

Titus 1:6 Study

“Believing Children” vs. “Faithful Children”

Considering the Question:

Does Titus 1:6 require an Elder’s children to be Christians?

Compiled & Edited by
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March 2004

TITUS 1:6 STUDY:
“BELIEVING CHILDREN” VS. “FAITHFUL CHILDREN”

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***SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM TITUS 1:6 STUDY:
“BELIEVING CHILDREN” VS. “FAITHFUL CHILDREN”***

Dennis McBride – March 2004

Summary Comments:

There is much information on this topic in publications and on the Internet. Some of that information reflects mere opinion rather than careful study, and consequently was not helpful in this study. However, much is thoughtful and studied and was extremely helpful. I am indebted to those sources and have listed them in the bibliography and referenced them throughout the study.

I began this study as an advocate of the “Believing Children” (BC) view (i.e., “*pistos*” in Titus 1:6 should be translated “believing”, and refers to children who are Christians. Therefore, if an elder has children, they must be Christians). In addition to any exegetical support this view may have, it seemed reasonable and consistent to me that children of elders should be believers. Over the course of this study, I found that the majority of published sources I read (i.e., lexicons and commentators) held the BC view as well (even though I expected more diversity of opinion from them).

I have the greatest respect for those sources, but I know that accurate interpretation is not determined by majority rule, or by merely citing one source against another. It is determined by the strength or weakness of the interpretive data for or against a particular view. So with that in mind, I purposed to research the major tenants of the BC view, and then to match them point by point with counter arguments from the “Faithful Children” (FC) view (which teaches that “*pistos*” in Titus 1:6 should be translated “faithful”, and refers to children who are obedient and respectful toward their earthly fathers while under his authority in the home).

The results surprised me because, despite the popularity of the BC view, and my own initial bias toward it, I found that it does not seem to carry the most exegetical weight, and leaves a number of key questions unanswered (or inadequately answered). On the other hand, I found much to commend the FC view.

For example, below I summarize what I believe to be the most compelling arguments for each view. But I was hard pressed to list compelling arguments for the BC view based on exegetical considerations because the interpretive data seemed weak or was absent on some critical points. Therefore, the four “compelling” arguments I list have more to do with the number of sources affirming the view than with the exegesis or rationale behind the view itself (which the reader may find less than compelling). By way of contrast, the most compelling arguments for the FC view have to do with lexical and exegetical considerations.

Additionally, some of the major assumptions and implications of the BC view seem difficult to harmonize with the totality of Scripture, or are unwarranted by the text itself. For example:

1. That Titus 1:6 addresses older children, whereas 1 Tim. 3:4-5 addresses younger children (cf. point #13 of study).
2. That parents are uniquely responsible for the salvation of their children (cf. points #8 & #9 of study).
3. That a father is virtually, if not actually, culpable for the sins of his children (with respect to spiritual leadership qualifications - cf. points #8 & #9 of study).

4. That an unbelieving child demonstrates a father's inability to exercise spiritual leadership in the home (cf. point #7 of study)
5. That an otherwise qualified father of multiple children is disqualified if even one of his children is unsaved (cf. point #7 of study).
6. That young children are excluded from the believing children requirement (cf. point #13, counterpoint #7 of study).
7. That we can know when a child is truly born again (cf. point #8, counterpoint #7 of study).

Points of Commonality Between Both Views:

1. Both views desire to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15) on this issue.
2. Both views uphold a high view of elder leadership in the church.
3. Both views want to guard against unqualified leadership in the church.
4. Both views enjoy support from various Bible translations (cf. point #1 of study).
5. Both views enjoy support from various Bible commentators (cf. point #3 of study).
6. Both views acknowledge divine sovereignty in salvation (although some proponents of the BC view place greater emphasis on the parent's role in bringing a child to Christ – cf. point #8 of study).
7. Both views agree that from a purely lexical standpoint *pistos* (lit. *pista*) in Titus 1:6 could be translated “believe” or “faithful”, and that the immediate context and general usage of *pistos* throughout the NT must be considered in determining which translation is appropriate.
8. Both views see a direct link between Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5 (although the specific nature of that link is a primary point of disagreement – cf. section of study titled “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5”).
9. Both views agree that any man whose children are “accused of dissipation or rebellion” (NASB) is not qualified to be an elder (whether or not the children are Christians - cf. point #12, page 15 of study).

Most Compelling Arguments for the BC View:

1. Most modern translations favor this view (cf. point #1 of study).
2. The preponderance of published NT lexical opinion favors “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6 (cf. point #2 of study).
3. The preponderance of contemporary NT commentators favor “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6 (cf. point #3 of study).
4. Believing children affirm the spiritual leadership of their father, thereby lending credibility to his ministry (cf. points #7 & #11 of study).

Most Compelling Arguments for the FC View:

1. “Trustworthy” or its equivalent is by far the predominate translation of *pistos* in the NT, including the nearest contexts to Titus 1:6 (i.e., Titus 1:9, 3:8 - cf. counterpoints to point #2 of study).

2. Translating “pistos” as “faithful” or “trustworthy” harmonizes Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5 very nicely (whereas translating “pistos” as “believing” (i.e., salvation) leaves several key issues unresolved (cf. “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5” section of study).
3. This view best harmonizes *pistos* with “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (NASB) in Titus 1:6 (i.e., “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” defines what Paul means by “faithful” children - cf. counterpoints to point #12 of study).
4. This view places the emphasis on the father’s ability to “keep his children under control with all dignity” (1 Tim. 3:4), which is a watershed issue for elder church leadership (1 Tim. 3:5 – cf. “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5” section of study, point #1, counterpoint #4).

Summary Conclusion:

Paul, Timothy and Titus had to choose from relatively recent converts whose children didn’t have the benefit of a lifetime of Christian education and discipleship. That is not the case today. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that today’s standards and expectations for elder leadership would be very high and would, ideally, include believing children. And there is no question about the desirability and benefits of believing children. However, the primary consideration in this study is whether or not Scripture *requires* that an elder’s children be believers. This study concludes that Scripture *does not* make that requirement.

What does Scripture require with respect to this qualification? If a man would be an elder, he must first demonstrate his ability to manage his own household well and to keep his children under control with dignity and loving authority. His life and convictions must earn the respect of his family, and his children must be obedient to his authority and leadership in the home. In short, he must exemplify Christian character and exercise spiritual authority and leadership in the home, just as he would in the church.

Note: Having decided in favor of the FC view does not mean that this study affirms all the opinions or conclusions set forth in the “FC Counterpoints” sections of the study.

**SYNOPSIS OF TITUS 1:6 STUDY:
“BELIEVING CHILDREN” VS. “FAITHFUL CHILDREN”**

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Introduction

Purpose

Does Titus 1:6 teach that an elder’s children must be Christians? More specifically, what is the correct translation and application of the phrase “*tekna echon pista*” in Titus 1:6? This study seeks to answer those and other related questions.

Related Questions

1. Does the Greek word *pista* in Titus 1:6 speak of a child’s relationship with his or her Heavenly Father, or earthly father?
 2. Does Titus 1:6 require saved children, or merely faithful, trustworthy and/or obedient children in a general sense?
 3. Does the Greek word “*tecna*” (children) in Titus 1:6 refer to small children, children of any age, children who are still in the home, or all children in or out of the home?
 4. How can we harmonize Titus 1:6 with 1 Timothy 3:4-5?
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Lexical Overview

Titus 1:6 Greek Text

ει τις εστιν ανεγκλητος μιας γυναικος ανηρ **τεκνα εχων πιστα** μη εν κατηγορια ασωτιασ η αν υποτακτα

EI TIS ESTIN ANEGLHTOS MIAS GUNAIKOS ANHR **TEKNA EXWN PISTA** MH EN KATHGORIA ASWTIAS H ANUPOTAKTA

“Pistos” Defined

Pistos is a verbal adjective that passively means “trustworthy”, or “faithful” (as KJV), and actively means, “to believe.” *Pistos* is used in the Pastoral Epistles in both active and passive senses:

“Faithful” or its equivalent (KJV):

1 Tim 1:12 – counted me faithful
1 Tim 1:15 – This is a faithful saying
1 Tim 3:1 – This is a true saying
1 Tim 3:11 – faithful in all things
1 Tim 4:9 – This is a faithful saying
1 Tim 6:2 – they are faithful and

2 Tim 2:2 – commit thou to faithful men
2 Tim 2:11 – It is a faithful saying
2 Tim 2:13 – abideth faithful: he
Titus 1:9 – Holding fast the faithful word
Titus 3:8 – This is a faithful saying

“Believe” or its equivalent (KJV):

1Tim 4:3 – which believe and know the truth

1Tim 4:10 – specially those that believe

1Tim 4:12 – example of the believers

1Tim 5:16 – believeth have widows

1Tim 6:2 – believing masters, let

Grammatically, either “believing children” or “faithful children” are possible translations of *pistos* in Titus 1:6.

