

# A WEED IN THE CHURCH



*How a culture of age segregation is  
destroying the younger generation, fragmenting  
the family, and harming church*

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SCOTT T. BR

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*The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches*

220 S. White Street, Wake Forest, NC 27587

[www.NCFIC.org](http://www.NCFIC.org)

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*How to Recover the Original  
Generational Design for Discipleship in the Church*

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The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches  
Wake Forest, NC

# *A Weed in the Church*

How to Recover the Original Generational  
Design for Discipleship in the Church

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## Preface

*How a Culture of Age Segregation Is Harming the Younger Generation, Fragmenting the Family, and Dividing the Church*

*Theology gives the alarm at the first and so often decisive moment, when the language of religion among a people begins to decline from the truth, and when error, like a rising weed, sprouts and grows into a plant. It then gives timely warning, and people hasten to root it out.<sup>[1]</sup>*

—Louis Gaussen, 1840

The foundational assumption of this book is that God's people are required to build their practices out of the fertile soil of sound doctrine and not out of their own perspectives. This means that we

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[1] Louis Gaussen, *God-Breathed: The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, trans. David Scott, ed. John Robbins (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2001), 33.

must have a clear biblical warrant for what we do in the church of Jesus Christ.

So what does the Bible say about discipleship? Are there clear instructions? Are there commands? Are there consistent patterns in Scripture that we should follow? This book attempts to answer these questions. I spend most of my time walking through what the Bible says positively about discipleship in the church.

The main focus of this book is on the solutions found in Scripture. These solutions form the beautiful design that brings the young and old, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish together under the counsel of the Good Shepherd. However, this beautiful design is vastly different from what most churches practice today.

# Section I

## A Weed Discovered





## CHAPTER 1

# *A Child of the Movement*

I entered the stream of history in the 1950s, at the dawn of the systematic, age-segregated ministry movement. I went with the flow, not knowing where the water came from or where it was going, embracing the practices that everyone thought were best. I was a child of the movement.

### **I Did it All**

Like most pastors in my generation, I was a proponent of the age-segregated model of outreach during my early years of ministry. I did it all: youth minister, singles minister, senior pastor, and everything in between. I have worked in the nursery, played guitar for the toddlers, and taught a high school Sunday school class. As an elder, I have been involved in hiring and firing youth ministers. I have made statements such as, "After you hire a senior pastor, youth and music ministers are next." I bought the literature of

Youth Specialties and even started a Campus Life chapter under the leadership of Youth for Christ. I have said, along with the best of them, “It’s a sin to bore a kid with the gospel.”<sup>[1]</sup>

I have argued that you must meet youth on their own ground, and was the greatest advocate for pragmatism in the churches where I served. I proactively and creatively helped to lead churches to think this way. In my twenties and early thirties, I could have been a poster child for modern youth ministry. I read the books, studied the programs, and did my best to ensure that the techniques they espoused were practiced in our church.

This perspective was driven by my own experience as a young man. The workers of Campus Crusade for Christ profoundly impacted me while I was in high school. They brought the gospel, and God saw to it that they would find me. Their ministry, along with the ministry of my father and a local church pastor, played an important role in my conversion. So much so that years later, when I heard the news that the founder of Campus Crusade, Bill Bright, had died, I sat in my office and wept out of thankfulness for those missionaries who had come to my high school campus. They threw out the seed of the gospel, it fell on sinful but fruitful ground, and I was converted. They loved the youth they sought to reach; they loved me.

So I am grateful for how God uses all things for His own glory. I do not despise the kindness of the Lord and how he uses our practices to save the lost and heal the broken. But all is not well

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[1] Char Meredith, *It’s a Sin to Bore a Kid: The Story of Young Life* (Waco, TX: Word, 1978), 53.

on the discipleship front in our churches, and we should not be content to pattern our lives after secular movements and the forces of youth culture.

### **The Errors of Our Times**

In the introduction to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the authors speak of a problem that besets all of us; the errors of our spiritual fathers that become ours.

*They were not so much their own errors, as of the times wherein they lived! Thus do most men take up their religion upon no better account than Turks and Papists take up theirs, because it is the religion of the times and places wherein they live.<sup>[2]</sup>*

I am aware that no matter what historical moment we enter, we can know with certainty that there are problems with the practices of the times and they will affect us.

