1 Timothy 2:15 - Salvation through childbearing?

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The traditional literal translation of this verse as found in the KJV is as follows:
She shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

NIV clarifies that it is not a particular woman, but Christian women in general:
Women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.
Both of these translations sound very strange. So, what does this verse really mean?

Many people have grappled with the verses in 1 Tim 2:15. Three basic views have been suggested, and they are closely related to how people interpret the word **teknogonia**.

1. Some take **teknogonia** to refer to having children in the literal sense.
2. Some take **teknogonia** to be used in a metaphorical sense to the virtues mentioned.
3. Some take **teknogonia** to refer to the extended sense of parenting children.

Those who take **option 1**, have made several attempts at explanation:
A. Some suggest that women are only saved if they have children. That is obviously not true according to Scripture.
B. Others suggest that despite the "curse" in Gen 3, Christian women will be kept safe when bearing children. But in Gen 3, neither man nor woman are cursed, only the snake and the ground. The woman is punished by pain of childbirth, but it is not true that Christian women are exempt from the pain of childbirth nor from potential death in childbirth. Paul would never had suggested that.
C. Others suggest that this refers to the birth of the Child - Jesus, but this does not fit with the use of the future sense "will be saved", nor does it refer only to women. It is obvious that without the birth of Jesus, there would be salvation for no one. The birth of Jesus is a necessary but not sufficient grounds for salvation. One needs to have faith in Jesus for salvation.
Many of the Church fathers seem to take option 1, but it is not clear if they understood that the word is not only having children, but also raising them.[1]

Option 2 has been suggested by Kenneth L- Waters Sr.[2] He argues that the word "child" can be used metaphorically in Greek philosophical writings, so he suggests the following translation "*All women and men must give birth to and continue in faith, love, holiness, and temperance in order to be saved.*" However, the text does not talk about women and men. It is true that Paul expects Christian women and men to show these and other Christian virtues, but the suggestion does not fit the context here. This suggestion is based on the rejection of option 1 without looking into option 3.

Option 3 is the better option, and I shall discuss this option more below.

Andreas Köstenberger has the following to say about the meaning:
The most common interpretation among conservative evangelical interpreters today is that women will eventually be spiritually saved by adhering to their God-ordained role centering around the home. This view seeks to alleviate the difficulty of the phrase "saved through childbearing" by

[1] See *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (ed. Peter Gorday; ACCS 9; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), p. 167

[2] Kenneth L. Waters Sr. (2004): *Saved through Childbearing: Virtues as Children in 1 Timothy 2:11-15*. In Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 123, No. 4, pp. 703-735.

interpreting the term "saved" as referring to a woman's consummated salvation on the last day rather than the salvation she already has received at the time of her conversion. And "childbearing" is understood as referring not merely to the birthing process but, by extension, also to the raising of children and the managing of the home.[3]

Köstenberger is not completely satisfied with this and he gives the following suggestion for translation:

> *We may therefore conclude that 1 Tim 2:15 may best be rendered in the following way: "She (i.e., the woman) escapes (or is preserved; gnomic future) [from Satan] by way of procreation (i.e., having a family)."*
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> *Moreover, in line with 1 Tim 5:14, one should view procreation as merely the core of the woman's responsibility that also entails, not merely the bearing, but also the raising of children, as well as managing the home (synecdoche; cf. also Titus 2:4-5). The sense of the injunction in the present passage is thus that women can expect to escape Satan under the condition of adhering to their God-ordained role centering around the natural household.*[4]

Köstenberger prefers to focus on being preserved from attacks of Satan which might cause one to lose salvation, but I do not see much difference between these two views. Both seem valid and complement one another, although Köstenberger's suggestion is moving rather far away from the actual text. The women are advised to live *in faith, love and holiness with prudence*. This kind of life will both *keep them safe* in their salvation and will *eventually bring them into full redemption* and entrance into the heavenly kingdom. It seems better in my view to take "salvation" here in the normal future tense rather than just being preserved or escaping.

There are both linguistic, cultural and contextual considerations to take into account.

The cultural and situational **context** is that Paul is writing to Timothy about the situation in the church in Ephesus, and he is addressing certain issues where he feels the church is not doing things in the right way. He is particularly concerned about false teachers in the church. Some of these seem to have been women. He gives the following advice in 2:11-12: *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*(NIV)

From this we understand that certain women, probably Greek women, had taken upon themselves the role of authoritative teaching in the church. It is not so much a matter of giving instruction as it is a matter of deciding between false and true teaching. This was a role that at least at that time was limited to men who were well trained in the Scriptures. Women normally had not had the same opportunity for training in the Scriptures, but there were exceptions, like the famous Priscilla (Acts 18:26) and Junia (Rom 16:7). We can guess from Paul's letter here that some women had become too vocal and dominating taking on the role of teaching in the church about matters that they were not qualified to teach about. So, Paul says that they ought to instead concentrate on taking care of their children at home. They are allowed to participate in the church activities, but do it in submission to their husbands and the church leadership. In 1 Tim 2:9-10 he advises the women in that church not to show off in terms of dress and jewelry, but instead live quiet lives doing good deeds. If these women are disobedient and go beyond the limits set for them, they may end up like Eve who was deceived by Satan (2:13-14).