Translations of “Pistos” (or “Pista”) in the New Testament

Pistos (or *pista*) is used 67 times in the New Testament:

1. 57 times *pistos* is translated by the word “trustworthy” or its equivalent (KJV).
2. 10 times *pistos* is translated as “believing”, “believe “ or “believer.”
3. In 1 and 2 Timothy *pistos* occurs 14 times.
 - a. Eight times it is translated “faithful,” “reliable” or “dutiful” (1 Timothy 1:12, 1:15, 3:1, 3:11, 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:2, 2:11, 2:13).
 - b. Six times it is used in the sense of “believing”, “believer”, etc. (1 Timothy 4:3, 4:10, 4:12, 5:16, 6:2).
 - c. In Titus, *pistos* is used three times, two of which are in the sense of “trustworthy” or “reliable” (Titus 1:9, 3:8). The third is the passage in question (Titus 1:6).

Translations of “Tekna Echon Pista” in Titus 1:6

King James Version: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

New King James Version: If a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or unruly.

Wycliffe New Testament: If any man is without crime, an husband of one wife, and hath faithful sons, not in accusation of lechery, or not subject.

American Standard Version: If any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having children that believe, who are not accused of riot or unruly.

New American Standard: Namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.

English Standard Version: If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

New International Version: An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

A Parallel Passage

It is generally agreed that on a purely lexical basis, either “believing” or “faithful” is a permissible translation of *pistos* in Titus 1:6. Therefore, additional considerations must come into play in determining the most appropriate translation. Among those considerations is the relationship of Titus 1:6 to 1 Timothy 3:4-5 (which we will consider in detail below in the section titled “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5”).

An elder “must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)” (1 Tim. 3:4-5)

Two Predominate Interpretive Views

The “Believing Children” View (BC) – “*Pistos*” in Titus 1:6 is best translated “believe” (i.e., believing or faithful in the sense of being full of faith) and therefore requires that an Elder’s children be Christians. (**Note:** All comments representing this view are in blue type.)

The “Faithful Children” View (FC) – “*Pistos*” in Titus 1:6 is best translated “faithful” (i.e., faithful to parents, well behaved, trustworthy) and therefore requires that an Elder’s children be faithful to their earthly parents. (**Note:** All comments representing this view are in maroon type.)

This study presents the primary points of the “believing children” view, followed by counterpoints from the “faithful children” view. This study does not include all of the interpretive variations and nuances within each view.

Summary of Primary Points in Support of the “Believing Children” View

1. Most modern translations favor the “Believing Children” view.
2. The preponderance of published NT lexical opinion favors “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6.
3. The preponderance of contemporary NT commentators favor “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6.
4. In the New Testament, *pistos* is always used of believers; never of unbelievers.
5. Even if we translate *pistos* as “faithful”, it still refers to believing children.
6. In the Pastoral Epistles, *pistos* seems always to have a spiritual meaning.
7. If an elder cannot bring his own children to the faith, how shall he bring others? If his children remain unbelievers, it will throw into question his ability to lead others to the faith.
8. One cannot rightly oppose the “believing children” view on the basis of the doctrine of election.
9. Because God alone has the power to convert our children; ultimately He plays the deterministic role in affirming elders.
10. Requiring believing children is consistent in principle with God’s standard for Old Testament Priests.

11. Practically speaking, an elder with unbelieving children is simply unthinkable.
12. The phrase “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (NASB) indicates the kind of children who disqualify their fathers from elder leadership.
13. *Tecna* (translated “children” in Titus 1:6) refers to children of any age, whether in or out of the home. The only exceptions are children too young to understand and respond to the gospel.

“Believing Children” vs. “Faithful Children” ~ Points and Counterpoints

Note: The following numbered points and their related quotes, in bold blue type, represent the “Believing Children” (BC) view. Their respective counterpoints in maroon type represent the “Faithful Children” (FC) view.

Documentation: Comments are documented to their sources (see “Bibliography” section for more complete documentation). Comments showing no source documentation are those of the compiler/editor.

1. BC Point: Most modern translations favor the “Believing Children” view.

Examples: American Standard Version, New American Standard, English Standard Version and New International Version

FC Counterpoint: Other translations favor the “Faithful Children” view. Examples: King James Version, New King James Version and Wycliffe New Testament

2. BC Point: The preponderance of published NT lexical opinion favors “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6.

Examples (representative, not exhaustive):

- *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT, aka “Kittel”)
- Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*
- A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Titus
- Henry Alford, *New Testament for English Readers*
- Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Despite the strong support “believing” enjoys from published New Testament lexical sources, the fact is that “*pistos*” occurs 67 times in the New Testament. Of these it is translated in the Authorized Version 55 times as *faithful*, 9 times as *believing*, twice as *true* and once as *sure*. Since *true* and *sure* are basically synonyms for *faithful*, this means that 87% of the time it means *faithful* rather than *believing*. . . [Therefore, translating *pistos* as “believing”] needs to be defended and the traditional [translation of “faithful”] shown to be deficient” (Louis F. DeBoer, Internet Article).

- 2) “Faithful” or “trustworthy” is the predominate translation of “pistos” or *pista*” in the New Testament. In Titus, *pistos* is used three times, two of which are in the sense of “trustworthy” or “reliable” (Titus 1:9, 3:8). This lends weight to translating *pistos* as “faithful” in Titus 1:6(see “Translations of “Pistos” in the New Testament” on page 2 above).
- 3) It is true that those holding the “believing children” view have considerable support from NT lexical sources. However, what this writer found interesting was that few lexical sources consulted for this study gave a rationale for their choice of “believing” over “faithful.” Those who did were based on disputed assumptions or seemingly disconnected thoughts.

Those weaknesses do not disprove their positions, but they don’t help prove them either. And they lend no helpful insights to the student seeking closure on this issue. For example:

- A.T. Robertson comments, “*That believe (pista)*. Added to what is in 1 Tim. 3:4. ‘Believing children’” (Titus, p. 598). But Robertson offers no rationale to justify adding Titus 1:6 to 1 Tim. 3:4, and we maintain it is not sound exegesis to do so (see #1 below under “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5” for a thorough discussion of this point).
 - Marvin Vincent comments, “Faithful children (*tekna pista*). Better, *believing children*; or, as Rev., *children that believe*. Compare 1 Tim. iii.4.” Although Vincent invites us to compare this passage with 1 Tim. 3:4, he says nothing of believing children in his comments on 1 Tim. 3:4, which is understandable since that passage says nothing about believing children. His readers are left to wonder what direct connection Vincent saw between “believing children” in Titus 1:6 and a verse in 1 Tim. that makes no mention of them at all.
- 4) The translation “having children who believe” is misleading because it leads the reader to believe that two verbal ideas are contained in the text, when in fact, there is only one. There is one participle - “having” - and two nouns *pista* and *tekna* (children). The noun *tekna* (children) is the direct object of the participle “having.” The noun *pista* functions as an adjectival modifier of “children.” If *pista* were in the participial form, we would naturally translate it “believing.” However, it is not in the participial form. There is only one other NT usage of *pista* in the form used here by Paul (see Acts 13:34 where Luke uses the accusative plural of *pistos*) and in that case it clearly would make no sense to translate it “believing.” Acts 13:34 – “I will give you the holy and sure [*pista*] blessings of David.” (Richard Barcellos, Internet Publication)

3. BC Point: The preponderance of contemporary NT commentators favor “believing” as the meaning of *pista* in Titus 1:6.

Examples (representative, not exhaustive):

- John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Titus
- Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Titus
- RCH Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles*, Titus
- William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, Titus

- D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Titus
- Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871), The Epistle of Paul to Titus
- J.N.D. Kelly, *Black's NT Commentary*, The Pastoral Epistles

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Other commentators favor “faithful” as the appropriate translation of *pista*, including some contemporary commentators.