### **Fragmenting the Family**

Today's church life is highly fragmented into age and life-stage discipleship opportunities. There is a ministry niche for everyone, including infants, toddlers, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders; junior high, senior high, college, singles, young marrieds, marrieds, senior adults, and the divorced. Thirteen-year-olds hang out with thirteen-year-olds; twenties with twenties, marrieds with marrieds, and seniors with seniors.

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[2] "To the Christian Reader, Especially Heads of Families," Westminster Confession of Faith, (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003. First published 1646.), 6.

At a time in history when nearly every social opportunity the secular world offers separates the generations and the family, the church has followed suit. We seem to have fallen in love with popular educational philosophy and target marketing. The church has joined ranks with an age-segregated world.

When I realized this, I became convinced that something was wrong with the whole system. A wild plant had overtaken the garden. I began to believe that the problem could be traced primarily to one fundamental issue: the abandonment of Scripture as it pertains to our discipleship philosophy and practice. It seemed to me that we had built our approach to ministry on a new revolutionary educational and cultural movement.

I don't know how I missed it. I don't know how, after decades of local church involvement and Bible reading, it never occurred to me that the pattern in Scripture is so different when compared to the age-segregated pattern of the modern church. But, as I began to recognize our church's constant practice of separating into different sub-groups I came to three conclusions.

First, age segregation was not founded in Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation you only see age integrated worship and discipleship. And there are a host of commands establishing it.

Second, it is actually tearing the fabric of the family, which is essential to the church. I saw that we are losing the youth in our church. They are increasingly worldly, immature, and dishonoring to their parents and other authorities.

Third, this practice actually came about as a result of easily identifiable forces at work in the culture at large. Various modern movements, which I too had embraced, are the driving factors of the age-segregated world we have created; specifically, the coupling of two major forces apply—the rise of youth culture (something that did not exist in past generations) and the modern public school movement. The church copied the public school model of age segregation and embraced the rising of youth culture.

### **Harming the Younger Generation**

These realizations framed the beginning of my change of perspective. I saw the pain in families. I saw worldliness in our youth and the corrupting influence they had on each other, and it got my attention. I saw severe problems in contemporary church and family life, and it caused me to question what we were doing.

Not only was there significant pain, the generations hardly had anything to do with one another. While the Bible presents a picture of a big family where the older teach the younger, our churches had peers teaching one another. It was like everyone had to figure everything out fresh and on their own within their own peer group, without older and wiser members helping them along the way.

Then I saw what Scripture taught and it all made sense. The generations were meant to be together in the church. This whole culture of age segregation was fragmenting the family, harming the younger generation and dividing the church.

As my concerns increased, the theological issues began to be

clarified in my mind. I decided to do something about it. During an elders' meeting, I drew a graph on the whiteboard to illustrate how our church was fragmenting the families of our congregation. On the top of the graph I listed all the ministries we were providing, and on the left, their function, whether equipping or evangelism. Then I added a third category: fragments family.

### **Dividing the Church**

Literally, every single program or ministry in our church separated the church into subgroups and divided the church family into an age-segregated system of discipleship. Everything we were doing fragmented the church and the family. But this was no different from any church I had ever been a part of. And then I realized, "I'm part of the problem. This is the only thing I have ever done." I was at the whiteboard that day to argue that we needed to shift some, or at least one, of our programs to help keep our families together.

However, this was just the beginning of the changes I would make in my views of youth and family ministry. In the years following, my thinking regarding discipleship methodology underwent a radical transformation. This was fueled by a return to a cardinal tenet of the Protestant faith, *Sola Scriptura*, which argues that God's Word alone is sufficient for faith and practice.<sup>[3]</sup> This principle holds the Bible as the exclusive foundation for all that we do. It is rooted in the belief that man's notions for how to live must be set aside for God's clear directives. These directives are found in His inspired, written revelation, and God's people are to limit themselves to obedience to His revealed will.<sup>[4]</sup>

[3] Deuteronomy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3

[4] "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture:

I progressively realized that the modern-age, segregated ministry model had largely developed from traditions, educational philosophies, cultural shifts, cultural preferences, and the opinions of creative leaders rather than biblical principles. I will speak in detail on this in the next chapter.

