

Introduction:

1. Among all the qualifications for elders, the one whose meaning is perhaps most disputed is "having faithful children."
 - a. Different interpretations place the emphasis and meaning on each different word in that 3-word phrase.
 - b. Some say it must mean multiple children, others say at least one.
 - c. Some say every child of the elder must be a truly faithful Christian.
 - d. Others say that once they leave the house, they no longer count.
 2. Because it deals with the elder's children, we will also look at the qualification "having his children in subjection."
 3. By the end of tonight's lesson, hopefully we will have a better grasp on just what these qualifications mean.
- I. How many children must an elder have?
- A. Before we can even begin on the qualifications at hand, we need to answer this question.
 - B. How "children" is used today.
 1. "On Sunday, children eat for free."
 2. We understand that if someone only has one child, that child still gets to eat free.
 3. If we said "all those with children need to sign something," it would be understood that someone with one child still needed to sign it as well.
 4. We use the phrase "children" to refer to offspring, whether many or an only child.
 - C. How "children" was used in the Bible.
 1. Genesis 21:5-7, Isaac was born, and Sarah said, "who would have said that Sarah would nurse children?" (NASB, ESV).
 - a. She used "children" in the plural, though she only had one child, Isaac.
 2. I Timothy 5:3-4 – honor those who are widows indeed (with no relatives to care for her), but if she has children or nephews, let THEM take care of her.
 - a. IF "children" must always mean multiple children, then...
 - 1) The widow's only son has no responsibility to care for his mother.
 - 2) In fact, the widow's one son, by inference, would be sinning by taking care of her, because the command is for CHILDREN (plural) to take care of her.
 - b. Before we consider this further, let's look at another couple verses in the same chapter.
 3. I Timothy 5:9-10 – descriptions of widows who can be taken care of by the church.
 - a. She must have been the wife of one husband (a dedicated wife).
 - b. She must have raised "children."
 - c. So does that mean if she only raised one child, the church cannot support her?
 - 1) If this means she must have raised multiple children, then the church SINS by supporting a widow who only had one child.

- 2) That also means that her one child has no responsibility to support her (I Timothy 5:4).
 - 3) Therefore, if "children" must mean more than one child, a widow who only had one child is left to fend for herself in a culture which allowed no property to be owned by a woman, and most women were not permitted to have jobs.
 - 4) Then the church must let this woman die of starvation or exposure, even if she has been a faithful Christian all her life!
4. "Children" can be used in the Bible to refer to an only child or to multiple children.
- a. The only child of a widow has the responsibility to care for her.
 - b. Sarah only had one child, but used the plural word "children."
 - c. "Children" was used in the Bible the same way we use it today.
- D. Practical application.
1. It would be better for an elder to have multiple children for a few reasons:
 - a. Children have different personalities, and that experience would help him in dealing with the different personalities within the congregation.
 - b. Children have differences with each other (arguments, etc...) and helping his children overcome these differences would better prepare him for helping members in the congregation overcome their differences.
 - c. Having multiple children will eliminate the "question" regarding whether Paul requires multiple children for the elders.
 2. But because of the way the Bible uses the term, and the consequences from demanding multiple children (with the widow), a man with only one child can fit these qualifications.
- II. Do they ever cease to be your "children"?
- A. Some people cling to the notion that "once they leave your house, they are no longer under your control."
1. The idea is that once they leave the house, if they cease being faithful, they don't count against you anymore.
 - a. If this is true, then if they remain faithful, they don't count FOR you anymore either.
 - b. Therefore, if this reasoning is true, then once they leave your house, they no longer apply at all (good or bad).
 2. The reasoning of "once they leave your house" they don't count against you is self-defeating.
 - a. It is a REQUIREMENT that elders have (present tense) faithful children and have their children in subjection.
 - b. If the children no longer count after they get out of the house, then an elder no longer meets the requirement of having children once his children all grow up and move out.
 - c. This would mean that every elder who does not have children at home is unqualified and needs to step down.

