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Short Note:
Whoever, Anyone, and The One Who

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Short Note

By J. Harold Greenlee

Recently I was asked to explain the distinction in meaning for three Greek phrases that seem to be interchanged in some versions of the Bible. After I gave my reply, it was suggested that I write this up to share with a broader audience.

If you want merely the general idea, or if the receptor language does not make the distinctions, I believe you could translate these three constructions alike. (In translation workshops I sometimes replied, "That's probably as near as you can get!") However, they do have different implications, and they are not always properly distinguished in English versions. A notorious example is in John 3:16, which in Greek falls into the third category below, but which is translated as category 1 in the KJV, RSV, and NIV.

1. **ὅς (or ὅστις) + ἀν or ἐάν + finite verb.** This construction is expansive, emphasizing the broad or universal outreach of the Gospel—'whoever, without limitation!' This construction is appropriate in Matthew 10:11 and 10:14—"into whatever house you enter," "whoever receives you."

2. **εἴ τις + finite verb.** This construction is conditional, implying that a person might or might not believe. This is appropriate in Matthew 16:24, "if anyone wishes to follow me," and Romans 8:9, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ."

3. **ὁ + participle + finite verb.** This construction identifies the person who believes—'the one who believes.' In John 3:16 the addition of πᾶς 'every (one)' makes it emphatic. Similarly, in John 4:13, "everyone who drinks of this water…" (But in v. 14 the emphasis changes to ὃς ἄν + subjunctive, "whoever may drink," making it expansive.)

J. Harold Greenlee, associated with OMS International, is the author of more than a dozen books and more than 150 articles, mostly pertaining to New Testament Greek, including A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek *(1963, 1986), his classic textbook,* Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism *(1964, 1995), and his most recent book,* The Text of the New Testament: From Manuscript to Modern Edition *(2008).*