### **If All I Had Was Scripture**

If I began with Scripture alone, I would have no reason for age-segregated Christianity. In other words, if all I had was the Bible, it would be difficult—if not impossible—to establish the credibility of current practices.

I was humbled to learn that God’s vision for training young people is beautiful and wise and comprehensive. *And* it stands in sharp contrast to the culture-driven model I once advocated.

I realized that I was blind to the clear patterns of discipleship revealed in Scripture. I realized that I was a child of a movement that was born out of general blindness to Scripture. For twenty-five years of ministry, it did not occur to me that the only pattern in Scripture for discipleship was an age-integrated pattern that was contrary to the age-segregated pattern I was practicing. I was clueless to the fact that not a single godly leader in Scripture ever practiced it. What is worse, it never even occurred to me to

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unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word, and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.” “Of the Holy Scriptures.” The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) republished in *The Baptist Confession of Faith & The Baptist Catechism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian; Carlisle, PA: Reformed Baptist Publications of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, 2010), 3.



question the practice. I was caught in a culture that had rejected biblical patterns.

### **Time to Rebuild**

What I drew on the whiteboard in that elders' meeting is the pattern of most churches in America today. As a general rule, churches separate family members for worship, equipping, evangelism, celebration, and prayer. Most churches are so comprehensively programmed for age segregation that sons and daughters are rarely together with their parents or siblings in the corporate meetings of the church. Why? They have been divided by a vast network of age-segregated activities.

Don't get me wrong, I am not against ministry to youth. In fact, the Bible presents a detailed testimony for how to minister to youth. I love ministry to young people. Being surrounded by them in my work has always been one of my greatest joys. The church in which I am currently a pastor is no exception. It consists of almost 70 percent youth. Our church is a youth ministry. My desire is to see them believe the gospel so they can blossom into great and mighty warriors for Jesus Christ. I desperately want to see them equipped to be salt and light in our culture. And yet, the methods I now use among these young people are vastly different from those I once embraced.

But do methods matter? Or is it only the message that matters?

### **The Preaching of the Gospel Is at Stake**

This book exists because of the importance of the methods and message of preaching the gospel. It defends one of the critical methods the Bible has commanded: that the gospel be preached to the younger generation. The gospel is the central matter for everything in life. It is the highest priority of all, for it is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). Without the priority of preaching the gospel, there is no true conversion, no true church, and no true sanctification in any area of life. The preaching of the true gospel and genuine conversion is the beginning of all transformation.

With such a precious and treasured message, it matters greatly how you communicate the gospel to youth. The Bible clearly spells out specific ways to pass on the treasure of the gospel to youth. There is a biblical methodology for the evangelization and discipleship of youth, and their equipping in the church and in the family.

### **Methods Matter**

The Bible not only talks about the content of the message but how the message is delivered. We should care deeply about what that methodology looks like. If we don't care, or if we think we have a better idea, we are acting like unbelievers.

It is a well-known fact that the modern church is plagued with false gospels. The most visible type is easy believism, where there is no repentance or life change. Yet we must understand that the same thing that delivers a false gospel also gives us age segregation. We get a false gospel by not taking seriously everything God has

said about the gospel. Leave out one detail and we lose the gospel. If we omit repentance, we have a false gospel. If we replace faith with works, we have a false gospel. And the same goes with adding. If we insist on the reliance upon certain spiritual gifts, a prayer formula, or spiritual disciplines for the new birth, the result is the belief in a false gospel because sinners are redeemed by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone. Any change presents a gospel that is not *the* gospel. Similarly, if we leave out critical elements that the Bible has explicitly prescribed for the discipleship of youth, we end up with a false methodology.

### **Ignoring Details**

There are many details given in Scripture for how we ought to preach the gospel to the rising generation. If we leave any of them out, we have compromised the communication of the gospel. We may have the message of the gospel right, but we are not communicating it in the way that God has prescribed.

### **Adding and Subtracting from Scripture**

Does it really matter if we add to or subtract from the methods the Bible presents for the communication of the gospel? I maintain that man sins by adding to or subtracting from the ways that the Bible says that youth are to be gathered and evangelized and instructed (see Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19). The Word of God is sufficient for the communication of the gospel to the rising generation, for it contains “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Here in this book, I document the various ways God has prescribed to communicate the gospel to the next generation. Honoring the details of the Word of God is what preserves the true gospel, and

also shows us how to preserve a right delivery of what is the most important message that can ever be delivered.