- d. If it can be applied to one child, it must be applied to all his children.
 3. This reasoning of "once they leave the house, they don't count" makes the qualification of "faithful children" meaningless.
 - B. Let us look back at I Timothy 5.
 1. The widow's children (be it one child or multiple children) are supposed to take care of her.
 - a. If this is still a child living at home with mom, how can he take care of her?
 - b. Worse yet, if it is a small child, how is he supposed to care for his mother?
 - c. It should be obvious that Paul is referring to children who are adults.
 - d. They are still considered her children, even though they have grown and left the house to start their own families.
 2. When Paul discusses "children" there is no line of demarcation that says they ever cease being your children.
 - a. The idea that "once they leave your house they no longer count against you" does not agree with what the Bible has to say about children.
 - 1) Children are to honor their father and mother and obey them in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-2).
 - 2) Jesus said the command to honor your parents applied to adults as well (Matthew 15:1-4).
 - 3) The sins of the Gentiles included being "disobedient to parents" (Romans 1:30).
 - 4) Paul said adults would become "disobedient to parents" (II Timothy 3:2).
 - b. The idea that "once they leave your house, they no longer count against you" also means that they no longer count FOR you either, and any elder with no children at home would have to step down immediately.
- III. An elder must "have his children in subjection" (I Timothy 3:4).
 - A. What does it mean to "have his children in subjection with all gravity?"
 1. First, the man who would be an elder must take seriously his responsibility towards raising his children ("with all gravity").
 - a. He must not take it as a light thing.
 - b. Even after they are grown, he must take his responsibility as a parent seriously.
 2. Secondly, his children must be in subjection to him.
 - a. This means that they are not unruly (like you see at almost every restaurant and store), but ones who listen to what their father tells them to do.
 - b. How many times have you seen parents with screaming children say "stop that...I said stop it...I told you to quit that...You'd better quit that..." yet the child never listens?
 - c. This reflects on the parents and how they are raising their children.
 - d. Even after the children are grown, they are still to be in subjection to their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-2, and other verses).

- B. Does THIS include the idea that the children must be faithful Christians?
 - 1. After all, it is said, if they are still in subjection to their father who is a Christian, he would make sure they are faithful.
 - 2. I challenge each one of you to force someone to be a faithful Christian.
 - 3. God does not want FORCED faithfulness, he wants people to DESIRE to be faithful themselves.
 - 4. THIS qualification (having children in subjection) says nothing about whether or not the man's children are faithful Christians.
 - C. How can you tell if a man's children are still in subjection to him, even after they have moved out?
 - 1. Do they still respect him?
 - 2. Do they still obey him?
 - a. A man should be able to tell his daughter to change clothes if she is dressing inappropriately, even if she is grown and married.
 - b. A daughter who respects her father will obey him.
 - c. Esther was raised by Mordecai, but still obeyed him even when she had moved out and was queen (and obeying could have resulted in her death).
 - D. Why is this qualification here?
 - 1. Because if a man cannot rule (run, control, keep in line) his own house, how can he hope to lead the church? (I Timothy 3:5)
 - 2. The church is far more difficult, and if you cannot keep your own kids in line, there is no way you will be an effective elder.
- IV. An elder must have "faithful children" (KJV) or "believing children" (ASV) (Titus 1:6).
- A. There are three main arguments regarding this qualification.
 - 1. The elder must have children who have become Christians.
 - 2. The elder must have children who are faithful Christians.
 - 3. The elder's children must be faithful to him (that is, submissive to his authority).
 - B. Interpretation #1: the elder must have children who are faithful to him.
 - 1. Those who say "yes" make this qualification to be a different way of saying "having his children in subjection."
 - a. This effectively eliminates the requirement for the children to be Christians.
 - b. However, you must ask yourself this question: even IF (and I'm not saying it is) this is the correct interpretation, what does this say about the importance he placed on the Lord in raising his children?
 - c. Do you really want a man as elder who did not instill a love of the Lord in his own children?
 - d. What does that say about his ability to lead others to Christ?
 - 2. The word "faithful" is used elsewhere in the New Testament.
 - a. What part hath he that believeth with an infidel (II Corinthians 6:15), the context demanding that "believeth" (same word as "faithful") means a Christian.

