

## FAITHFUL CHILDREN OF ELDERS

There is a growing need for good, qualified men to serve as elders in local congregations of the Lord's body. Though there are many qualifications of elders, **one** of the first notable qualifications that brethren think of is the “faithfulness” of the children of men under consideration for the eldership. This article is not intended to consider the number of children that a potential elder must have, but the “faithfulness” of any children elders may have. We remember years ago some argued that the children who “believe” might **well** believe in the existence of God, even at the age of 3, and thus the father of that 3 year old would meet this qualification. Others have suggested that the faithfulness of the children might be suggestive of a 3 year old being “faithful” to his father, rather than his being a “believer” in the Lord.

Some, making the latter argument, prefer to stay with the word “faithful” of the KJV, rather than the word “believe,” as used in the ASV. Surely this is because the word “faithful” **could** allow for his being faithful to his father, rather than being a believer of the word as a faithful Christian. Such interpretations might well put a 22 year old man into the eldership if he is “generally” qualified otherwise, but the use of the word “elder” (older) **does** suggest a certain amount of time and age that go with the development of character and leadership experience that truly qualifies one to lead and rule the people of God as He wills. Such a 22 year old man would not have had the experience to rule the church of the Lord, but having reared children who become true obedient believers **does** allow sufficient time for him to develop experience in serving as an elder. We believe efforts to stretch both words to include 3 year old “believers” is a stretch, as we shall show.

First, let's look at the word “faithful” from Tit. 1:6. Such is translated “believe” in the ASV and NASB. The basic Greek word for the study of “believe” and “faithful” is *pistis* (noun), which is used in the spiritual sense, of one connected by the Christian faith. It “is used in the NT always of 'faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual’ (VINE, p. 222). A form of this word is *pistos*, which is a verbal adjective of *pistis*, which VINE says **always** refers to “things spiritual.” The opposite of being “faithful” (or a “believer”) would be “unfaithful” (faithless), or “unbeliever,” which is *apistos*. It is used three times in parallel accounts of the healing of a boy, and once in Acts for “incredible.” **One** of the references in the “gospels” is Luke 9:41, which is translated “faithless,” and its **opposite** in the same book is translated “faithful” (Luke 12:42). The **other** times *apistos* is used is in John 20:27 where Jesus said to Thomas, “be not faithless, but believing.” Here, both *apistos* and *pistos* are used as opposites. So, the word is properly rendered “believing.” In the NKJV, the term is rendered, “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Interestingly, the word “believers” is used only twice in the NT (Acts 5:14 and 1 Tim.4:12). In Acts 5, it is stated that the “believers were the more added to the Lord”--could they have been 3 year olds? Then, in 1 Tim. 4, Paul admonished Timothy to be “an example of the believers”--was Paul telling him to be an example of 3 year olds in his ministry? So, children who “believe” (ASV) are the same as “faithful” children. Those who want the word to describe 3 year olds prefer to use the word “faithful” instead of “believing”, for they want the child to be “obedient” to his father rather than to have an obedient faith in God. Unwarranted and dangerous “reasoning.”

Second, let's look at the words “riot” and “unruly” in the same text of Tit. 1:6. These two words are words that can **only** describe those sufficiently mature so as to **avoid** being riotous and unruly. “Riot” is from *asocia* (noun). It is used once more in the NT, 1 Pet. 4:4, which describes some who run in excess of riot, and speak evil of those who will not participate with them. Then, as form of the word is used in Luke 15:13 to describe the “riotous” living of the young man who left home for the world. Clearly, it is conduct of a more responsible nature (though acting irresponsibly) than 3 year olds. Then the word “unruly” (Gr. *anupotaktos*) is used again in the **same** chapter to describe “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers....whose mouths must be stopped” through the use of the word of God. Does this sound like 3 year olds? Can one quote the scripture to a 3 year old

and expect him to change his conduct? Hardly! **Both** of these words **can** describe the children of those who serve in the eldership, but do **not** describe 3 year old children.

We have been told that Tit. 1:6 should be interpreted by 1 Tim. 3:4—meaning when one wants to know what Tit. 1:6 (faithful children) actually **means**, we should just turn to 1 Tim. 3:4 (having his children in subjection), and conclude that a 3 year old is to faithful to his father by being in subjection to him. Why not reverse these scriptures, and conclude that we look at 1 Tim.3:4, and interpret **it** through Tit. 1:6---meaning that being “in subjection” to one's father suggests that he is faithful? Truth is, these are 2 separate qualifications, and neither is to be interpreted by the other. Critics seem to overlook the use of the word “gravity” in 1 Tim. 3:4, describing one's subjection. Gravity is from the word *semnotes*, which is a “necessary characteristic of the life and conduct of Christians, 1 Tim.2:2” (VINE, p. 279). So, we are speaking of the subjection of one who is mature enough to live the Christian life as a matter of seriousness, which a 3 year old would not be doing. We once heard a preacher advocating the above “reasoning” to try to get preachers to convince their congregations to install men as elders, even **if** their children are only 3 years old.

One more point: The **reason** for the described conduct of elders' children is that they might take care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5). **How** in the world would being the father of a 3 year old give a man sufficient experience to take care of the house of God? What is going to happen when that 3 year old never obeys the gospel at all, or goes astray at the age of 17, and truly brings reproach on the elder's family and the church? The elders' children **must** be old enough to have responded sufficiently to their fathers' spiritual guidance and leadership, and give experience to elders to lead the church properly.

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