Examples (representative, not exhaustive):

- John Piper, *Biblical Eldership: Shepherd the Flock of God Among You*, Internet Publication.
- *IVP New Testament Commentary*, Titus
- Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*, Titus
- Hampton Keathley III, *The Letter to Titus: An Exegetical and Devotional Commentary*
- Knight, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary
- John Lightfoot, *John Lightfoot's Commentary on the New Testament*

- 2) With all due respect to translators and commentators on both sides of the issue, we recognize that accurate interpretation is not determined by “majority rule”, or by citing one translation or another, but by the interpretive evidence for or against a particular view.

4. BC Point: In the New Testament, *pistos* is always used of believers; never of unbelievers.

Representative Quote: It is significant that, except for this sometimes disputed text (Titus 1:6), *pistos* always is used of people whom the context clearly identifies as believers (see e.g., Matt. 25:21,23; Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 4:2, 17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 2:10, 13; 17:14). Unbelievers are never referred to as faithful. That fact alone argues strongly for the rendering here of children who believe, that is, who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ (John MacArthur, et al.).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Although *pistos* is primarily used of believers, it is also used of people in general who may or may not be believers. For example, in His master/slave parables (Matt. 24:45; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:42; 16:10-12; 19:17), our Lord draws a comparison between faithful domestic slaves and believers. But He gives no indication of whether or not the slaves in his illustration are believers. That point is irrelevant to the parable. Their faithfulness and trustworthiness (or lack thereof) as slaves is the issue, not their beliefs.

Similarly, in 1 Cor. 4:2 Paul states the general principle that it is required of a steward (whether Christian or not) to be faithful (*pistos*), and then applies that general principle to stewards of the mysteries of God). Apart from the general principle of faithfulness in secular or domestic stewardship, the comparison would have no meaning.

Therefore, we maintain that the point cannot be sustained that “*pistos* always is used of people whom the context clearly identifies as believers. Unbelievers are never referred to as faithful.” The particular context and usage must decide the application of *pistos*.

- 2) Even if it were correct that elsewhere in Scripture *pistos* is never used of unbelievers, that does not mean Titus 1:6 couldn't be a linguistic exception. The immediate context of a verse must always be the final determiner of its meaning. In that regard, MacArthur and others acknowledge that within the book of Titus, Paul uses *pistos* only two other times, both of which refer to the faithfulness, or trustworthiness, of God's words (Titus 1:9; 3:8). If Paul uses *pistos* in that way in the most immediate context, it would be consistent for him to use it that way in Titus 1:6 as well.

5. BC Point: Even if we translate *pistos* as “faithful”, it still refers to believing children.

Representative Quote: In the New Testament *pistos* is used passively of God's faithfulness (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18), of Christ's faithfulness (see e.g., 2 Thess.3:3; Heb. 2:17; 3:2), of the faithfulness, or trustworthiness, of God's words (see, e.g., Acts 13:34; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 1:9; 3:8). It is also used passively many times of people in general. But it is significant that, except for this sometimes disputed text (Titus 1:6), it always is used of people whom the context clearly identifies as believers (see e.g., Matt. 25:21,23; Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 4:2, 17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 2:10, 13; 17:14). . . .

Even if the idea [of *pistos* in this context] were that of faithfulness to parents, the use of *pistos* in those other passages would argue for its referring to the faithfulness of believing children. In an elder's home, especially, a child who is old enough to be saved, but is not, can hardly be considered faithful. He would be unfaithful in by far the most important way (John MacArthur, et al., underscore added).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) This point has merit only if all of “those other passages” clearly refer to believers. But some may not (see counterpoint to #4 above).
- 2) This point has merit if the “faithfulness” called for in Titus 1:6 is toward God rather than toward parents. However, even in some of the examples cited (e.g., Matt. 25:21, 23), as well as elsewhere (e.g., Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:42; 16:10-12; 19:17), *pistos* refers to faithfulness toward a human master, not toward God. Therefore, rather than firmly establishing the necessity of faithfulness toward God in Titus 1:6, this argument assumes the conclusion it is attempting to prove, which sheds no definitive light on the meaning of *pistos* in this context. It simply draws a conclusion based on a presupposed meaning that is brought to the text.
- 3) It must be noted that the subject of this portion of Titus 1 is the elder and not God. The only direct reference to God in this section of Titus 1 is in the following statement (Titus 1:7) where the elder is identified as “God's steward.”

Just as the whole of this text is describing the qualities of the elder, so it describes the relationship between the elder and his children, not the relationship between his children and God. . . . The issue does not appear to be others' beliefs, but the overseer's management

abilities. . . . This passage is saying that the elder’s children should be faithful to their father in a manner that is demonstrated by their lifestyle. This lifestyle must be consistent so as to eliminate any reasonable charges against him. This is what enables the elder to be blameless in regard to his household (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

Emphasis of Titus 1:6-9:

- v. 6 – Elder/wife relationship (husband of one wife)
 - v. 6 – Elder/children relationship (faithful children – see also 1 Tim. 3:4-5)
 - v. 7 – Elder/motives (not self-willed)
 - v. 7 – Elder/temperament (not quick-tempered)
 - v. 7 – Elder/wine (not addicted to wine)
 - v. 7 – Elder/temperament (not pugnacious)
 - v. 7 – Elder/money (not fond of sordid gain)
 - v. 8 – Elder/strangers (hospitable)
 - v. 8 – Elder/affections (loving what is good)
 - v. 8 – Elder/other characteristics (sensible, just, devout, self-controlled)
 - v. 9 – Elder/Scripture (holding fast the faithful word)
 - v. 9 – Elder/sound doctrine (exhort)
 - v. 9 – Elder/errorists (refute)
- 4) “One might ask: ‘How can a child of an elder be faithful to his father if he does not believe the gospel?’ One might reply: ‘How can a child of an elder be faithful to his father if he sins at all?’ His father would surely teach him never to sin. However, the son would sin. Would this constitute dissipation or insubordination? Do dissipation and insubordination refer to minor infractions or a way of life indicative of excess and riot? I think the latter” (Richard Barcellos, Internet Publication).

6. BC Point: In the Pastoral Epistles, *pistos* seems always to have a spiritual meaning.

Representative Quote: In 1 Timothy 3:11, the wives of elders and deacons are to be “faithful in all things.” Is Paul primarily concerned with her faithfulness to her husband? Or is he concerned with spiritual matters? In every other context, “faithful” seems to have a spiritual meaning (i.e., faithful to God, or used in the sense of being trustworthy in God’s sight): Jesus Christ considered Paul faithful (I Tim. 1:12); Timothy was to teach “faithful men” who would teach others also (II Tim. 2:2; faithful to whom or what?); God remains faithful (trustworthy); elders are to hold fast the faithful word (Titus 1:9). These passages convince me that “faithful children” in Titus 1:6 refers primarily to a child’s spiritual condition before God, not his trustworthiness to his father (David Posey, Internet Publication).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Paul’s use of *pistos* to indicate faithfulness or trustworthiness in a child does not necessarily give the word a “spiritual meaning” that necessitates belief (or saving faith), any more than our Lord calling a slave “faithful” (cf., Matt. 24:45; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:42; 16:10-12; 19:17) means that the slave is a believer. The context must be the final determiner.

- 2) As we pointed out in “5. 3)” above, the subject of this portion of Titus 1 is the elder, not God. Just as the whole of this text is describing the qualities of the elder, so it describes the relationship between the elder and his children, not the relationship between his children and God. . . . The issue does not appear to be others’ beliefs, but the overseer’s management abilities.

7. BC Point: If an elder cannot bring his own children to the faith, how shall he bring others? If his children remain unbelievers, it will throw into question his ability to lead others to the faith.

Representative Quote: If we fail to raise our child to be a Christian, how can we be relied upon to give proper direction to individual Christians in the body of Christ? It may also affect a man’s credibility when he has to deal with rebellious children (and their parents). They may wonder how he can tell them to do such and such, when he failed to do it (David Posey, Internet Publication).

Representative Quote: To find out if a man is qualified for leadership in the church, look first at his influence on his own children. If you want to know if he is able to lead the unsaved to faith in Christ and to help them grow in obedience and holiness, simply examine the effectiveness of his efforts with his own children. . . . A man whose children are profligate and unruly, even if they are genuine believers, is not qualified for pasturing or for other elders’ duties. No matter how godly and self-giving a man himself may be in the Lord’s service, children of his who do not believe and who are known for their dissipation or rebellion distract from the credibility of his leadership.

