

## Q: What does Paul mean when he writes that women will be saved through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15)?

**A:** Paul's childbearing comment, infamously found in 1 Timothy 2:15, has long confounded interpreters. First, I will share my own view of this perplexing verse, but humility and honesty require me to give others' opinions as well, for the most certain thing that can be said is that interpreters disagree on its meaning. Though Paul knew what he meant when he said, "she will be saved through childbearing," his meaning has long eluded his readers.

The opening statement of 1 Timothy 2:15, "she will be saved," depends on the previous sentence for its subject: "the woman." From what "the woman" will be saved, however, is unstated. Several scholars believe Paul refers here not to eternal salvation but to physical safety through the travails of labor. The NASB, for example, suggests this interpretation: "But *women* shall be preserved through the bearing of children..." This view typically emphasizes the Greek goddess Artemis' pervasive influence in Ephesus. Frank Ames and I have argued that verse 15, rather than straying from the chapter's main thrust, continues the theme of prayer which is explicit in verses 1 and 8. The certainty that pregnant women in Ephesus prayed to Artemis—goddess of new life—raises the question whether some Christian women did the same. A pregnant Christian convert may have prayed to Artemis out of fear that she or her child would die in labor. She may have also prayed to Artemis for protection against child exposure leading to slavery or infanticide and against the social shame and economic vulnerability of being childless. Thus verse 15 is a warning against syncretism and an appeal to faith in the "one mediator...Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).<sup>1</sup>

A second view is that, rather than being saved through the dangers of childbearing, women will be saved from false teaching. This view enjoys the strength that false teaching is indeed a prominent theme in 1 Timothy. Representative of this view is T. Scott Womble: "Paul is reminding the women to ... 'fix their hope' on Christ, their Savior. By turning their attention away from the false teachers to an admirable family life, he was helping them to do just that. Indeed, the troubled women at Ephesus who were captive to false teaching could be saved." Similarly, Alvera Mickelsen and others have argued that women will be saved from the effects of false teaching.<sup>2</sup>

A third and well-known understanding is that Paul speaks here of salvation from sin itself. That is, Eve and all her descendants

are offered salvation from the results of that ancient archetypal sin. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* makes plain this interpretation: "...her childbearing brought about salvation, reversing Eve." Many who accept this view understand "childbearing" as referring to the birth of Christ and rightly clarify that it is a Greek definite noun, hence "the birth of a child."<sup>3</sup>

Having demonstrated lack of consensus on what this verse means, I should emphasize the strong consensus on what it

does not mean: Commentators, regardless of their view of women in ministry, unanimously shun any suggestion that, while men are saved by grace through faith, women are saved by bearing children.

Finally, in this issue of *Mutuality* focused on parenting, one more point of consensus should be noted. Reading between the lines and even between the interpretations, Paul's words remind us that parenting is important. Indeed, with each birth of a child, new hope enters the world. May our souls magnify the Lord as we continue—with faith, love, and holiness—to nurture the fearfully and wonderfully made children whom God may grant us.

**Pregnant Christian converts in Ephesus may have been praying to the goddess Artemis out of fear that they or their children would die in labor.**

1. Frank Ritchel Ames and J. David Miller, "Prayer and Syncretism in 1 Timothy," *ResQ* 52/2 (2010), p. 65-80; reprinted as p. 94-111 in *Women in the Biblical World*, vol. 2.

2. T. Scott Womble, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, p. 208; Alvera Mickelsen, "An Egalitarian View: There is Neither Male nor Female in Christ," p. 173-206 in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*.

3. See Loren Cunningham, David Hamilton, with Janice Rogers, *Why Not Women?*, p. 223-224; Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, p. 417-444.



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