



The Believing Spouse Sanctifies the Unbelieving Spouse?

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*For the unbelieving husband is **sanctified** by the wife,
and the unbelieving wife is **sanctified** by the husband:
else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

1 Corinthians 7:14

This verse has powerful implications but I see that it has been misunderstood and perhaps just plain mistaught. To me it is apparent that there is perhaps even spiritual abuse as it has been interpreted.

It seems that there are people who believe that if they are married to an unbeliever, that they could never in good conscience divorce that person, no matter what the situation, because to do so would mean that the spouse would lose their entrance to heaven. They understand that if the unbeliever chooses to leave them, there is no Scriptural need to try to persuade them otherwise, but do not believe that they are free to make the choice lest the person's eternal life be on their conscience.

*But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.
A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases:
but God hath called us to peace.*

*For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt **save** thy husband?
or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt **save** thy wife?*

1 Corinthians 7:15-16 KJV

I am most certainly NOT a proponent of divorce, and historically, in my counseling work have tried to turn over every stone to promote restoration in marriage. Yet, there are times when it has been the only reasonable or safe option. May our Elohim have mercy on us who are only dust and sometimes must deal with hard heartedness and evil.

But I had not realized that people have understood this verse as I wrote above. It seems they have confused the topics of sanctification with salvation.

The believing spouse sanctifies the unbelieving spouse in that their lifestyle is more set apart, and seeking a God honoring lifestyle than an unbeliever would normally seek. This type of sanctification is the ongoing purification of our walk, our *halachah*, that is our part as we work out our own salvation. An

unbelieving spouse who sees the walk of the believer may be more sheltered from the wickedness of the world, and may be more inclined at some point to come to their own declaration of faith than if they were with another unbeliever.

To “save” in these verses is the Greek word, *sozo*:

Lexicon :: Strong's G4982 – *sōzō* σωζω

The Outline of Biblical Usage defines it as follows:

1. to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction
 1. one (from injury or peril)
 1. to save a suffering one (from perishing), i.e. one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health
 2. to preserve one who is in danger of destruction, to save or rescue
 2. to save in the technical biblical sense
 1. negatively
 1. to deliver from the penalties of the Messianic judgment
 2. to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance ¹

Vine’s Expository Dictionary further confirms that this word, *sozo*, “to save,” is most often used with reference to “healing” or “making whole” as in the sense of protecting from disease. Thayer’s Greek lexicon confirms all of the above and in the midst of a very extensive listing, also notes that:

To save in the technical Biblical sense; --negatively, to deliver from the penalties of the Messianic Judgment, Joel ii.32 (iii. 5); to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance. ²

This phrasing from Vine’s, the Outline of Biblical usage and Thayer-- *to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the Messianic deliverance*-- seems the best understanding of what we in our human limitation can actually do. If we thought that our actions can really bring salvation to another person, would we not be claiming to BE Messiah?

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

John 17:17

It is this kind of sanctification that only Messiah accomplished and finished on our behalf in His death and resurrection. There is an ongoing sense of the sanctification that is already ours as we walk after Him and a final sense of the complete sanctification that will be ours on His return.

¹ The Blue Letter Bible Search: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4982&t=KJV>

² The Blue Letter Bible: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4982&t=KJV> ,
Thayer’s Lexicon entry

*For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one,
for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,
Hebrews 2:11 NKJV*

*For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean,
sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God,
cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
Hebrews 9:13-14 NKJV*

In either case, each individual must still come to a personal declaration of faith and cannot expect to get a “free ticket to heaven” because their spouse is a believer. This interpretation would fly in the face of the many verses that indicate the personal nature of the saving relationship with Messiah.

What must we do to be saved?

*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,
and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;
and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

Romans 10:9-10 KJV

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness,
but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish,
but that all should reach repentance.
2 Peter 3:9 KJV*

But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

Luke 11:28 NASB

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