

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Are Children Saved by Their Believing Parents?

Question:

Do I **Corinthians 7:14** and **Job 1:5** teach that children of believing parents are saved by their parents?

Answer:

The short answer is, "no". If these passages teach such a doctrine, they would be the only passages that teach that anyone can be saved by the righteousness of another besides Christ Himself.

This would be contrary to one of the most basic truths of Scripture—that each of us is morally responsible for our own salvation.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;**" **Philippians 2:12 (NKJV)**

Salvation is by faith in Jesus; not faith in our parents, or even faith in our parents' faith.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." **Galatians 2:16 (NKJV)**

Indeed, it is a strange doctrine that teaches that we are saved by the faith of our parents rather than working out our own salvation.

If these passages were teaching such a doctrine, a number of problems arise.

First, we have a contradiction with what Ezekiel teaches in chapter 18. Here, Ezekiel plainly teaches that if a righteous man has a son who does wickedly, the son shall die for his sins. Further, if an unrighteous man has a son that does righteously, he will live. The conclusion he reaches from these facts is stated in verse 20; that righteousness or guilt is upon the one who is righteous or guilty and not their son.

"9 If he has walked in My statutes And kept My judgments faithfully-He is just; He shall surely live!" Says the Lord GOD. 10 "If he begets a son who is a robber Or a

shedder of blood, Who does any of these things 11 And does none of those duties, But has eaten on the mountains Or defiled his neighbor's wife; 12 If he has oppressed the poor and needy, Robbed by violence, Not restored the pledge, Lifted his eyes to the idols, Or committed abomination; 13 If he has exacted usury Or taken increase-Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, **He shall surely die; His blood shall be upon him.** 14 "If, however, he begets a son Who sees all the sins which his father has done, And considers but does not do likewise; 15 Who has not eaten on the mountains, Nor lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, Nor defiled his neighbor's wife; 16 Has not oppressed anyone, Nor withheld a pledge, Nor robbed by violence, But has given his bread to the hungry And covered the naked with clothing; 17 Who has withdrawn his hand from the poor And not received usury or increase, **But has executed My judgments And walked in My statutes-He shall not die for the iniquity of his father; He shall surely live!**" **Ezekiel 18:9-17 (NKJV)**

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father

bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." Ezekiel 18:20 (NKJV)

Ezekiel makes it even plainer in chapter 14. There, he says that even Noah, Daniel, and Job could save nobody but themselves, not even their own children.

"14 "Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord GOD...20 "even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live," says the Lord GOD, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness." Ezekiel 14:14, 20 (NKJV)

Second, some attempt to use this to argue that one must be an adult before being held responsible for their sins. Instead, they argue that the parents are the ones who are held accountable for the actions of their children. They attempt to say that this means you must be an adult (however that is defined) to be considered for baptism.

Even if that were true, what would it say about the children of unbelievers? They certainly are not saved by the righteousness of their parents since they have none. Are they then in need of baptism or not?

Further, if the righteousness of Christian parents brings about salvation for their children, why wouldn't we expect the wickedness of the parents who are not Christians to bring condemnation to their children?

Finally, what about children of parents who are nominal Christians at best or even hypocrites? How could we even know the spiritual state of the parents with any certainty? Do we baptize their children or not? Are their children saved or lost? How can we be certain?

But we need to look at the passages in question themselves.

"So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly." Job 1:5 (NKJV)

There are several reasons why this is not teaching that Job's children were saved by his righteousness.

First, the events of Job occurred during the Patriarchal Age when the father acted as priest for the entire family. That is what Job was doing in this passage. His children were not saved because of his righteousness any more than an Israelite was saved because of the sacrifices the priests made for them under the Law of Moses.

Second, at this time, Job's children were adults with their own houses. The context makes this clear. This passage has no bearing on the salvation of young children with a righteous father. If Job's children were saved by their father's righteousness, the same can be true of any adult today. What proves too much proves nothing.

"And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them." Job 1:4 (NKJV)

Third, Job offered sacrifices in case they had sinned. The very fact that sacrifice would be required for any sin they may have committed shows that they were capable of sinning and would be held accountable if they had.

Fourth, the picture here is of Job going above and beyond what would be required. He offered sacrifices for them simply because of the possibility one of them had sinned and cursed God in their hearts. In other words, these were not sacrifices for any specific known sin of theirs. They were sacrifices offered just in case they had sinned.