If he cannot bring his own children to salvation and to godly living, he will not have the confidence of the church in his ability to lead other unbelievers to salvation or to lead his congregation in godly living. Unbelieving, rebellious, or profligate children will be a serious reproach on his life and ministry (John MacArthur, Titus pp.30, 31).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) We agree that “a man whose children are profligate and unruly, even if they are genuine believers, is not qualified for pasturing or for other elders’ duties.”
- 2) David Posey’s statements presuppose that if a child does not come to saving faith, the parents have somehow failed to “give proper direction” to the child. That may, in fact, be the case at times, but it need not necessarily be the case any more than the Israelites’ failure to enter the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea means that Moses failed to give them proper direction, or that Judas’ failure to trust Christ means that Jesus failed to give him proper direction. It doesn’t follow logically or theologically.
- 3) “If we fail to raise our child to be a Christian, how can we be relied upon to give proper direction to individual Christians in the body of Christ?” may seem like a reasonable argument in our day, but given the fact that the church at Crete was relatively new, and that no one had been raised in the Christian faith, no one in Crete would have met that qualification. Therefore, it also seems unlikely that Paul had that in mind in Titus 1:6.

It may be argued that Paul had in mind Cretian fathers who had raised their children in the true Jewish faith, and whose children, like Timothy, had come to Christ because “from

childhood [they had] known the sacred writings which are able to give [them] the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

That may be a reasonable argument with apparent biblical support, but this writer found no commentator who appealed to that argument. That may be because it reads too much into the simple wording of Titus 1:6. It is, however, a possibility.

- 4) If we grant the premise that a man who has an unbelieving child “will not have the confidence of the church in his ability to lead other unbelievers to salvation or to lead his congregation in godly living”, what do we do with the common situation of a father of multiple children who has (together with his wife) led the majority of his children to the Lord? Do we still question his ability to lead someone to Christ because his “success rate” with his own children is less than perfect? If so, are we not evaluating the man on the basis of a child’s response rather than on the man’s overall godly character and Christian example (which is the primary focus of all the other elder qualifications)?
- 5) If a man were otherwise qualified to be an elder, he would be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) and would be characterized as a man who “holds fast the faithful word so that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). It seems those qualifications would be clear and objective evidence of his ability “to lead other unbelievers to salvation or to lead his congregation in godly living” even if he had an unbelieving child.
- 6) With regard to “blame” in Titus 1:6, the issue isn’t that the elder is disqualified because he fails to get all his children saved (something he can’t do anyway). It is that the elder, if he fails to restrain his children, would be found to be a hypocrite if he tries to correct believers engaged in similar practices (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).
- 7) On a practical level, the “believing children” view seems a difficult requirement for the church to enforce. Both the parents and the church can determine if the children are well mannered, disciplined, and subject to their parents in the Lord. They can see that they are being catechized, attend church regularly, and outwardly behave properly. Well behaved children of godly parents will generally conform to what is expected of them in the home and in the church. This does not, however, establish that they are converted. Many times when they reach maturity they will drift away from the church and the teachings of their parents (Louis F. DeBoer, Internet Article).

8. BC Point: One cannot rightly oppose the “believing children” view on the basis of the doctrine of election.

Representative Quote: Based on a defective understanding of God’s sovereign election, some interpreters argue that Paul could not possibly hold a man responsible for the failure of his children to be saved if God has not elected them. But that sort of thinking is unbiblical. Scriptural predestination is not fatalism or determinism. God’s sovereign election, as clearly taught in Scripture, in no way mitigates against Scripture’s equally clear teaching that salvation comes only through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and that the Lord uses believers to witness the gospel to unbelievers by what they say and by how they live.

Jesus commanded, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). A life that reflects the light of the gospel draws men to that light (John MacArthur, Titus, p. 31).

Representative Quote: If parents are committed to godly living, and to proclaiming God’s Word and His saving gospel truth in the home, there is every reason to believe that God in His grace will use their lives to bring their children to salvation. It may not always happen, but for a man that stands in the pulpit to be the model, and who will not be scandalized by some activity on the part of his children, it is necessary (John MacArthur, Jr., “The Required Character for a Pastor: Family Leadership”, Tape GC 56-6).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Granted, divine sovereignty doesn’t work in a vacuum, and God uses godly parents to impact their children spiritually. By the same token, He often brings children of ungodly parents to saving faith. So the principle of divine election is apparent in either case. The ideal, of course, is for children to grow up in a home where they are nurtured in righteousness by praying, Christian parents.
- 2) John MacArthur’s statements strongly imply that a child’s salvation is somehow determined by parental faithfulness rather than divine sovereignty alone, or that parents are somehow directly responsible and accountable if their children do not come to saving faith. However, at the same time he concedes, “it may not always happen” (referring to a child of parents committed to godly living coming to faith in Christ).

The primary question is whether or not a parent’s role is determinative in a child’s salvation. If so, it is consistent to expect the children of godly parents to come to faith. And, we would have to add, it would seem that *all* children of godly parents *would* come to faith. If, however, the parent’s role is not determinative in a child’s salvation, it seems inconsistent to hold a godly parent accountable if a child does not trust Christ.

- 3) While it is true that Jesus said, “let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16), and that “a life that reflects the light of the gospel draws men to that light”, we must not forget that Jesus Himself, who is the Light of the World, was rejected by most who encountered Him. But their rejection did not reflect on the presence or quality of the Light. The light simply exposed their sinful hearts. Similarly, apart from sovereign grace in the heart of a child, that child will continue to walk in darkness despite the presence of gospel light.

“While parents can keep their children under control through loving discipline and may prayerfully seek to bring them to Christ, becoming believers is, in the final analysis, something only the Spirit of God can do” (Hampton Keathley III).

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9. **BC Point: Because God alone has the power to convert our children; ultimately He plays the deterministic role in affirming elders.**

Representative Quote: Some may argue, “We parents do not convert our children, God does (true point). Therefore, why should *pistos* be a deterministic qualification for eldership?” Perhaps we should better understand the security from the fact that God alone has the power to convert our children, for that also means God plays the deterministic role in establishing an eldership. God, not man, has the power to convert our children. Thus, God, not man, has the power to establish our eldership. By reframing *pistos* into a trait (trustworthy, loyal) rather than a transformation, we unwittingly usurp God’s role in church leadership (Mike Fontenot, Internet Publication).

Representative Quote: To place the salvation of an elder’s children outside his influence says nothing about this particular requirement. Suppose this to be the case, and God in His sovereignty has determined not to save one of the pastor’s children. Unless we alter the wording or meaning of this passage, this would simply mean that the sovereign God has determined to reveal His desire to have the pastor step down from his ministerial responsibilities in this particular fashion (Douglas Wilson, Internet Publication).

Representative Quote: [A man] may have children who are not favored with the sovereign electing grace of Christ. In that case he does not qualify to be an elder, but God has other plans for him. He has in no way been relegated to an inferior ministry. Church leadership is of high priority, but every ministry is important (1 Cor. 12:12-25). The key thing is for him to faithfully pursue the ministry opportunities God brings his way, and not feel that his task is in any sense inferior to another’s (John MacArthur, *Spiritual Leadership Study Guide*).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) If the believing children view is correct, those conclusions have merit. However, requiring an elder’s children to be Christians seems to violate at least three fundamental points of Paul’s teaching:
 - a) It doesn’t harmonize with the other elder qualifications, which focus on the elder’s own Christian character and relationship with God, not someone else’s (see #5, FC Counterpoint #3 on page 7 above).
 - b) It doesn’t harmonize with the parallel passage in 1 Tim. 3:4-5 (see section titled “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 with 1 Timothy 3:4-5” on page 17 below).
 - c) It doesn’t harmonize with the parallel Paul draws between the domestic and ecclesiastic roles of an elder: “But if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?” (1 Tim. 3:5).

The qualifier in that verse is the elder’s ability to manage his household in general, and his children in particular. Domestic management is the proving ground for church management. That’s the parallel Paul draws. If, however, we stipulate that successful domestic management for an elder is measured ultimately by the salvation his children, there is no parallel in the church.

Do we evaluate an elder’s church management by the absence of unbelievers in the assembly? Do disqualify an elder if a member of his congregation falls away, especially if that elder is faithful in his Christian character and spiritual duties? Of course we don’t. Yet many would quickly disqualify him if one of his children goes astray, even

though he is faithful in his Christian character and spiritual duties in the home. Where's the parallel?