*You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*

—Deuteronomy 4:2

*If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

—Revelation 22:18-19

## CHAPTER 2

# *How We Got Here: The Rise of Modern Youth Ministry*

In the last 150 years a massive shift occurred in church and family life, completely changing the sociology of the church. This resulted in shifting the discipleship methodology from a biblical model to a secular model patterned after public education and youth culture. This was unprecedented in the history of the church. It was so different that it transformed the nature of church discipleship, the discipleship agenda of the family, and even the entire way the family related to the church. It actually transformed the structure of the family. It was truly a mega-shift. But it happened so slowly that almost nobody noticed. What happened? Discipleship in the church gradually became age segregated, where the duties assigned to the family were handed off to church workers.

Why is the modern church age segregated? Why are the

teenagers almost always worshipping and learning separately from the adults? Why are the senior citizens separated from the younger generation? Who thought it was a good idea for thirteen- to sixteen-year-olds to develop their own culture? Why is it that, in most churches today, the whole organizational structure is based on age segregation?

Have you ever noticed that the whole pastoral staff is designed for age segregation, that the discipleship curriculum is written for it, that the deployment of teachers is organized for it, that the vision of the church is determined by it, and that the buildings are constructed for it? The fact is, the whole superstructure of modern church life is built around the assumption of the goodness of age-segregated discipleship. It is, in fact, the foundation of church discipleship.

But, is it a good thing for the church to be organized for age segregation? Did we derive the pattern of age segregation from the Bible? Does the Bible have anything to say about whether a church should be age segregated for worship, discipleship, or evangelism?

Where did our modern understanding of age-segregated ministry to youth come from? How did it become an accepted practice? Which historical figures promoted it? Why is this practice defended so tenaciously? The answers to these questions are easily answered in the philosophies, personalities, and conditions that surrounded the rise of modern youth ministry. It is a fascinating study. Follow its development and you can track the footprints of how the church got to be age segregated. With each step you will see how and why the beautiful generational design for discipleship

was pushed aside.

### **Battle Lines**

In the opening scenes of Genesis, the devil's lies and man's inclinations waged war against the authority of God. In the garden, God walked with Adam and Eve and instructed them, saying, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Genesis 2:17). Satan undermined the relationship between God and man, and drew Eve into questioning the goodness behind God's authority. Eve chose knowledge apart from God's order and heeded an opponent of God who offered enlightenment and knowledge at the expense of obedience.<sup>[1]</sup> In doing so, Adam, who embraced his wife's disobedience, endorsed autonomy and self-reliance over humble submission to God. This tension between God's authority and man's inventions shaped human history for the next six thousand years. What started in the garden has been an enormous conflict in every generation since.

I wonder how many tactics and methods used in the modern church today can be traced to this ancient battle?

Allow me to map out just how modern youth ministry during the twentieth century came about as church leaders rejected the sufficiency of Scripture to define and direct methodology. Instead of using Scripture, they embraced the ideas of psychologists, efficiency theorists, business and marketing experts, philosophers, and social activists. More prominent figures in this line of worldly wisdom include Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Horace Mann, and John Dewey. These men advocated or gave philosophical support

[1] Genesis 3:5

to the removal of children from their parents and the grouping of those children according to age.

While church leaders, in many cases, rejected the more extreme applications of these man-centered theories, they did adopt the core presuppositions that undergirded these popular systems of thought and sought to blend them with Christian ideas. The result was radical change in how the church approached evangelism, education, and worship. These changes were built on man-centered ethics that denied the sufficiency of Scripture and attacked the Christian worldview.

What follows is an historical summary of thought leaders and philosophies that have been layered into the thinking—the stream of consciousness—that has made the modern version of age-segregated ministry reasonable to most minds.

### **Plato (428-347 BC): The State Owns the Children**

The philosophical roots of age segregation can be traced at least as far back as Plato, who argued that children should be separated from their parents and trained to be servants of the state.<sup>[2]</sup> Plato wrote:

*All those in the city who happen to be older than ten they will send out to the country; and taking over their children, they will rear them—far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents—in their own manners and laws that are such as we described before. And, with the city and the regime of which*

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[2] “All these women are to belong to all these men in common, and no woman is to live privately with any man. And the children, in their turn, will be in common, and neither will a parent know his own offspring, nor a child his parent.” Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, Translated, with notes and an interpretive essay. 2nd ed., (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 136.