- b. "If any man or woman who believeth..." refers to male and female Christians (I Timothy 5:16).
 - 1) Literally, the verse says "if any faithful man [or] faithful woman."
 - 2) The context demands that this be understood as it is translated in almost every Bible version: believers or Christians.
 - c. Slaves were not to despise their "believing masters" (I Timothy 6:2).
 - d. "Be thou faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10).
 - 1) Does anyone doubt that "faithful" here means a faithful Christian?
 - 2) Literally, it says "be a faithful one unto death."
 - e. Paul uses the word "faithful" as an adjective to describe those who are dedicated Christians.
 - 1) Ephesians 1:1
 - 2) Colossians 1:2
 - 3) Colossians 4:9 (about Onesimus)
 - f. The only times Paul uses "faithful" in a way other than describing a child of God are when:
 - 1) He is discussing the faithfulness (trustworthiness) of God or Christ.
 - 2) Describing a saying (faithful sayings).
 - 3) Describing the gospel (hold to the faithful word).
 - 4) Possibly describing the wife of a deacon (I Timothy 3:11), though this may also mean she is to be a Christian.
 - 5) When using this word to describe a person, Paul NEVER applied it to a non-Christian.
3. Conclusion: this qualification cannot be referring to faithfulness to their earthly father.
- C. Interpretation #2: The elder must have children who have become Christians.
- 1. As we noted earlier, Paul only used this word with humans when they were dedicated followers of God.
 - 2. Yes, this would mean that the elder must have children who are Christians.
 - 3. However, this is not the end of the discussion.
 - a. Paul never used the term "faithful" to refer to someone who was not "faithful."
 - 1) He called people "faithful ministers".
 - 2) He referred to the faithful saints.
 - b. When Paul called someone "faithful," he was referring to someone who was still a faithful child of God.
 - 1) He never uses the term to describe someone who was once faithful, but is no longer walking in the light.
 - 4. So, just because a man has children who are Christians does not automatically mean that he fits this qualification.
 - a. Are they ones who are faithful?
 - b. Or are they ones who have abandoned God?

5. Yes, an elder must have Christian children, but that is not enough.
- D. Interpretation #3: the elder must have children who are faithful Christians.
 1. Because of the way Paul uses the term "faithful," this is the proper interpretation.
 2. In the Bible, to call someone "faithful" is the same as calling them a Christian who is living for God.
 3. So, when we look at the elder, we must ask, "does he have children who are faithful Christians?"
 - a. If the answer is "no," then the man is not qualified.
- V. If a man's children die, is he no longer qualified?
 - A. For the sake of the question, assume the man had two children who were both faithful Christians and both died in a car accident.
 - B. Should he step down because he no longer has any living children?
 - C. Please remember last week we discussed that all the qualifications for elders centered on character traits.
 - D. You look at the children and how they turned out to see the character of leadership in the father.
 - E. You look at the children and see how much emphasis he put on the gospel in his house; that will give you an insight into his character.
 - F. So, if the man's children all die, does that destroy the character trait of leadership and passing on the word of God to others?
 - G. Just like the death of a spouse does not take away that person's character trait, nor does the death of his children.
- VI. Must every one of his children be faithful Christians?
 - A. Faithfulness cannot be determined until after children have moved out.
 1. Children may become Christians and come to services while living with their parents, but that is mostly because they don't have a choice in the matter.
 2. It is after they have grown and moved out that THEIR faithfulness or lack thereof is seen.
 3. How many times have you heard of people whose children become Christians, but when they go off to college, they leave the church?
 - a. That reflects on the importance placed on the gospel by their parents, especially the father who is to be the head of the household.
 4. Paul adds to the qualification of "faithful children" by saying "not accused of riot (prodigal living) or unruly (disobedient)."
 - a. This is something that younger children would never be.
 - b. This implies the idea of older children.
 - B. Some say "yes, every one of them must be faithful."
 1. So, if a man has 7, 10, 13 children, each one of them would have to be faithful.
 2. If one of them ceases to be faithful, the man is no longer qualified.
 3. This would be ideal; no one would doubt that for a moment.
 4. But is this what Paul says?
 - a. Paul's words are "having faithful children."