- 2) Additionally, requiring that an Elder's children be Christians doesn't harmonize with the analogy of faith (the overall teaching of Scripture) regarding disqualification of a leader based on the faith or lack of faith of a child.

(Source: Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication, underscore added)

Timothy did not have to deal with this issue. Ephesus had elders based upon the way that they managed their households, not on the basis of their children's faith (see section below titled *Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5*). If Titus 1:6 requires elders to have believing children, then Titus did have to deal with this issue. How did he resolve such a situation? What scriptures might he have employed to explain to such leaders that they needed to step down?

I can find nowhere in scripture where a man's leadership is judged by the faith of his children. Abraham was justified by his faith; Isaac was the son of the promise who conveyed the promise to his youngest and least favored son, Jacob, by means of a ruse, and yet God is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jacob had twelve sons who were obviously not all godly men, and yet God still approves of Jacob, names him Israel, and claims the name "God of Israel." David, a man after God's own heart, is anointed king and rules over God's people most of his life. He sins, and has to deal with the impacts of his own sin by suffering strife within his own household among his many sons. Absalom murders his half-brother Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13). Absalom then conspires against David, proclaims himself king, and makes war on David. In all this, God does not disavow David. In fact, he makes an everlasting promise to him.

The only section of scripture that supports the removal of a leader in relation to the behavior of his children is that of Eli. It must be understood that God's judgment of Eli is not because of his sons' sins, but because he knew of their sins and failed to "restrain" them (1 Sam 3:13). Eli was shepherd of all Israel, but failed to deal with his sons who were harming God's people and treating God with contempt. God himself removes the sons and then Eli, and this judgment is consistent with all of scripture; God does not hold the sin of the father against the son, nor does he hold the sin of the son against the father. "The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him (Ezekiel 18:20)."

In the New Testament, there are no comments or records regarding the removal of elders, nor any other comments in regards to an elder's children. Based on the passages reviewed, the practice of removing leaders because their children fall away (sin and no longer believe) does not fit the biblical record.

Because this practice is different from all previous biblical examples and does not fit the way in which God applies judgment, it would appear to be a false practice derived by logical deduction based on a disputed and unclear interpretation. At the very least, it should be

classified as an obscure or questionable teaching within the context of the Bible. There is no clear mechanism identified in the scriptures for the removal of leaders, including elders, other than the process identified in Matthew 18:15-17, modified in accordance with 1 Tim 5:19-20. Neither Matthew 18 nor 1 Tim 5 addresses anyone's sin except the person who sinned. Does an elder commit a sin if his child leaves the faith?

10. BC Point: Requiring believing children is consistent in principle with God's standard for Old Testament Priests.

Representative Quote: In the Old Testament there were certain physical disqualifications for a priest. Leviticus 21:16-20 says, "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron, saying, 'No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the bread of his God. For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles'''" (NASB).

Anyone with a physical deformity could not perform priestly duties. That wasn't a commentary on the character or spiritual life of a deformed man, but simply a matter of God's selecting a certain kind of man to serve as priest. He wanted unblemished men as models of spiritual service. It's the same with church leadership. God wants elders to have an unblemished and exemplary home life (John MacArthur, *Spiritual Leadership Study Guide*).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) The point of exemplary leadership is well taken, and elders *should* be exemplary in their Christian character and their leadership in the home and in the church. And there may, in fact, be a general and vague correlation between qualifications for Old Testament priests and New Testament elders. However, drawing a parallel between unblemished bodies and believing children seems a stretch at best, especially since God could have required unblemished bodies of New Testament elders if He wanted to illustrate exemplary leadership in that way.
 - 2) See Counterpoints under #9 above.
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11. BC Point: Practically speaking, an elder with unbelieving children is simply unthinkable.

Representative Quote: "Can we really envision a man otherwise qualified to be an elder whose children have rejected the father's faith?" (David Posey, Internet Publication)

FC Counterpoint:

This line of reasoning is similar to "7." above, but with a slightly different twist. This statement implies or assumes that if a man is godly, his children will naturally follow him into the Christian faith. By God's grace that may be the case, but it does not necessarily follow.

For example (and we mean no irreverence or flippancy), according to that reasoning, one might argue that God Himself would not qualify as an elder! To rephrase the argument: “Can we really envision a person otherwise qualified to be an elder whose own children rejected Him and plunged the whole human race into sin and death? In the case of David, “Can we really envision a man otherwise qualified to be King whose own son rejected his faith and even sought to overthrow him?” Or, “Can we really envision a man otherwise qualified to be the Son of God whose own people rejected His faith? Etc.

We do not impugn God’s holiness because Adam and Eve rebelled. Nor do we question our Lord’s spiritual qualifications because His own people rejected Him. Of course God the Father and God the Son are not parents in the physical sense, so those are not direct parallels. However, they serve to illustrate the fact that one person’s sin and/or lack of faith does not necessarily reflect on the Christian character or leadership capabilities of another.

12. BC Point: The phrase “accused of dissipation or rebellion” (NASB) indicates the kind of children who disqualify their fathers from elder leadership.

FC Counterpoints:

We agree with that conclusion. However, we must consider what “dissipation” and “rebellion” mean, and to whom does the phrase “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” refer?

- 1) **The meaning of “dissipation” and “rebellion”** - The two words describing what the children’s character should not be are *asōtias ē anupotakta*. *Asōtias* means “dissipation,” “reckless living,” “unruly” and *anupotakta* means “rebellious,” “disorderly,” “disobedient,” “outside of one’s control,” and “not made subject to rule.” Together they describe a person who is out of control and in a state of spiritual prodigality, not just a non-Christian (Don Martin, Internet Publication).
- 2) **Unbelieving children in general** - Many commentators conclude or imply that “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” refers to unbelieving children in general. In other words, Paul is contrasting believing children with unbelieving children. **If that is the case, the application is:** to have unbelieving children disqualifies a man from elder leadership.

That conclusion is the primary tenant of the “believing children” view. However, it may go beyond Scripture by implying that all pagan children are guilty of dissipation or rebellion. Or it may fall short of adequately explaining why Paul included “dissipation or rebellion” in his description of the kind of children who disqualify their father.

If we conclude that “dissipation or rebellion” refers to unbelieving children in general, we must also conclude that all unbelieving children are somehow accused of dissipation or rebellion (because Paul doesn’t make reference to unbelieving children who are *not* accused of dissipation or rebellion).

However, if Paul is referring to unbelieving children in general, why did he specifically mention dissipation and rebellion? Why give any qualifiers at all? According to the “believing children” view, **unbelief itself is the disqualifier**, not any particular type or manifestation of unbelief.

One may argue that unbelief is dissipation and rebellion. But is that really what Paul is arguing in this passage? Even some who hold the “believing children” view acknowledge that the Greek term for “dissipation” “strongly suggests that [Paul] has in mind primarily grown or nearly grown children. “Very young children can believe in Christ, and they certainly can be rebellious. But they cannot be guilty of dissipation in any normal sense of the word” (MacArthur, p. 30). If a young child cannot be accused of dissipation, and yet a young child apart from Christ is a lost sinner, it seems unlikely that Paul would use a word like “dissipation” to indicate all unbelieving children. However, that is the conclusion one is forced to draw if “dissipation or rebellion” refers to unbelievers in general.

For the sake of discussion, if it can be shown from Scripture that unbelief itself constitutes dissipation or rebellion, then we could rightly say to a man whose unbelieving children were respectful and under his control, “Notwithstanding your children’s respect and submission to your authority in the home, their unbelief toward God constitutes dissipation or rebellion. Therefore, you are not qualified for elder leadership.”

If, on the other hand, it cannot be shown from Scripture that unbelief itself constitutes dissipation or rebellion in the sense that Paul uses those terms in this context, it is incumbent on the “believing children” advocates to deal more adequately with the reason for Paul’s “dissipation or rebellion” qualifiers in Titus 1:6.

John MacArthur comments, “In an elder’s home, especially, a child who is old enough to be saved, but is not, can hardly be considered faithful. He would be unfaithful in by far the most important way” (Titus, p. 30). However, that statement merely reflects its author’s understanding of “faithful.” It doesn’t address the accusation of “dissipation or rebellion.”

- 3) **Professing Christian children** - Other commentators conclude that “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” refers to rebellious professing Christian children. In other words, Paul is contrasting faithful believing children with rebellious believing children. **If that is the case, the application is:** to have Christian children who are rebellious disqualifies a man from elder leadership.

