



SAVED THROUGH *Childbearing?*

by **Rebekah Curtis**
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There I sat in Sunday School, paging through my Bible like the saintly child I was, when I tripped on this: “Yet [women] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (1 TIM. 2:15).

Reading the verse felt like running into a wall. I was in fourth grade, and the first thing I thought of was my beloved, unmarried teacher. How could she go to heaven if she didn’t have a baby? And next I wondered, “What if I don’t get married and have a baby? I didn’t know ladies had to have a baby to go to heaven!”

Still being saintly, I tracked down a pastor (my dad). When I asked him about this verse, he asked some questions right back: “How are we saved? Can anyone be saved by something she does? Is there any way to be saved without Jesus?”

Those are answers a fourth grader can handle. We are saved because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross (1 PETER 3:18). There isn’t a thing I could do to save myself (EPH. 2:1). Jesus is the only way for anyone to receive forgiveness, life and salvation (ACTS 4:12).

But what about that “saved through childbearing” thing? It can’t mean that a woman gets saved by giving birth to a baby. We are saved by God’s mercy, not by anything we do (TITUS 3:5). Seeing biological motherhood as a requirement for women to be saved goes against the most basic message of the Gospel.

This passage is famous for its difficulty. Some translations of 1 Tim. 2:15 use the word *in* rather than *through*. That makes things sound a little different: Women being saved in childbearing could mean they won’t die while giving birth. This idea goes down easier. Christians certainly trust God in all dangerous circumstances. Yet it is clear that He has not promised to preserve the life of every Christian mother without exception. Many Christian women have died in the blessed but dangerous act of bringing a child into the world. A baby’s birthday

is not Judgment Day for his mother’s faith, love and holiness. If it were, everyone would grow up motherless since every mom would fail the test. Again, we are saved by God’s grace, not our goodness.

Where does that leave us? A woman can’t be saved eternally by having a baby, and it might even be the end of her earthly life. Her only hope is Jesus, whom we remember sometimes as baby Jesus. In the Small Catechism, the creed’s explanation teaches that Jesus Christ is “true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary.” Childbearing is a part of salvation in the sense that we would not have a God-man if He hadn’t been “born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (GAL. 4:4–5).

That leads us to another interpretation of this verse worth considering. A few Bible translations make this easier to see. In Young’s Literal Translation, 1 Tim. 2:15 reads, “And she shall be saved through *the* child-bearing” (emphasis added). That “the” is no accident. It is also in the Greek original, and it may be the best guide to what this verse is talking about. We are saved through the bearing of a child, but not our own bearing of children. We are saved because there was one miraculous childbearing that gave us a Savior.

All of this is just a complicated way of getting at what a fourth grader remembers when her dad puts her thinking in order with the right questions. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life; He is the only way to the Father (JOHN 14:6). Starting from there clears up the Bible everywhere else. Women (and men) will be saved through childbearing, but not in the prideful or self-righteous way those of us blessed to give birth might be tempted to think. The childbearing through which we are saved is the incomparable one that gave us Jesus. ☪

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