

Shayla: Are women saved through bearing children?

Midrash:

1 Timothy 2:9-15 HCSB Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense; not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel, (10) but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God. (11) A woman should learn in silence with full submission. (12) I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to be silent. (13) For Adam was created first, then Eve. (14) And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. (15) But she will be saved through childbearing, if she continues in faith, love, and holiness, with good sense.

This passage is notoriously difficult to translate and fraught with doctrinal landmines. I intend to advance very cautiously and to retain an open mind if someone can come up with a better solution.

The first thing we need to do is establish the immediate context. In the previous six verses, Paul was asking women to not be in demanding, teaching, and authoritative positions in the church but rather to live quiet, simple, contented lives.

I'm not going to go into the whole "role of women in the church" issue which I've answered elsewhere, but suffice it to say that Paul was not asking the women anything that elsewhere he had not asked of the men.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12 HCSB** ...But we encourage you, brothers, to do so even more, (11) to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, (12) so that you may walk properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.
- **1 Timothy 2:1-4 HCSB** First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, (2) for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (3) This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, (4) who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I want you to notice that this idea of quiet, humble contentedness is again associated with salvation in 1 Timothy 2:1-4. This is important because it demonstrates the usage of the words by the same author in the same book.

The verb used in 1 Timothy 2:15 (soqhsetai¹) can imply a spiritual or metaphysical type of salvation, but just as often implies salvation from a more immediate, physical type of danger.

Let's establish what Paul CANNOT be saying. He cannot be saying that women find salvation from their sins, the sin's incumbent wages, through the act of giving birth for that would flatly contradict Paul's own teaching in:

- **Ephesians 2:8-9 HCSB** For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-- (9) not from works, so that no one can boast.²

Even though Paul refers to Eve's sin and the curse of child birth³ in verse 14, he cannot be saying that believing women are free from those pains because all women, including disciples still struggle with those pains and some even still die.

I also find it unlikely that he is referring to Eve being justified upon the ultimate birth of the Messiah (an interpretation I heard my whole life) for three reasons: first, the word "she" in verse 15 does not refer to Eve but to "woman" in verse 12. Second, saying that Eve was

¹ Strong's #4982

² Cf. Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 26-27, 34-35; 1 Timothy 5:3-10

³ Genesis 3:16

justified when the Messiah was born would still contradict Ephesians 2:8-9. In fact, if women in general are saved simply because the Messiah has been born then that means that women have a different means of salvation, indeed they have no NEED for the atoning work of Christ. That's not tremendously likely, is it? Third, teknogonia (the Greek term for childbirth here) refers to the process, rather than the product. That makes it unlikely to be referring to the Messiah.

I believe that the key is to understand "saved" in the more pragmatic manner rather than the more esoteric, spiritual manner. We need to understand that the context of both passages in 1 Timothy 2, one to men and one to women, are saying that true safety lies in humble quiet lives. Contentedness is rooted in humility and humility can lead one to ultimate salvation. It is when we are willing to present our bodies as living sacrifices and transform our sinful ways of thinking that we can discern the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. It is when we cease to think more highly of ourselves than we should and begin to think sensibly that we are truly responding to the measure of faith that Hashem graciously distributed to all men.⁴ When we do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, and in humility consider others as more important than ourselves – that is when are truly imitating the mindset of Christ⁵ and are obeying the command to be holy as Yahweh M'Kadesh is holy. I find it interesting that it is within that context that Paul says we are "working out our own salvation with fear and trembling."⁶

I think that when we learn to be humble, to accept our small roles, and work faithfully at developing the resources that God has given us, the Lord responds by granting more enlightenment, more faith, more grace, and ultimately, salvation ensues. Humility must precede salvation. Paul is using "motherhood" or "childbirth" as metonymy for the proper role of a woman. When a woman or man learns to be content with their state,⁷ and do not pass the natural bounds⁸ without God's specific calling, they are "safe". That is the point to this passage I believe.

⁴ Romans 12:1-3

⁵ Philippians 2:1-12

⁶ Philippians 2:12

⁷ Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:8

⁸ Cp Jude 1:6-7