

Titus 1 and the Conversion of Pastors' Kids

Does flourish the family mean converted kids?

Titus 1:6 is a thorny, little verse that creates a lot of angst among some pastors and churches because it seems to be saying that only if a man's children are Christians can he qualify to be a pastor.

Here is how some of the most used translations word this qualification:

ESV: "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."

CSB: "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."

NIV: "a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."

KJV: "having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

What does this passage mean? It sounds like it's saying that our kids must be known to be converted in order for our husbands to qualify or stay qualified to be pastors? And if it doesn't mean that, then what does it mean?

First of all, it's helpful to remember that what we read in English is a translation from something originally written in Greek. And the Greek word being translated believers in the ESV, CSB, and NIV is also translated "faithful, as the King James version chooses.

Is a man disqualified from the ministry if his children remain unconverted?

The answer to this question must be "no." First of all, we know that conversion is something that the Holy Spirit brings about. Why would a man be disqualified for something he has no power to bring about in his children? Many scholars clear up the issue by pointing out that the word translated "believers" can also mean "faithful." And that fits far more with the rest of the description of elders' kids: "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." Faithful in this context does not mean full of faith in Christ. It means faithful to live under the authority of their father.

My husband, many commentaries, and many other pastors feel that faithful is a better choice.

Here's why:

1. Because the context seems to be using that word as the first of three descriptors of children's obedient, responsive behavior under their father's leadership. It's not that the first one has to do with their spiritual state before God. It's that all three has to do with their pattern of compliance to their father's leadership.

2. Nowhere else in Scripture is there a reference to a pastor's or elders' children having to be Christians for them to qualify. In 1 Timothy 3:4, the mirror passage for elder qualifications, a man is said to need to : "manage his own family well and see that his children obey him." Paul wrote both of these letters. I don't think he (or the Holy Spirit who inspired his words) changed his mind in the time between when he wrote Timothy and Titus. I think he's conveying the same thing with two different phrases.

3. We cannot convert our kids. We can raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We can love them. We can lead them without exasperating them. We can pray for them. We can discipline them. And these are all things that, when done consistently, lead to the very pattern of behavior that Paul says describes the children of men who manage their homes well.

4. We must leave the conversion of our children to the Lord. That is a work only He can do.

5. Think about it logically. A man who is married without children meets the qualifications of an elder. He serves as a pastor until his wife has a baby. Should this man's step down from being an elder or pastor until his child is of age to be saved and shows signs of salvation? And even if that child does come of age and then his father qualifies again to be a pastor, what happens if they have a second child? Do they once more retire from the pastor until that child grows up old enough to be saved and show signs of conversion? It just doesn't make sense, does it? And if that's what Paul really meant, wouldn't he have elaborated on it? It makes a lot more sense that Paul is just using a different turn of phrase and Titus 1:6 to say the same thing about a husband managing his family well in 1 Timothy 3: 4.

Is a man disqualified from ministry if his children are rebellious?

I think it's important to distinguish between strong-willed and allowed to live in rebellion. Strong-willed kids test the bounds of good behavior a lot! In this sense, you could say they rebel a lot. Does that automatically mean that a pastor who has a strong-willed child shouldn't be a pastor? No, it cannot. The point of this passage is whether the father allows his children to live out a pattern of rebellion without correction. He needs to help them turn away from their self-willfulness to live under his authority. The highlight is on the father's responses to his children's behavior, not whether they are naturally compliant or not. This points back to the idea in 1 Timothy 3:5 about an elder needing to manage his household well.

The bottom line is: we are called to live out what it means to be children of the living God before our children. We are to teach them about Him in ways that leaves a legacy in their hearts for use by the Lord whenever, however He and His good plans see fit. We are to pray for the Lord to save them, but we are also to pray that we might glorify the Lord in how we raise and teach our children, regardless of whether they are ever saved. This is caring well for our children, and this is a powerful model for the rest of the families in the church trying to do the same for their children.

Underneath all this teaching and praying for our kids, we need to pray for ourselves and our husbands. It is a monumental task to faithfully live the kind of life God calls us to live. God is holy and perfect. We, His children, are not! How are we to ever reflect Him to THEM, being the weak, sinful people that we are! And on top of being examples and teachers to our kids, we have the eyes of the congregation upon us, too!

I think the key words to remember are "faithful and grace; humble and prayerful." We will never be perfect, but we can every day ask God to give us His grace to be faithful. In humility before God, our kids and our congregation, pray to God for Him to work in us and in our children as only He, by His Holy Spirit can. God has ordained to work through our prayers, so down on our knees we must go, for our husbands, ourselves, and our children. May He glorify Himself, help us, and save them!