Even though translating *pistos* as “faithful” is inconsistent with the “believing children” translation, it is allowed by some “believing children” advocates as a concession: “Even if the idea [of *pistos* in this context] were that of faithfulness to parents, the use of *pistos* in [other passages] would argue for its referring to the faithfulness of believing children” (MacArthur, Titus, p. 30, underscore added).

- 4) **Definition of “faithful children”** - Other commentators conclude that “not accused of dissipation or rebellion” defines or qualifies what Paul means by “faithful” children. In other words, Paul is clarifying what it means to be a “faithful” child, whether or not that child is a believer. **If that is the case, the application is:** to have rebellious children, whether Christians or not, disqualifies a man from elder leadership.

View #4) seems to represent the best balance of all the interpretive data, including harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Tim. 3:4-5, as discussed in the *Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5* section below.

13. **BC Point:** *Tecna* (translated “children” in Titus 1:6) refers to children of any age, whether in or out of the home. The only exceptions to the believing children requirement are children too young to understand and respond to the gospel.

Representative Quote: “Children” translates *teknon* and refers to offspring of any age. Paul has just referred to Titus, a grown man, as his “true child [*teknon*] in the faith” (v. 4). His immediately following reference to dissipation strongly suggests that he has in mind primarily grown or nearly grown children. Even very young children can believe in Christ, and they certainly can be rebellious. But they cannot be guilty of dissipation in any normal sense of the word (John MacArthur, Titus, p. 30, underscore added).

Representative Quote: If [Titus 1:6] means “faithful to God,” then a man who would be an elder must have children who are Christians. But for how long? In other words, what if a man serves for 30 years and then his 50-year-old son quits the Lord. I can only speak as the utterances of God (I Pet. 4:11) and here is what God says: “having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.” There is no “until this time” or any other qualifying language in the passage. It is a simple statement, and the only safe course would be to apply it through the duration of the man’s service as an elder (David Posey, Internet Publication).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) David Posey’s comments add nothing to the discussion because he merely appeals to his preferred English translation of *teknon* rather than dealing with the interpretive issues at hand. (We included them here because they are representative of others who hold the same view.) Appealing to what the text says is one thing; appealing to what the text means by what it says is quite another—and *that* must be the goal of the careful Bible expositor.
- 2) **An unwarranted assumption?** - John MacArthur’s explanation implies that Paul did not give qualifications to Titus regarding younger children. For those qualifications one must go to 1 Tim. 3:4-5, where, according to MacArthur and others, Paul gives qualifications regarding younger children. However, that implies that Paul gave no qualifications to Timothy regarding older children.

The “believing children” advocates simply assume that Timothy already knew about the older children qualifications, and that Titus knew about the younger children qualifications. However, their failure to adequately explain how Titus and Timothy knew that, or why Paul would give them different instructions, constitutes a major interpretive weakness of the “believing children” view. (See the section below titled “Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5” for further discussion of this point.)

- 3) **Present tense** - We must note that the children referred to in 1 Tim. 3:4 are children who live at home, under their father’s authority: “keeping [present tense] his children under control with all dignity.” In the Titus 1:6 passage, the verb in the phrase “having children who believe” also indicates that the children are presently in the home and under the father’s authority (Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 198).
- 4) **Dependent children** - As we consider application of this quality today, a practical question arises regarding the length of time elders are to be held accountable for the behavior of their

children. As used here, the term *children* views sons and daughters in relation to their parents. Within the household their status would be that of dependents.

The instruction, therefore, restricts the elder's accountability to children who are not yet adults. And of course, then and now and from one culture to the next, entrance into adulthood is measured by different combinations of age and events (marriage, leaving home, beginning a career), which prevent us from drawing rigid lines (such as up until age eighteen or twenty-one).

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to think that the attitudes and behavior of children still within the household provide an indication of the faithfulness of an elder in parenting. But while this formative influence is meant to prepare children for godly adult lives, it does not constitute a guarantee such that elders ought to be made responsible for the directions that their grown children might choose to take (*IVP New Testament Commentary, Titus*)

- 5) **Ruling his own house** - It is also important that we appreciate the detailed description of I Timothy 3:3-4. The house over which the elder exerts the rule is his own house (*tou idiou oikou*). In other words, these are children who are still under his immediate rule, not those who have established their own households (cp. Gen. 2:24). It is also apparent from both texts that all his children under his rule are to be *pistos*. The man rules his house and his children are not out of control. . . .

We are faced with the challenge of avoiding extreme positions anytime we study the scriptures. Some want to compromise in setting aside qualifications that God has bound, in the case of elders, others attempt to bind where God never bound. The view held by some requires matters of elders that are beyond their control. Men can teach their children, set a good example, and exercise headship (rule), however, they can not always be held responsible for any of their children not being Christians, especially those who are out on their own (Don Martin, Internet Publication).

- 6) **Regarding Proverbs 22:6** - The Proverb (22:6), “train up a child in his way he should go and when he is old, he will not turn from it,” gives us a universal and general principle of life that will normally occur when parents apply themselves to the spiritual development of their children, but it is not a guarantee that children will always turn out as desired. Some children will occasionally refuse the best of parental leadership and will turn from their godly heritage later in life. Therefore, if it is known that a man applied himself diligently to bringing up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, what one of his children does after leaving home should not become a reason to keep him from leadership or a reason to remove him from this role (Hampton Keathley III).
- 7) **Very young children excluded?** - Strict application of the BC view requires that all of an elder's children be Christians. However, most BC advocates allow exceptions for children too young to understand the gospel. However, that is a concession based on the logical implications of the view itself, not on the text. We realize that is a reasonable assumption, but we mention it here because, by way of contrast, the FC view requires no concession. Even very young children can be shown to be under their father's authority.

Harmonizing Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5

The interpretive principle of “Scripture Interprets Scripture” (i.e., the totality of Scripture is the context and guide for understanding the particular passages of Scripture), dictates that we look to the clear passages of Scripture to help interpret the more obscure passages. In that regard, we must give due consideration to Paul’s parallel passage in 1 Timothy 3:4-5 in determining the meaning of Titus 1:6.

Common Positions

The following numbered points and their respective quotes represent the most common positions of the “Believing Children” view. However, not everyone holding that view would necessarily agree with the numbered points.

1. **BC Point: With respect to an elder’s children, Titus 1:6 and 1 Timothy 3:4-5 are parallel passages that together give us qualifications for younger and older children.**

Representative Quote: *Teknon* refers in general to offspring of any age. However it would seem that the Timothy passage deals with younger children while the Titus passage deals with children old enough to be rebellious and “sowing the wild oats.” Only adult children can violate Titus 1:6, whereas younger children (as well as older) could be out of control (1 Tim. 3-5). Other Greek words are used to describe tiny children and infants. *Teknon* stresses relationships. You are not always an infant but you are always someone’s child (Mark Markham, Internet Publication).

Representative Quote: If a man’s children are too young to understand the gospel and to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, then the standard given to Timothy applies. An overseer, or elder, “must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Tim. 3:4-5; cf. v. 12). As children grow older and the issue is no longer control, the more demanding criteria in Titus 1 come into play (MacArthur, Titus, p. 30).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) Merely combining the two lists of elder qualifications to create an all-inclusive list violates Paul’s intent.

Some have proposed that the two lists be combined to create a robust, all-inclusive listing of qualifications. While this appears to have merit on the surface, we must recognize that this was never Paul’s intent when he wrote the letters. To sum them together violates proper exegesis, which requires that the scriptures be evaluated based upon the intent of the author and the understanding of the recipient. Therefore, we must respect the integrity and independence of each set of qualifications, and consequently, each set of qualifications must be viewed as equally authoritative and complete (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

- 2) Separate lists require clear guidelines.

If we accept that the two sets of qualifications are different [e.g., one requiring management of children; one requiring Christian children], what guidelines are provided so that we know

when each is meant to apply? . . . If the two sets of qualifications are different, no clear guidelines for when they should apply are evident (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

- 3) In the absence of any clear guidelines for applying two differing lists of qualifications, it becomes necessary to harmonize them.