- b. Let us place some other adjectives there instead of faithful and see if you would insist it means all the children.
 - 1) Do you have sick children? (would you answer "no" if only 4 of your 5 kids were sick?).
 - 2) Do you have grown children? (if you had two married children and one who was in Jr. High, how would you answer the question?).
 - 3) Do you have athletic children? (maybe you have one bookworm and one baseball player. What would you answer: "yes" or "no"?)
 - 4) Do you have faithful children?
- C. III John 4 – I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.
 - 1. John here is saying that he has great joy when he hears his children (spiritual) are faithful.
 - 2. Did he mean that EVERY person he converted remained faithful?
 - 3. Not even all the people Jesus converted remained faithful (see Judas).
 - 4. John used the phrase in a general way, meaning he has great joy when he hears about those he converted remaining faithful.
 - 5. He did not—could not—mean that he was only happy when every person he ever converted was faithful.
 - 6. Instead, John used the phrase to refer to some of his children.
 - 7. So, we can see that an inspired apostle referred to his children, but was not speaking of every last one of them.
- D. If all of a man's children cease being faithful as adults, then it reflects on the father's ability to lead and instill the word of God to others, and that man is not qualified to be an elder.
 - 1. It is true that after the children grow up, they are on their own to make their own decisions.
 - 2. However, if all of a man's children choose to not live for God, that tells you he did not make spiritual things an emphasis, and he is not qualified to be an elder.
- E. But if most of the man's children remain faithful Christians, it reflects on his leadership and emphasis of spiritual things in a good way.
 - 1. Remember, even Jesus didn't keep all of His disciples (not even His apostles) faithful.
 - 2. God, our Father, does not have 100% faithfulness out of His children, either.
 - 3. Again, you cannot force someone to be faithful.
 - 4. Identical twins are raised in the same family, by the same people, in the same way, yet many times turn out completely different.
 - a. One may be faithful, the other may have rejected Christ completely.
 - b. Yet both were raised in a Christian home and reared to respect God.
 - c. Some people just won't live for God.
 - 5. If most of the man's children are faithful Christians, then he would fit the description of having faithful children.

Conclusion:

- 1) Summarizing all of this:
 - a. An elder must have children (at least one).
 - b. The elder must have his children in subjection to him.
 - c. The elder must have children who are faithful Christians.
 - i. This does not say ALL of his children must be faithful Christians (though that would be the ideal).
 - ii. He must have shown the leadership and care of God's word needed to convert his children to Christ.
 - d. They do not cease being your children when they move out.
 - i. It is when they move out that they give objective proof to their faithfulness.
 - ii. It is when they move out that they are the testimony to how they were raised.
 - iii. If most of the children stay faithful, then the father did something right in raising them.
 - iv. If most of them leave the faith, then the father was not a good leader and cannot lead the congregation.
 - e. The most important thing to remember is that the qualifications deal with character traits in the elder.
 - i. The character trait from "children in submission" is one of leadership.
 1. Does he show the leadership needed in his family?
 2. If not, then there is no way he can be an effective leader in the church.
 - ii. The character trait from "having faithful children" is how much emphasis he places on God's word in his life and how he spreads it to others.
 1. If most of his children are faithful Christians, it means he places a lot of importance on following God's word.
 2. If most of his children are not faithful Christians, then it tells you he was not diligent in passing on the word of God to his children.
- 2) Does this qualification apply to everyone?
 - a. If you have children, you are commanded to raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).
 - b. Failure to do this will result in you sinning (disobeying a command of God), but it will likely cost your children their souls.
 - c. If you don't teach them the truth, and show them that you live by it, they will not learn it.