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[3] Andreas J. Köstenberger: *Saved Through Childbearing? A Fresh Look at 1 Timothy 2:15 Points to Protection from Satan's Deception.*

[4] Andreas J. Köstenberger (1997, p 142) *Ascertaining Women's God-Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15*. Bulletin for Biblical Research 7 (1997) 107-144.

Now let us look more at the **linguistic** issues in 2:15:

There are three key words that are a challenge. The first is the word for *save*. It is here used in the future: (Women/she) *will be saved*. The word can refer to physical rescue, but here it must refer to spiritual salvation as it always does in Paul's letters. The word can be used in past, present and future tense.

1. In the past tense it refers - in the case of believers - to when the person was first saved by faith and became a believer or follower of Christ. Examples: Rom 8:24: "For in this hope we were saved;" Eph 2:5: "it is by grace you have been saved;" Eph 2:8: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith;" Tit 3:5: "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

2. In the present tense it refers to an ongoing process that has started and not yet ended, but the eyes are set towards the final salvation. Examples: 1 Cor 1:18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God;" 1 Cor 15:2: "By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain." See also 1 Pet 2:2: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation;" Php 2:12: "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

3. In the future it can refer to the consequence of a fulfilled condition as in Mark 16:16: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved;" John 10:9 "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved;" Acts 2:21, Rom 10:13: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

In Matt 10:22 and other places it refers to the final redemption where the believer enters into eternal life with God and Jesus forever after death and resurrection. In Paul's letters this is almost always the intended meaning. It is found among other places in 2 Tim 4:18: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.*

It is important to compare with the related passage in 1 Tim 5:13-15 about advice to young women:

They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.(NIV)

Those who turned away to follow Satan have lost their salvation and will not get the final redemption unless they repent and come back.

The second challenging word is the Greek word **teknogonia**. It is often translated as *childbearing*, but if the focus had been on childbearing, it is likely that a different Greek word **teknopoiia** (making of children) would have been used. When we remember that the Greek word for parents is **goneis** and **teknon** means child, a better translation would be *child-parenting* or as many commentators have put it: *childrearing*. It includes the birth of children, but the focus is on taking care of children after birth.

Some have argued that if the corresponding verb **teknogonein** in 1 Tim 5:14 supports the meaning "bearing children", why would the noun in 1 Tim 2:15 not have the same meaning? Or since Paul uses **teknotropein** for "bringing up children" in 5:10, why not use the same term in 2:15? My response is that both the noun and the verb are not restricted to bearing children, but includes both having children and caring for them with the focus on bringing them up. It may be easiest to see the difference when we list 3 related words together:

1. **teknopoiia** - the making of children
2. **teknotrofia** - the nurturing of children (mainly giving food)
3. **teknogonia** - the parenting of children

We become parents when we get children, but parenting is so much more than just getting a child and feeding them.

The third challenging word is the Greek preposition **dia.** It can have different meanings in different contexts. It may refer to **means**, but here it must refer to what is called **attendant circumstance**. One of many examples of this sense is found in 1 Pet 3:20: *the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, **were brought safely through water**. Baptism, which corresponds to this [event], now saves you* (ESV). The Greek text has the same word for save, but with the **dia** prefix - ***were saved through***. The water was not the means of salvation, since it was their faith and the ark that saved them, but it was an attendant circumstance. They went through the water while being saved by the ark. (Similarly, believers go through the water of baptism while being saved by faith).

So, in conclusion, the text of 1 Tim 2:15 seems to advise certain (Greek?) women in Ephesus to concentrate on their God-given calling of motherhood which they need to focus on as they ***continue in faith, love and holiness with prudence***. They should refrain from usurping the role of authoritative teachers in the church, because they may easily end up as false teachers. As long as they concentrate on motherhood, they will be kept safe in their already obtained salvation and will eventually reach final redemption. This advice is similar to what Paul says in 1 Tim 5:14: *So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.* (NIV). Instead of *to have children* I would translate *to be good parents for their children,* because once they are married, it is not necessary to talk about having children, but about taking good care of the children as well as the home.