

## “Having Faithful Children”

by John Isaac Edwards

Among the qualifications of elders is the requirement: “... **having faithful children...**” (Titus 1:6). Let’s explore what this condition requires.

1) **Requires Children.** A childless man does not qualify, just as an unmarried man is unqualified, for he must be “... the husband of one wife, having faithful children...” (Titus 1:6).

“But,” the question is asked, “how many children must an elder have?” Think about how the word “children” is used. When a restaurant advertises, “Children eat free,” if you have one child, does that child get to eat free? When you are encouraged, “Bring your children to Bible study,” are you excluded or included, if you have one child? Now, notice use the Holy Spirit made of “children.” Sarah “...bare Abraham **a son...**” and said, “Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given **children** suck? for I have born him **a son** in his old age” (Gen. 21:1-8). In Matthew 22, the Sadducees referenced the Levirate law recorded in Deuteronomy 25: “Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no **children**, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up **seed** unto his

brother” (v. 24). If the man had one child, did he have seed, or was the man’s brother required to perform the duty of an husband’s brother? Paul wrote Timothy, “Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have **children** or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents...” (1 Tim. 5:3-4). If “children” means more than one, then a widow’s only child would have no responsibility to care for his mother. Furthermore, if he did take care of her, would he not be sinning since the instruction is for “children”? Likewise, a widow taken into the number must “...have brought up **children...**” (1 Tim. 5:10). If she brought up one child, may she be taken into the number? If “children” means more than one, then would not the church be acting without Scriptural authority by taking into the number a widow who brought up only one child? Thus, an elder must have one or more children.

2) **Requires Faithful Children.** Some suggest “having faithful children” simply means he has children who are faithful to him. If so, would that not essentially eliminate the need for any of his

children to be believers for him to be qualified? The word “faithful” in our text is used of “one who has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and the author of salvation (a believer)” (Thayer’s). The word translated “faithful” in Titus 1:6 is translated “believing” in 1 Timothy 6:2: “And they that have **believing** masters, let them not despise them, because **they are brethren**; but rather do them service, because **they are faithful and beloved**, partakers of the benefit...” The American Standard Version says, “... having children that **believe...**” Therefore, an elder must have one or more believing children.

“Is this limited to children at home?”, we are asked. Would not limiting this to children at home effectively disqualify every man whose children leave the house? When our children leave the house, they are still our children. Otherwise, the teaching of 1 Timothy 5:3-4 only applies to children still living at home. If not, why not?

Now the question is raised: “If a man has more than one child, must all of them be faithful Christians?” If so, then should his wife conceive a child after he is appointed, would he

then not become immediately disqualified? Insert the word “healthy” in place of “faithful.” If you were asked, “Do you have healthy children?”, would you answer “no” if 2 of your 3 children were healthy? Would the one sick child render the others unhealthy? John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my *children* walk in truth” (3 Jn. 4). Was John using that in a general way, or was he only joyful when every person he ever converted was faithful? Jesus is the “good shepherd”

(Jn. 10:11), “great shepherd” (Heb. 13:20), and “chief shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4). “...Judas by transgression fell...” (Acts 1:25). Does that disqualify the Lord? We are “...*children* of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). Are all of the Heavenly Father’s children faithful?

We must be careful to not impose more than is demanded and not accept less than is expected. To be Scripturally qualified, a man must have

faithful children as well as meet the other qualifications revealed by the Holy Spirit in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

*“...a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (NIV).*

*“...his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (ESV).*

## Q & A

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**Q-** ‘How many elders must there be? Don’t you have to have three? Everywhere I’ve ever been they said you had to have three. That way, if there were two and they disagreed, the third would break the tie.’

**A-** When relief was sent by brethren in Antioch, “...they sent it to the *elders* by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30).

During the return visit of Paul and Barnabas to cities where churches were established in their itinerant preaching work, the

divine record says, “And when they had ordained them *elders in every church...*” (Acts 14:23).

In Acts 15, when fleshly circumcision was discussed, “...they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and *elders...*” (vv. 2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4).

Acts 20:17 reports of Paul, “And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the *elders* of the church.”

Titus was given instruction to “...ordain *elders* in every city...” (Titus 1:5).

James said, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the *elders* of the church...” (Jas. 5:14).

Peter penned, “The *elders* which are among you I exhort...” (1 Pet. 5:1).

Paul wrote the church at Philippi, “...with the *bishops* and deacons” (Phil. 1:1).

Thus, we always read of a *plurality of elders* in the local church; *more than one*. The exact number is determined by how many men meet the qualifications and are willing to serve; not some arbitrary number.

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