

Michael Wilson

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31). This is the hope of all Japanese people who come to Christ for salvation. They long to see their loved ones—their household—believe in Christ, too. However, all too often, they are counseled to forsake their families who remain enmeshed in religious rituals to demons.

While this last point is no doubt true, since when does God require non-Christians to follow His laws without knowing Him first? In addition, it is this author’s opinion that the testimony of Scripture is that believers in Jesus Christ have shared in the triumph of their Lord over the demonic principalities when He humiliated them at the Cross (Col. 2:8–16). In verse 16, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, specifically writes, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.” So could it be that God would have new Christians who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them not remove themselves from family gatherings, thus removing themselves from their natural influence within their families?

Nevertheless, there are three important considerations for those who would

stay in intimate contact with unsaved family members in order to lead them to Christ. First, demons are real and by attending family gatherings centered around the activities of demon worship, there is danger that is real and deadly. Demons, though defeated and humiliated, still possess spiritual power beyond that of humans who are not indwelt by the Spirit of God. A Christian that is not clear on his or her authority in Christ can be destroyed by the deceiver of our souls. However, the Enemy is no match for Christians who know the love and powerful working of God's grace in their lives, as stated in the following Scripture:

“This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere (Eph. 1:19–23, Today's English Version).

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So Christians must be strongly grounded in the Word of God, able to appropriate *the full armor of God* (Eph. 6:10–18). They must be skilled in the use of the sharpened sword of the Spirit from common practice. Such a believer will surely be certain that no one except the one and only Almighty God must be worshipped. Though they participate in family gatherings, meals, and some rituals, they must never trust in or expect blessing from anyone other than Jesus. The Ten Commandments are particularly important in this regard. We are required by God to *honor* our father and mother (the fifth commandment). At the same time we are *commanded to worship no other than the Creator of all* (Gen. 1:1; John 1:3; first and second commandments).

Okinawa, Japan, is an oral culture, and as such a pictorial approach to teaching the Ten Commandments has been most effective—though in any culture “one picture can be worth a thousand words.” With knowledge of God's commandments in hand, seekers and believers who have developed a trust relationship can honestly discuss the specific boundary lines between honoring loved ones and worshipping only God. Mnemonic charts have been used to help people memorize the Decalogue in ten minutes or less.

A final consideration regarding evangelism at the family altar is that to participate in family gatherings that are at least partly religious and not to make a clear declaration of loyalty to Christ is to lose one's saltiness (Matt. 5:13–16). In reading the Old Testament, one cannot escape the fact that a key component of God's plan for the people of the world is that every one of them has a chance to

know that there is only one God over all—and it is He! (Deut. 4:35; 32:39; Isa. 45:6; Dan. 3:29). The content of the declaration should include the distinction between the obligation to “honor” one’s parents while being commanded to only worship the one true God in the Ten Commandments. For example, “I love and honor you (my loved ones) and our father and mother. My God commands me to honor you, and I want to do it because I love you all and want to be with you. But I can worship only one God. He is the maker of heaven and earth, and he has provided a way for me to have everlasting life in fellowship with Him. I would like to meet with you when you honor our relatives but worship Jesus alone.”

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If accepted by the family members, such a testimony can open the way to share a “lifestyle testimony” at family gatherings. By being filled with the Spirit and putting on the armor of God, a Christian thus engaged can demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit and distinguish where to participate and where not to participate in family activities. Clearly religious activities like lighting incense might best be eschewed while other activities that have an “honoring” focus rather than a “religious” focus might be participated in. Cultural insiders living in dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit are the best ones to delineate exactly where participation would maintain a clear, Christian lifestyle testimony and where participation would just “muddy the waters” in terms of knowing the one and only God.

As family members experience the love of Christ through the participating Christian, some will slowly or, in some cases, suddenly display an openness to knowing more about this transformational God who has so changed (for the better) their gentle and respectful (1 Pet. 3:15–16) loved one. That’s when evangelism of the lips (*Enjoyable Personal Evangelism* by M. Toyotome) can happen with the Christian sharing his or her salvation testimony and whatever else the Spirit may want to use to draw his or her loved ones.

Let’s remove human barriers to the harvest God wants to give Japan. Let’s trust the Holy Spirit in new believers and support them with prayer and encouragement, believing their families **can be reached with the Good News of Jesus Christ**. The sword Jesus said would come to families will undoubtedly come sometimes. But by a gentle and respectful approach much wrath can be turned aside, and whole households can be won to Christ.

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