immediate context (e.g. Heb 2:9). However, when we expand our sources beyond the New Testament, it becomes clearer that *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* (apart from command and decree) are used more frequently than not to convey exception. While this

fact alone does not prove the a Limited-Atonement reading of *pas anthrōpos* in Hebrews 2:9, it does, however, give warrant to reading it that way.

Examining *kosmos* and *pas anthrōpos* in the LXX and the non-literary papyri in order to inform their usage in the New Testament is a valid project since these two sources have a strong semantic and structural link with the New Testament. The LXX's influence on the New Testament both linguistically and theologically is greater than that of any other document or collection of documents.

Neither Calvinist nor Arminian scholars have taken this information into account when arguing their viewpoint. Many times each side argues for their perspective of the atonement based on its consistency with other points of theology.²⁶ While this is an important step in developing a view of the atonement, much more is needed than theological consistency. If one's doctrine of the atonement is not founded on the Scriptures, then it cannot have any claim to atonement. Admittedly, this paper has not included much by way of theological argument. Rather, the aim has been to bolster the doctrine of Limited Atonement which many consider to have little to no ground in the text given the many universal statements concerning the atonement.²⁷ Limited Atonement has much more going for it than simply theological consistency. There are strong textual, linguistic, and historical reasons in favor of a Limited-Atonement reading of the controversial texts, and without these reasons, any other grounds for Limited Atonement are too weak on which to stand.

²⁶ Two examples of works that consider the extent of the atonement from a purely theological standpoint with virtually no consideration of the text are Paul Helm, "The Logic of Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3 (1985): 47-54, and Colin E. Gunton, "Universal and Particular Atonement Theology," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 453-66. Both works offer excellent theological arguments but they do so apart from any textual analysis. Even theological arguments must ultimately find their root in the Scriptures. Apart from this, any theology of the atonement is only pure speculation.

²⁷ Consider D. A. Carson's claim that attempts at defending Limited Atonement exegetically, while clever, are ultimately feeble since there are simply too many texts favoring a universal atonement for one to overcome (D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000], 17).