If each set of qualifications is equally authoritative and complete, but differs in requirements, we have a problem. . . . Therefore, we must find the harmony between these sets of qualifications. And if our interpretation of scripture results in one scripture negating or falsifying another, that interpretation of scripture cannot be valid (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

The analogy of Scripture seems to preclude [the “believing children”] interpretation of [Titus 1:6]. The parallel passage in 1 Timothy 3:4 does not demand what [that view] says Titus 1:6 demands. Assuming [the “believing children”] interpretation, we would have one standard in Ephesus and another on Crete. How could this be? Both 1 Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6 refer to a man’s ability in his domestic oversight and demand that his children be in submission to his rule as a general pattern of life and that while under his roof (Richard Barcellos, Internet Publication).

- 4) The “faithful children” view harmonizes both lists of qualifications with respect to and elder and his children.
 - a) The qualification in Timothy is that an elder’s children must obey him with proper respect. There is nothing in that statement that requires the children to be believers.

An elder “must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)” (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

If we translate *pistos* as “faithful”, “trustworthy”, or “reliable”, the two passages harmonize nicely as long as the reference is to the relationship between the father and the children, rather than the children’s relationship to God.

However, if we translate *pistos* as “believing”, we establish two different sets of criteria for evaluating elders with respect to their children. Timothy would be reviewing how a man manages his family and how his children obey and respect their father, while Titus would be looking at the children to see if they were believers not given to wild living or rebelliousness – very different evaluations, indeed (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

- b) Titus 1:6 and the parallel passage in 1 Tim 3:4-5 provide some important indicators of Paul’s intended meaning in Titus 1:6. The qualifying statement, “not accused of dissipation or rebellion,” emphasizes behavior and seems to explain what it means for *tekna* [children] to be *pista*. Likewise, 1 Tim 3:4 speaks of an overseer “keeping his children under control with all dignity.” In both cases the overseer is evaluated on the basis of his control of his children and their conduct. It is likely, therefore, that *tekna exwn pista* here is virtually equivalent to *tekna exonta en hupotaghi* in 1 Tim 3:4. If that is so, then *pista* here means “faithful” in the sense of “submissive” or “obedient” (George W. Knight, pp. 289-90).

These parallel passages [i.e., 1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12] say nothing of requiring the elders' children to be converted. They simply require that the children be in subjection to the father as the head of the home. It requires that the children be disciplined and orderly and not contentious and rebellious. It requires the prospective elder to be in control of his home, ruling it well. They do not make him responsible for a state of grace in the hearts of his children. The traditional translation preserves the unity of these passages as teaching the same doctrine. The newer translation destroys this unity and introduces a new requirement for the eldership. A requirement that the father can neither control nor can the church positively ascertain, as God alone can change hearts and discern their state (Louis F. DeBoer, Internet Article).

- c) While the “believing children” view is possible, it seems to place more stringent requirements on the elder than does 1 Timothy 3:4. Moreover, in view of this parallel, Paul probably means that the elder’s children are to be faithful in obeying the head of the house. In fact, the rest of the verse contrasts “faithful” with *the charge of being wild and disobedient*, which suggests a more general kind of faithfulness. The code asks that candidates for the office of elder not be those whose children will attract accusations of dissipation and rebellion (compare v. 10). This is very much in accord with 1 Timothy 3:4 (IVP New Testament Commentary).
- d) Why did Timothy not require believing children? It did not seem logical that qualifications for elders at Ephesus should differ substantially from those in Crete. Further checking showed that “faithful” is repeatedly used in the sense of being loyal, trustworthy or responsible. If that is the correct meaning, it resolves the difficulty. If not, then it would appear that in some way the words in Timothy must convey the necessity that they have believing children [which does not seem to be the case] (A. Ralph Johnson, Internet Publication).

2. BC Point: The differences between Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding children, and his instruction to Titus, can be attributed to the longevity of the churches in their respective locations.

Representative Quote: It must be supposed that a Christian father who has unbelieving children is himself a recent convert, or a very careless Christian. The fact that St. Paul did not think it necessary to warn Timothy that such men were not eligible for the presbyterate is a proof that Christianity was at this time more firmly established in Ephesus than in Crete” (Robertson Nicoll, Titus, p. 187).

FC Counterpoints:

- 1) We agree that apparently all men considered for eldership in Crete would have been relatively new converts due to the short length of time Christianity had been present there prior to Paul’s letter to Titus. But that raises the question of how Titus could have found men who fulfilled the “believing children” requirement.

The churches in Crete had been in existence only a short time, and the church at Ephesus had a body of elders within three years of its creation. For there to be any elders at all [in Crete],

entire families would have to be converted en masse. This certainly occurred, but the references are limited. Three include Cornelius (Acts 10), Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31-33) (Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication).

- 2) We disagree that the presence of a more established church in Ephesus was the reason Paul did not mention believing children to Timothy.

(Source: Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication, underscores added)

- a) Since Paul does not identify “believing children” as a qualification to Timothy, one possible means is to assume that Timothy already knew of this criterion, and therefore Paul did not need to restate it. There are three likely considerations for why Timothy might already know of this criterion.

First, Timothy was like a son to Paul and had been with him in many of the churches Paul established. This relationship and experience undoubtedly exposed Timothy to the process of determining and appointing elders numerous times.

Second, if “believing children” was a standard qualification, then it would have been the norm among the churches. Hence, there would be little need for Paul to restate this to Timothy.

Third, Ephesus had existing elders who would have been fully aware of this criterion, since Paul had appointed them.

- b) Each of these considerations has problems.

First, both Timothy and Titus share Paul’s acclamation “my true son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4). Both had accompanied Paul and likely seen the appointment of elders. . . Titus had been with Paul even before Timothy, so he likely had equal or greater exposure to Paul’s appointment of elders. It therefore seems inconsistent for Paul to supply one bit of critical information to the one and not to the other, or to remind the one and not remind the other.

Second, if “believing children” were the common standard of the day, why then did Paul need to inform Titus? Had Titus been isolated from what Paul was doing in all the other churches? We have no information suggesting that this was the case. It seems again inconsistent for Paul to have anticipated that the one would have been aware of a common standard when the other would not.

Third, because there were existing elders in Ephesus, appointed by Paul, why would Paul need to convey to Timothy all of the other selection criteria and not need to convey the “believing children” criterion? This is especially questionable because this single criterion has such a strong implication for the elder’s family size and age, where all of the other criteria are personal character traits.

- c) There does not appear to be a clearly defensible means to harmonize these two passages if the “believing children” translation is accepted. Because there is no comparable “believing children” statement in 1 Timothy, either harmony must be achieved based

upon assumptions outside of the text, or we must conclude that the standards for elders varied. If the standards varied, then we must ask, “are the scriptures inconsistent?”

FC Summary Observations and Conclusions
Regarding Elder Qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus
(Source: Ron Sawhill, Internet Publication, underscore added)

1) Exegetical Evaluation

- a) Each set of qualifications was composed by Paul, who was initially responsible for the building of both the church in Ephesus and on Crete.
- b) Each set of qualifications was intended to be used independently to appoint elders.
- c) Each set of qualifications must therefore be considered to be independently authoritative and complete.
- d) Combining them into one composite list was never the intent of the writer, nor was it the recipients’ response, and therefore, to do so is not a valid exegetical approach.
- e) For scripture to remain true, either the two sets of qualifications must be harmonized, or some clear guideline must be found to know when one should be employed over the other. No such guideline was found.

2) Issues of Harmony Between the Two Letters

- a) Many qualifications are identical, meeting the standards for harmony by direct correlation.
- b) Several terms, especially the references to “respectable” in 1 Timothy, have no direct analogue in Titus. However, the greater number of specific criteria given Titus can be grouped to communicate the concept of “respectable.” This appears to fulfill the standards for harmony by concept.
- c) The only outstanding difference between the two sets of qualifications relates to the “believing children” versus the “faithful or trustworthy children” translation.

3) Implications of the “Believing Children” Translation

If we accept the “believing children” translation and interpret it to mean children who are [Christians], logical deduction requires that:

- a) The qualifications for elders in Ephesus and Crete were different (i.e., men could serve as elders in Ephesus who would not have qualified to be elders in Crete).
- b) All of an elder’s children, regardless of age, must be believers.
- c) An elder should be removed if any of his children leave the faith.

These logical deductions lead to real problems with scripture and practice:

- a) They establish two standards for elders without guidelines for determining when each should be followed.
- b) They establish differences between the bodies of elders depending upon which standard is used; Timothy's list shows no age bias or family size bias, resulting in a somewhat younger and probably larger pool of possible elders, while Titus' list favors mature children and smaller families, resulting in an older and smaller pool of potential elders.
- c) They require that an elder be removed from service for a reason other than that specified for sin in Matthew 18 or 1 Timothy 5. Requiring the removal of a leader due to children leaving the faith has no precedent in the Bible.

