

Household Salvation?

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For a believer married to an unbeliever, the concern for the soul of their spouse is very great. Much time is spent in prayer regarding their spiritual condition. Rejected invitations to attend worship services together, or for a Bible study with the preacher, can be discouraging. Despite being a good example of a Christian, seeing no favorable response toward becoming a Christian can be troubling. The same is true for Christian parents with unbelieving children.

These difficult situations have been falsely soothed by a teaching commonly known as "Household Salvation." This misleading teaching says that one believer in a household of unbelievers can save their household simply by their own genuine faith, independent of the others obeying the Gospel. This false doctrine is derived through misinterpretations of several passages of Scripture. For example, this scene from the book of Acts, and the words of Paul and Silas to Philippian jailer are often employed:

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Acts 16:31

Attention here is given to the words, "You will be saved, you and your household." Proponents of household salvation believe that once the jailer obeyed the Gospel, his actions brought salvation to his whole house, regardless of whether or not they too accepted the Gospel. Such an interpretation completely ignores the verses which immediately follow:

And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately **he was baptized, he and all his household.** And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, **having believed in God with his whole household.**

Acts 16:32-34 (Emphasis Mine)

It is not hard to see that each individual member of the jailer's household was saved as a result of their own belief, and not on the basis of the jailer's faith.

Another text used to teach this unbiblical concept of household salvation is found in what we know as Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Take a look at what the apostle said about marriages between believers and unbelievers:

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

1 Corinthians 7:14

Those who believe in the concept of household salvation read the word "sanctified" in this verse as if Paul is saying the unbelieving spouse is "saved" by the faith of the believer. Additionally, the apostle's statement regarding the children being holy is interpreted as children being saved by the faith of the believing parent. Once again, if they would just read a little further in the chapter, such an interpretation would be shown to be erroneous. Notice what Paul says just two verses later:

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

1 Corinthians 7:16

Here Paul talks about the possibility of saving an unbelieving spouse, not by getting married, but by the believer conducting himself or herself properly in the marriage. Peter discussed the same possibility (1 Peter 3:1-2). If the possibility exists of leading a spouse to Christ through proper Christian conduct and honoring marriage vows, then that unbelieving spouse is not yet saved. In fact, the text in Peter is even more specific. Peter writes, "...so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives." If they can be "won" they are lost.

Salvation in Christ is a choice each person makes for themselves. If Paul and Peter *were* saying what proponents of household salvation insist they are saying, then salvation is essentially forced upon a person apart from their free will! Jesus said, "...**Whoever believes**" shall be saved (John 3:16). Peter said, "Repent, **and each of you** be baptized..." (Acts 2:38). Paul said, "...**Work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

Household salvation is a very comforting system of belief. However, it has no support in the word of God. The only way for the unbelieving members of our households to be saved is by coming to faith on their own through the message of the Gospel (Rom. 10:17). To help them find their way, we can be good examples of a faithful Christian (1 Cor. 7:16; 1 Peter 3:1-2). We can pray for them (Rom. 10:1). We can encourage them to worship with us, or to read the Bible, so they can come to know Jesus (John 1:45-47).

Many an unbelieving spouse or child has found their way to Jesus as a result of the diligent faith of a spouse and/or parent. In some cases, it can happen quickly. On other occasions, it might take years or even a lifetime. As long as there is breath in their lungs, never, never, give up.