*we were speaking thus established most quickly and easily, it will itself be happy and most profit the nation in which it comes to be.*<sup>[3]</sup>

This was in direct opposition to the Hebraic model that taught direct discipleship involvement by parents. This distinction—familial discipleship versus village discipleship—is one of the key tensions between the Hebraic, or biblical approach, and a Greek, or statist approach, to raising children.

### **Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788):**

#### **Break the Parent-Child Connection**

By the eighteenth century, men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau<sup>[4]</sup> would champion and expand upon Plato's thesis. Rousseau, a wicked man who fathered five children out of wedlock and subsequently abandoned them on the doorsteps of orphanages, became one of the fathers of modern educational thinking. His message included rationalism, relativism, statism, the splitting of families, and the rejection of authority. In view of his treatment of children, it is shocking to realize that his groundbreaking book *Emile* would become one of the most influential works on the education of children. His statist and anti-familial views on education were carefully laid out in his writings:

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[3] Ibid., 220.

[4] Jean-Jacques Rousseau is arguably one of the most important educational revolutionaries, and his book *Emile*, next to Plato's *Republic*, has had a significant influence on twenty-first century education. Building off the theory of the evolution of culture, Rousseau pioneered what is now known as "developmentally appropriate education." Rousseau divides childhood into several developmental stages: (1) Up to age 12; (2) ages 12-16; (3) 16 and up. In the first stage, up to the age of twelve, children are still guided by their emotions. Once they hit the second stage, they begin to move towards logic, as their reason begins to develop. Stage three is essentially the adult stage, and the education of the child is finalized. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Emile: Or On Education*. New York: Basic Books, 1969.)

*If there are laws for adult life, there should be laws for childhood, which teach obedience to [the] others; and just as the reason of each man is not left to be the sole judge of his duties, so too the education of children should not be left to their fathers' capacities and prejudices, especially since it is even more important to the state than to their fathers; for in the natural course of things the father's death often deprives him of the ultimate benefits of having educated his child, but his country will sooner or later feel the effects of what he has done: the state remains while the family is dissolved.<sup>[5]</sup>*

### **Robert Raikes (1736-1811): Father of the Sunday School Movement**

One can hardly speak of modern youth ministry without citing the acclaimed founder of the Sunday school movement, Robert Raikes. Raikes crafted a philanthropic innovation in the late-eighteenth century through which he hoped to raise the literacy and morality of children. In England, Raikes observed that the streets were filled with children who, in his words, were “wretchedly ragged, at play in the street.”<sup>[6]</sup> Raikes described the parents of these children as those who “have no idea of instilling into the minds of their children principles to which they themselves are entire strangers.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Raikes worked for the reformation of the society—bypassing the parents—by seeking to train these children through a network of educators who became their principle teachers. Thus began the

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[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on Political Economy,” in *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by Christopher Betts (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1994), 23.

[6] Gloucester Journal, Nov. 25, 1783, quoted in W. F. Lloyd, *Sketch of the Life of Robert Raikes, Esq., and of the History of Sunday Schools* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1891), 13.

[7] *Ibid.*, 14.

modern Sunday school movement.

At that time, it was largely unheard of and considered inappropriate for Christians to hand their children over to others to disciple them in gospel truth. However, the Sunday school movement, which was born as an outreach to the children of neglectful parents and not as a tool for discipling the children of believers, soon evolved into a vehicle of parental abdication by Christians.<sup>[8]</sup> Busy or slothful parents realized that it was convenient to let other people teach their children than to take the time necessary to do it themselves.

With the rise of the Industrial Revolution in America and England, more and more fathers were leaving the work environment at home for that in the city, which offered more opportunities and higher wages. This meant that fathers had less time with their children. It also meant a fracturing of father-directed discipleship. The Sunday schools were in place and could provide a seemingly excellent substitute. Thus began a two-century long movement of decreasing involvement of parents in the instruction of their children and increasing shepherding by third parties, programs, and ecclesiastical innovations.