Finally, we have already quoted from **Ezekiel 14:14, 20** where he says that even Noah, Daniel, and Job could deliver only themselves by their righteousness, not even their own children. That ought to show us once and for all that Job's children could not be saved because of Job.

"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." I Corinthians 7:14 (NKJV) The question here is what is meant by "sanctified" and "holy" in this verse. Do these words mean "saved" in this context? The Greek words here are related. The word for "sanctified" means to make holy. Both "holy" and "sanctified" have the idea of

being set apart. It is certainly true that the saved are sanctified or holy. But does it automatically follow that what is sanctified or holy is saved? It is clear that the answer is no.

First, if these words are equivalent to being saved, then not just the children are saved by the believer, but the unbelieving spouse is also saved. However, this is not the case, **I Corinthians 7:16, I Peter 3:1**. Also, as stated above, this would contradict the Scriptures that teach that salvation is by a personal faith in Christ.

Second, sometimes these words are used in ways that simply cannot mean "saved".

One example ought to suffice.

In **I Timothy Chapter 4**, Paul is discussing the doctrine of demons, including the forbidding the eating of certain foods. He says that God created them to be received with thanksgiving. He goes on to say that every creature of God is good and is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. Clearly, these creatures that we are allowed to eat with thanksgiving are not saved. But they are made clean, as opposed to unclean, by prayer. That is, they can be eaten without making us unclean or sinful.

"4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." I Timothy 4:4-5 (NKJV)

With that in mind, notice the contrast in the **I Corinthians** passage between unclean and holy or sanctified. The idea is that

the believer is not defiled by their unbelieving spouse. In fact, the children of such a union are not defiled by the unbelieving parent either. It is not that they are saved, but that they are not defiled.

Third, the context of this passage in **I Corinthians** has nothing to do with the question of whether children should be baptized or need to do so. It has nothing to do with the salvation status of the children. It has to do with whether a Christian should remain married to a non-Christian. It has to do with whether their spouse and children should be considered unclean for them.

Remember that in the Old Testament, a Jew was not to marry someone outside of Israel. In the days of Ezra, they actually had to divorce their foreign wives.

"Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law." Ezra 10:3 (NKJV)

The question would naturally arise as to whether a Christian should remain married to a non-Christian and whether they needed to send both their spouse and children away. Paul is saying that they ought to remain married. He says the spouse is "sanctified" or set apart by the believer and their children are "holy" or not illegitimate because of this. Virtually all commentators are agreed on this very point.

Consider the following quotes:

Of the spouse being sanctified Clarke says,

"Or rather, is to be reputed as sanctified...so as to render their connection not unlawful".

Of the children, he says the following:

"The Jews considered a child as born out of holiness whose parents were not proselytes at the time of the birth, though afterwards they became proselytes. On the other hand, they considered the children of heathens born in holiness, provided the parents became proselytes before the birth. All the children of the heathens were reputed unclean by the Jews; and all their own children holy. -See Dr. Lightfoot. This shows clearly what the apostle's meaning is."

Barnes has the following to say on this issue:

"But the expression cannot mean here, that the unbelieving husband would become holy, or be a Christian, by the mere fact of a connection with a Christian, for this would be to do violence to the words, and would be contrary to facts everywhere."

He goes on to say the following:

"There is not one word about baptism here; not one allusion to it; nor does the argument in the remotest degree bear upon it. The question was not whether children should be baptized, but it was whether there should be a separation between man and wife, where the one was a Christian and the other not. Paul states, that if such a separation should take place, it would imply that the marriage was improper; and of course the children must be regarded as unclean."

Poole comments:

"I rather think it signifies, brought into such a state, that the believer, without offence to the law of God, may continue in a married estate with such a yoke-fellow; and the state of marriage is a holy state, notwithstanding the disparity with reference to religion...these are those that are called holy; not as inwardly renewed and sanctified, but relatively, in the same sense that all the Jewish nation are called a holy people: and possibly this may give us a further light to understand the term sanctified, in the former part of the verse."

Robertson agrees:

*"Paul does not, of course, mean that the unbelieving husband is saved by the faith of the believing wife, though Hodge actually so interprets him. Clearly he only means that the marriage relation is sanctified so that there is no need of a divorce...This is so simple that one wonders at the ability of men to get confused over Paul's language... if it is otherwise, your children are illegitimate (**akatharta**)." If the relations of the parents be holy, the child's birth must be holy also (not illegitimate)."*

Johnson says the children of a Christian and a non-Christian are,

"Brought into such a sacred relation that the unbelieving partners are under the power of sacred influences, and not to be counted as sources of defilement."

