**“FAITHFUL CHILDREN”**

What does the phrase, “faithful children,” mean in Titus 1:6? In this article, I’m more focused on the meaning of the word, “faithful,” than the word, “children.” The truth is: there are TWO possible meanings of this word! The first and most common view is that it means children who are ***faithful to God.*** This is best expressed in the translation, “children who believe” (ASV, NASV). The second view is that it means children who are ***faithful to their father.*** This is best expressed in the translation, “faithful children” (KJV, NKJV). This is NOT an imaginary interpretive problem, for the language of the text will permit either view. And the truth will not come from a superficial study!

Some claim that the word “faithful” ALWAYS means “believing.” However, it can be easily demonstrated that this is false. The Greek word, “pistos,” has TWO meanings. Vine says, “(a) in the active sense means ***‘believing, trusting’;*** (b) in the passive sense, ***‘trusty, faithful, trustworthy.’”*** Hence, the proper meaning of this word depends (as always) upon its context. Further, the ***usage*** of this word also shows that it doesn’t always mean “believing.” For example, the word is used to describe a faithful steward (Lk.12:42; 16:11-12; 1Cor.4:2), a faithful saying (1Tm.1:15; 3:1; 4:9; Tit.3:8), the faithful word (Tit.1:9), and our faithful God (1Cor.1:9; 10:13). The same thing can be easily said of the phrase “faithful children” (Tit.1:6). Therefore, the notion that “faithful” ALWAYS means “believing” is simply NOT true. We are going to have to rely on context to settle the issue...

***In the immediate context,*** the phrase, “having faithful children,” modifies the ***“man”*** to be appointed as an “elder.” There is no grammatical connection to God in the sentence; such a connection is asserted, but not proven! Hence, even though some translations say, “believing,” the question is: believing in WHOM? It may surprise you to learn that the word “believe” does NOT always have “God” as its object! (e.g. Mt.21:25, 32; Mk.16:12-14; Jn.5:46-47; Ac.26:27; 1Cor.11:18; 2Th.2:11; 1Jn.4:1). In Titus 1:6, it is the ***elder/father*** who has “believing children” – i.e. he’s taught them to believe in, and submit to, ***him.*** Contextually, this is the meaning of “faithful (or believing) children.” Furthermore, a father cannot “make” his children be faithful to God; like it or not, that is a personal choice (Ezk.18:4-18).

***In the enlarged context,*** the parallel requirement (1Tm.3:4-5) only requires the prospective elder to have “his children in submission” to him. By having submissive children, a father demonstrates that he “know(s) how to rule his own house.” *To deny this is to deny what 1 Timothy 3:4-5 explicitly says!* Contextually, this is DECISIVE for the meaning of the parallel requirement (“faithful children”) in Titus 1:6! (Parenthetically, a few will assert that 1 Timothy 3:4 includes submission to GOD; however, they will not apply the same standard to the deacons in verse 12!)

***Finally, let’s consider the broad context*** (i.e. the Bible as a whole). For instance, God said through Isaiah: “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me” (Isa.1:2). This means God has “children” who “have rebelled against” Him! In context, these “children” are accountable adults(the Jews, v.3). *Does this mean that GOD is a poor Father? Should He repent? Should He resign from Godhood?* We know better! Yet many expect more from some earthly fathers than from God Himself! We seem to understand the concept of “free will” when we talk to our Calvinist friends; but we forget about it when it comes to the children of a potential elder. To be clear, I refer here to grownchildren, who are no longer in their earthly father’s “own house” (cf. Mt.19:5). Obviously, if they’re still at home, the father is expected to bring them under his control (1Tm.3:4; Tit.1:6).

Having said all this, I also believe that if a man’s children are not Christians, then his leadership abilities should come under serious scrutiny!A competent father will ***usually*** end up with Christian children (there, I said it!). And, if it can be shown that his children are not Christians because he “rules” poorly, then he is not qualified (1Tm.3:4-5). *But, on the flip-side, it is also possible for a father to have children who became Christians BEFORE he did, and subsequently converted their father.* Here is a father who ***technically*** has Christian children – yet I dare say that no one would accept him as qualified in that regard. *Hence, “Christian children”* ***per se*** *is NOT the point of Titus 1:6!*

Finally, let me say that I do NOT believe that a man whose children are only three or four years old is qualified – *even if they are obedient to him.* The phrase, “faithful children,” does not appear in a vacuum. It is followed by the phrase, “not accused of dissipation or insubordination” (Tit.1:6). This means that his children are “not wild and unruly” (i.e. out of control) *– a pattern of conduct* ***observable over time.*** Further, Paul says that they must be “in submission with all reverence” (1Tm.3:4). This means that, ***over time,*** *they’ve learned to respect their father* – which implies children who are older. Finally, the man himself is an ***“elder”*** (Tit.1:5), who is ***“not a novice”*** (1Tm.3:6). *All these things imply an* ***older*** *man,* ***experienced*** *in leading a family.* That requires time – and older children. We may quibble about “how old” his children must be, but it is clear that they must be old enough for the father to have demonstrated that he “know(s) how to rule his own house.”

--Lanny Smith