

# What Does ‘All’ mean

‘All’ means all. That’s right, everything in question is ‘all’.

The problem is that ‘all’ must be in context to understand what it refers to. For example:

- “I ate it all up” – refers to the food that was on the child’s plate, not all the food in the kitchen that was prepared for the meal.
- “We are all going to the pool today” – refers to all the people in the family, not everyone in the suburb.
- “All of you are guilty” – refers to the criminals in the dock, not everyone in the courtroom.
- “I would like all of you to pass this exam” – refers to everyone in the class. But, it is qualified in context as the desire of the teacher, meaning that not everyone will necessarily pass the exam.

See how ‘all’ must be understood in context?

That’s the same process that needs to happen when “all” is read in scripture. For example:

**1 Timothy 2:4** (NKJV) – *who desires **all** men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

This is clearer in the Passion Translation: “He longs for everyone to embrace his life and return to the full knowledge of the truth.”

Notice that “all” is qualified by “He Longs” or “who desires”. This means that it is his desire that everyone comes back into his family as adopted sons, not that everyone WILL do that.

Communication requires an understanding of context. That’s textual context (it’s place in the writing) and also cultural context (its understanding by those who it was written to as interpreted by their cultural and societal knowledge). We miss these contexts when we isolate verses and phrases from their place in what was written. For example:

- “I’m letting the 3 of you go. You’re all fired” – “all” here is qualified by “the 3 of you” in the context in which ‘all’ is located.

**Ephesians 4:25** (NIV) – *for we are **all** members of one body.*

Paul is writing to the saints in Ephesus, so in context, ‘all’ must only refer to this group of people.

The Contemporary English Version confirms this as the rest of the verse is: “Stop lying and start telling each other the truth.”

However, ‘we’ in “we are all” could be the collective plural of every Kingdom citizen. In this case “all” is referring to every believer on Earth.

This interpretation is further justified by the use of ‘neighbour’ in the Greek (translated “each other”), which is a generic Hebrew term for those around you.<sup>1</sup>

The other context that helps us understand what’s written is its background. The background to communication puts it in the proper ‘light’ to be understood. This background information can cause the understanding of the intent of the writer to be 100%, or at worst, 0% – complete misunderstanding due to non-comprehension. For example:

- “Can I have it all” – this must be qualified by an understanding of the background to the statement. Only then can it be understood what “all” is referring to.

1 – [canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Should-We-Love-Our-Next-Door-Neighbour.pdf](http://canberraforerunners.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Should-We-Love-Our-Next-Door-Neighbour.pdf)

**Romans 11:26** (NKJV) – *And so all Israel will be saved*<sup>2</sup>

In context, it is the fulfilment of a prophecy that “The Deliverer will come out of Zion; he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

The background to this expression is that Israel has been cut off from the Kingdom of God through the stubbornness to accept the NC. However, when all the gentiles have come into the Kingdom, their spiritual eyes will apparently be opened and these people will be receptive to the good news.

The Passion Translation puts it this way: “A partial and temporary hardening to the gospel has come over Israel, which will last until the full number of non-Jews has come into God’s family. And then God will bring all of Israel to salvation!”

We need to be careful making dogmatic statements based on scripture expressions without a full understanding of what’s written there.

Let’s look at a final ‘all’ statement.

**Galatians 3:26** (NIV) – *you are all children of God*

This is a common statement that people make, but what do we know about it from the Bible where it comes from?

In context, the full verse states: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith”. That qualifies the ‘all’ – only those who are in Jesus through their faith in his death and resurrection. That means not everyone in the whole world.

This is confirmed in John 1:12 (NIV) – Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

‘Every’ is another word which equates to ‘all’. Here’s an example:

**Philippians 2:10** (NKJV) – *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*

Every knee will bow (that’s all created beings, both natural and spiritual) in reverence and respect of King Jesus because he has been given a name by Father which is greater than any other in all creation. This will be either out of relationship or respect (by sons and heavenly beings), or, out of regal acknowledgement (by every other being). The latter acknowledgement will happen whether they like it or not, because in his presence a person can’t help acknowledging who he is and bow to him.

In context, there is no indication when this will occur, or, whether every being will be forced to do it. The important point from the verse is that his name is the greatest and therefore he is the greatest.

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)