4) Implications of A Single Standard for Elder Selection

- a) A single standard requires the two passages be harmonized.
- b) Harmonizing must respect the guideline that a passage that is uncertain in translation must not rule over one that is more clear or pervasive in scripture.
- c) There is no doubt about the meaning of the passage in Timothy. Titus 1:6 is recognized as a passage that is uncertain in translation.
- d) There are no supporting biblical examples or principles for the "believing children" translation in the scriptures.
- e) Therefore, we must defer to 1 Timothy, and accept the use of "faithful" or "trustworthy" in Titus 1:6 as referring to the relationship between a father and his children.

5) Additional Supporting Evidence for A Single Standard for Elder Selection

- a) The structure of Titus 1:7 links the managing of God's house with how the man manages his children, which is similar in structure and agrees with Timothy's list. This strongly suggests that Titus' list should be read the same way as Timothy's.
- b) All of the other qualifications in both lists address the elder's character and not another person's faith. It would appear that the issue involved here is not the quality of others' beliefs around the elder, but the character of his relationships and how he conducts himself.
- c) By following proper harmonizing guidelines, the products of these two separate qualification lists, the elders themselves, are equal in family requirements, in age-maturity requirements, and in spiritual character requirements.
- d) Harmonization maintains unity between the scriptures and provides a clear and rational path for unity among believers.

Must An Elder Have Children?

The issue of believing children vs. faithful children raises another disputed question: must a man have children before he is qualified to serve as an elder?

There is general agreement that if a man has a family, he must “manage his household well” before he is qualified to care for the church of God (1 Tim. 3:6). That means the family is the proving ground for elder leadership.

Representative Quote: The reason a church leader must have a well-managed home is obvious: If a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3:6). . . . An elder is responsible for leading people to God, to holiness, to obedience, and to witness—crucial matters that must be tested in his own home. Resolving conflict, building unity, maintaining love, and serving each other are essentials to church life that are challenges also in the home. If he succeeds in his family, he is likely to succeed in God’s family. If not, he is disqualified (John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, p. 117).

The point of disagreement is whether or not Paul’s elder qualifications require a man to have a family so his spiritual leadership can be honed, observed and evaluated in that context.

Position #1 - No, a man need not have children.

- a. By far the preponderance of sources consulted for this study hold the view that a man need not be married or have children to qualify as an elder. Paul assumed that children would be present in the home, but he was not mandating that they be present.

Representative Quote: Since older men would be chosen for leadership, it is assumed that the elder would have children (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Titus, p. 430).

- b. Commenting on 1 Tim. 3:2 “husband of one wife”, John MacArthur says, “Nor does Paul intend to exclude single men from the ministry. If that were his point here, he would have disqualified himself, since he was single (1 Cor. 7:8). [We might add that Timothy and Titus, as far as we know, would also have been disqualified, being themselves single.]
- c. In 1 Cor. 7 Paul commends singleness for the sake of undistracted devotion to the Lord. It would therefore seem inconsistent for him to render single men disqualified from elder leadership if they were otherwise qualified.

Position #2 - Yes, a man must have children.

- a. The clear statement of Scripture is, “if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion” (NASB). There is no exception clause for single men or married men without children.
- b. To say that Paul would have disqualified himself if he had insisted that elders be family men confuses the roles of Apostle and elder. Paul was an Apostle, not a local church elder. God

did not require Apostles to be family men (Acts 1:21-22). However, God does require elders to be family men due to their critical role within the “family of God.”

- c. Interestingly, some of those who take the strongest stand on the benefits of family management in preparing a man for elder leadership (cf. John MacArthur above) also teach that not having children does not disqualify a man. Commenting on “keeping his children under control with all dignity” (1 Tim. 3:6), John MacArthur says, “that qualification is not meant to exclude men without children, but merely assumes they will be present” (1 Timothy, p. 116). Commenting on Titus 1:6, he says, “It should be noted that, just as it is not necessary for an elder to be married, neither is it necessary for a married elder to have children. But where there is no marriage or parenthood, a man must prove his spiritual leadership in other areas of family life” (John MacArthur, Titus, p. 32, underscore added).

Note: What is not clear from MacArthur or others consulted for this study is how a single man would go about “proving his spiritual leadership in other areas of family life.” The importance of the family context in developing and demonstrating spiritual leadership seems to require a more definitive explanation of how those men outside the family context relate to these specific qualifications.

- d. Lexical support for multiple children (Source: Don Martin, Internet Publication):

In the first place, the word used for children is *tekna*. The grammatical information regarding *tekna* is nominative, accusative, or vocative plural (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, pg. 399, *teknon* is singular). One cause of confusion among those not conversant with the Greek grammar is when they use such works as *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, they see *teknon* listed as the word in I Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6 (*teknon* is either nominative, accusative, or vocative singular or genitive or ablative plural, see the declension of omicron nouns using *ergon* in *Beginner’s Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 5th Edition, pg. 33-34, by William Hersey Davis).

Rather than providing grammatical detail, Young’s concordance just presents the nominative singular form of our word. However, the actual word in I Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:6 is *tekna*, plural in number. Plurals and singulars are not interchangeable. However, this is not to say that the plural does not include the singular. A determination of the singular application or inclusion when the plural is used is more a matter of interpretation.

In all fairness, there is what is called plurals of class. Plurals of class involve the plural form being used when it can have a singular application, as well as the plural (see *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, 7th Edition, by Dr. Gottlieb Lunemann, pg. 175 and *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson, pg. 408, Heb. 1:2; 9:8, are given as examples of plurals of class). There are a number of examples that fall under the heading of plural of class. For instance, the children (*tekna*, plural) of a widow are to assist their mother/widow (I Tim. 5:4). We know that *tekna* in this case includes *teknon* (a single son/grandson) because verse eight mentions a single son or grandson.

However, there is not anything in the context of I Timothy 3:4 to indicate the presence of the plural of class (the scriptures recognize plurals and singulars, Gal. 3:16, notice “seed,” *opermati*, and “seeds,” *opermasin*). It must be remembered that plural of class is the

exception and not the rule. Just because plural of class occurs in some cases does not mean it can be argued as present when there is no reason for such an assignment.

The argument is advanced that Paul had no other way to have worded this qualification. If the Holy Spirit had said, “having a faithful child,” then more than one child would not be permissible.” This argument sounds convincing and lends credence to the plural contains the singular; therefore, the elder may have only one child and serve.

The problem is the Holy Spirit could have easily worded the requirement so that one child or a plurality would be meant. In fact, the Spirit did precisely this in the case of the domestic requirements for deacons. A prospective deacon may have one child or children and be qualified.

Consider the construction of the requirement: “Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (I Tim. 3:12). Notice how the Spirit used “deacons” (plural) with “children” (plural). The plural used with the plural means one or more children are meant. In the case of the elder, though, you have this construction: “One (singular, dm) that ruleth well his own house, having his children (plural, dm) in subjection with all gravity” (I Tim. 3:4, see vs. 1-3 and Titus 1:6). It is evident that Paul wanted the plural in the case of the children understood as more than one child. As far as the reason for requiring more than one child, I can only speculate. I do know that there is by far more challenge in raising children (addressing the problems they have with each other) than in raising just one child. The elder will be dealing with people (plurality) in the church and often having to address their conflicts and relationship problems. Having raised children (plural) better qualifies him for the task he will be facing.

Must An Elder Have A Wife?

Responses to this question follow along the same lines as “must an elder have children.” Opinion is divided. By far the preponderance of sources consulted for this study hold the view that a man need not be married or have children to qualify as an elder. Perhaps the more interesting question is, “why doesn’t Paul say that an elder must have a believing or faithful children, yet say nothing about a believing wife?”

Representative Quote: “Paul assumes that, if an elder is married, his wife is a believer. The command “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness” (2 Cor. 6:14) has implications for marriage and applies to all believers, but especially to church leaders. In his comment about having “a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas” (1 Cor. 9:5), Paul makes clear that “a believing wife” is the only kind of wife that *any* church leader is to have (John MacArthur, Titus, p. 32).

Note: Some commentators view 1 Timothy 3:11 as Paul’s teaching on wives of elders and deacons: “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” However, for reasons beyond the scope of this study, it seems best to see that passage as Paul’s teachings on women deacons (deaconesses).

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