

## 5th Are Elders Qualified by Their Children?

(for discussion 4-18-2010)

### 2A. Titus 1.5-9

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 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. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

1B. How are we to understand 1.6 regarding children?

A condition or requirement for appointment to eldership is that **his children are believers** (ESV). In *The Case for Covenant Communion* (Athanasius Press, Monroe, Louisiana, 2006; ed. G. Strawbridge), PCA pastor Robert S. Rayburn in a comment on 1.6 sharply states the following: “Paul lays down the requirement that to qualify for consideration for the eldership a man must have believing children. Upon this rock must finally shatter every attempt to argue that parents are not directly accountable for the spiritual issue of their children’s lives. A man with unbelieving children is a man with a defect which disqualifies him from the leadership of the church” (“The Presbyterian Doctrines of Covenant Children, Covenant Nurture, and Covenant Succession,” 194-95).

1C. Basis (Rayburn grounds this conclusion in two ways.)

1) Lexical authority

He gives the translation, “believing in Christ” or “being a Christian” as a point on which “the authorities agree” (195, fn.60). He cites one Greek dictionary (BAG, 671).

2) Covenant succession

This is his most important concern; the statement about the children of prospective elders is part of his emphasis on all Christian parents in relation to the faith of their children. He speaks of God’s promise of covenant succession. In general, this is the promise of God rooted in Gen 17 that He will work out His saving purposes in the lines of generations promising to be God to “you and your children.” That is a promise to the children of the covenant “of the gospel, eternal life in heaven”; it is the covenant of “*grace*” (187). This is a difficult teaching, he acknowledges, so he qualifies it slightly noting that “God has the right to cover more parental sins in one case than in another” (197), but “Few Christians today are prepared to acknowledge that they have a direct responsibility for someone else’s eternal damnation” and David shows that parental unfaithfulness contributes “to the spiritual death of their children” (197).

There are ambiguities in this article for who would deny “the accountability of parents for the salvation of their offspring” (196) in the sense that all parents are responsible to God to do their best to nurture their children in the gospel? But does he tip the boat of ambiguity so radically that it overturns and sinks by its own weight? [**It seems clear that he does**]

2C. Evaluation

1) Is appeal to authority sufficient for such a gigantic claim, or any claim for that matter? [**No, emphatically, no!**] What can we learn by comparing the ESV (**his children are believers**) with the KJV (**having faithful children**) in close consideration of the context (**not accused of riot or unruly; cf. ESV**)? [**translation and context point to outward conduct that radically contradicts the gospel**] Is there reason to restrict the requirement to the child raising years (cf. managing and leaving/cleaving)? [**Yes, these things need point to a big difference for adult children who leave home and function on their own; this leads to the next question**]

2) Are we not to include the children’s personal responsibility with parental responsibility? cf. Ezekiel 18.10-20 (minimized by Rayburn, 197) [**This is a radically important text in this discussion and it puts much more on the shoulders of children for their own sins than what Rayburn allows**]

3) Is “covenant succession” an example of a historical-redemptive misunderstanding? [**I argue in the affirmative, beginning for example with John’s baptism that indicates that the new Israel, the new children of Abraham, the church is constituted by repentance expressed in baptism; see the sermons on Luke 3.1-20**]

When God saves a man, of course he saves him as a father, husband, and worker; he becomes a light of truth in all his relationships but does God promise to save all in these relationships (cf. the unbelieving spouse, 1 Cor 7)? [**He does not guarantee the salvation of all of them but putting 1 Pet 3.1f. with 1 Cor 7 shows that this is a means He uses to save: they may be won by a godly embodiment of the word**] Is it historically-redemptively sound to apply the promises to Abraham directly to Christian parents? [**No, Abraham and his children have historical-redemptive uniqueness; Christian parents are not promised that they will have children, that nations will come from them and kings, and so forth**] Are the children of Abraham, in a sense, still the covenant people? [**Yes, to the end of the age; God is keeping covenant with them though they are under judgment as Rom 9-11 teaches: He keeps covenant with them in their judgment by blessing the nations and then by using the nations to provoke them to jealousy to some some of them as a elect remnant**] Do all children have the promises of the Abrahamic covenant? [**Yes, now the promise to Abraham of a blessing to all families has come to fulfillment in the change from Jewish particularism to national universalism; the gospel is for all families of the earth calling covenant breakers to obedience and salvation by faith in Christ.**]