It is rare to find so many commentators agreed on any issue. However, to embrace such a strange idea as the children being saved by the believing parent does great damage to this

passage as well as many other passages of Scripture.

While these commentators hold various views on many other subjects, they all agree that the Scripture is not teaching such a concept.

Below, George L. Faull adds some important and interesting points to my own thoughts above.

George L. Faull says...

Those who argue that the parent's faith or righteousness as a Christian grants salvation to their un-baptized children, assume too much. If a parent's faith in Christ saves their children in that it says they are sanctified, then it follows that the faith or righteousness of the Christian's mate sanctifies and secures the soul of the unsaved mate. If not, why not?

Paul's argument for staying with the unbelieving spouse is that they may save them. This proves "sanctify them" does not equal salvation of their souls.

One must also ask, "At what age do the children lose the merit of their parent's faith"? Perhaps we should let God answer this!

Ezekiel 14:14, 16, 20, "14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver *but* their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. 16 *Though* these three men *were* in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only shall be delivered, but the land shall be desolate. 20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, *were* in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall *but* deliver

their own souls by their righteousness."

These state the inability to save our children by our righteousness.

A father could overrule his wife and unmarried daughters' vow but speaks not of a mother being able to do so.

This argument also is a vain attempt for man to argue that a man can cover the sins of his wife or child.

Numbers 30:3-8, "3 If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, *being* in her father's house in her youth; 4 And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. 5 But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her. 6 And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; 7 And her husband heard *it*, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard *it*: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. 8 But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard *it*; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her."

The passage in question in **1 Corinthians 7:14** speaks of a Christian couple's children as

clean, holy, and sanctified. One must be Biblically uninformed to think this speaks of salvation of the soul. No such doctrine exists except the imputed righteousness of Christ through our personal faith in what Christ did for us on the cross.

The text needs to be understood in terms of what Paul's audience would have understood from the terms that he used. Jews considered a child born of a mixed couple (Jew and Gentile) as unclean or unholy unless they were both proselytes.

Likewise, society considered children born of a Christian parent as holy and legitimate. If divorce were to occur, they were no longer a couple, so men would consider the children unclean or unholy. This is not of course God's view, but the child would lose both privilege and standing in society's eyes. Paul's argument would no doubt have prevented many divorces because parents would not wish to bastardize their children in society.

See **1 Corinthians 7:14** in John Lightfoot's "Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebrica. Page 211. Published in 1859.

To hold that the faith or righteousness of the parent saves the children because the parents were Christians, is Mormon Doctrine. The Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. said:

"The Elder Orson F. Whitney quotes his prophet: The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine — *that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only*

themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father's heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God." Conference Report quote Apr. 1929 (110)

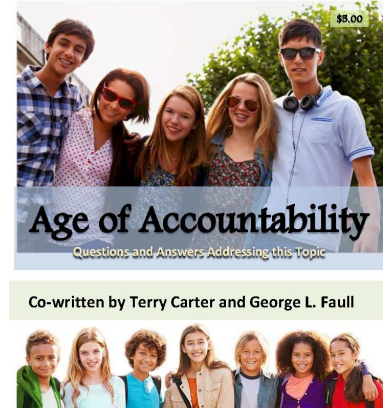
Likewise, the Mormon prophet said in the **Doctrine and Covenants 68:25**, "and again in as much as parents have children in Zion or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the Parents."

Leave it to the Mormon prophet to state the age of accountability and speak where God has not spoken.

As Christians, and not Mormons, we believe God rather than the false prophet. We believe the truth of **Ezekiel 14:14, 16, 20** and **Ezekiel 18: 9-17**. The soul that sinneth shall die, and parents cannot save them.

Let the reader read these texts again and know they have

misunderstood **1 Corinthians 7:14** if they think either proxy faith, repentance, or baptism can be valid for others.



Note: The previous article is an excerpt from *Age of Accountability* by George Faull and Terry Carter and is available for purchase on Summit's webstore.

Therefore, it is clear that Hobab is the brother-in-law of Moses and **Judges 4:11** should be translated that way.

Note: The previous article is an excerpt from *Failure of a Generation: Numbers Chapters 1-14* by Terry Carter.