It appears as though Raikes had excellent intentions, such as

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[8] There is evidence that, soon after Raikes' announcement, the Sunday school ideology began to be accepted in the Christian community. In his journal entry of July 18, 1784, John Wesley wrote: "Sun. 18. I preached, morning and afternoon, in Bingley church, but it would not near contain the congregation. Before service I stepped into the Sunday-School, which contains two hundred and forty children, taught every Sunday by several masters, and super-intended by the Curate. So many children in one parish are restrained from open sin, and taught a little good manners at least, as well as to read the Bible. I find these schools springing up wherever I go. Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?" (emphasis added). John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* Vol. IV. No. 32 (London: J. Kershaw, 1827), 277.

can be seen in many modern youth group theorists who identify a real problem and want to propose a practical solution. However, instead of looking to scripture for solutions, he instituted a method that was not promoted in Scripture, and this leaven would lead to the leavening of the whole lump<sup>[9]</sup> of church youth ministry.

There was significant controversy around Raikes' method. Some ministers were disturbed that teachers were being paid to work on the Sabbath. Others were concerned because it was mostly women who were doing the teaching. Some believed that reliance on the Sunday school would cause fathers to abdicate their teaching role and transfer it to the school.

The foundational errors that Raikes embraced formed a sandy foundation for a movement that would change the structure and culture of the church, the family, fatherhood, and youth culture itself. J. H. Harris, in his book *Robert Raikes: The Man and His Work*, quotes the Rev. Thomas Burns (from Scotland), as saying in 1798:

*[M]y great objection to Sunday schools is that I am afraid they will in the end destroy all family religion, and whatever has tendency to do this I consider it is my duty to guard you against. I might also show that these schools are hurtful to public religion, for it consists with my knowledge that children stay at home from church to prepare their questions for the even; and their families are divided when they ought to be together.<sup>[10]</sup>*

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What Raikes did is actually only a distant relative of the

[9] 1 Corinthians 5:6

[10] J. Henry Harris, *Robert Raikes: The Man and His Work* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1899), 98.

modern Sunday school and modern youth ministry programs. However, his massive movement grew up in the midst of other unchristian and radical and innovative educational philosophies, which when comingled with the Sunday school movement, would fulfill Burn's prophesy. Raikes' program would become a stepping-stone in the march of unscriptural ideas into the church. Although many of the philosophical presuppositions he established were carried forward, its primary purpose now was to minister to the children of church members. Thus, the Sunday school, as an essential ministry of the church, is a relatively new institution, replacing the parental teaching of Scripture and essentially opposing the home as the center for the socialization and education of youth.

**Horace Mann (1797-1859): The father of Public Education**

The belief that man is able to be made perfect, given the right instruction, gave rise to the public school movement. In 1837, Horace Mann, a Unitarian, was elected to be Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. He successfully imported the Prussian compulsory education model and established it in America in the form of "common schools." He is best known as "the father of American public education." What was so significant about this? The church would also adopt this revolutionary model.

Anne Boylan makes a direct connection between the Sunday school movement and the public school movement stating that in many ways the Sunday school movement paved the way for public schools to be fully established in America: "[T]he expansion of public schooling to include all children paralleled and reinforced

the same process in Sunday schools<sup>[11]</sup> ... Without Sunday schools, the ‘common school ideal’ would never have worked.”<sup>[12]</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, more trendy theories and “isms” proliferated. Each was designed to replace the biblical worldview. Some of them continued to expand the boundaries of educational theory by further removing parents from the discipleship of their children, increasing the role of the state and distancing education from the fear of the Lord.

This gives us a window into the true effects of age segregation and the destruction of the family. The place of education, economy, and spiritual life has been transported out of the home and into schools and age-segregated church programs.

### **The Institutionalization of Age Segregation in the United States**

Systematic age segregation in schools in the United States did not emerge until 1848, when Quincy Grammar School in Boston, Massachusetts, was established. (Before this time, the concept of separate grades did not exist.) The architecture of the building communicated its philosophy, with twelve rooms of equal size. It was called “the egg crate plan,” allowing for fifty-five students per room. This pattern rapidly replaced the one-room schoolhouse and became the universally accepted method of education. As time passed and the architectural features matured, students would find themselves walking down long, high-ceiling corridors with classrooms on each side.<sup>[13]</sup> This same architectural design can

[11] Ibid., 19.

[12] Ibid., 59.

[13] Charles Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education* (New

be seen when you walk down the hallways of most churches in America today. In the same way that “the egg crate plan” replaced the one-room schoolhouse, so sophisticated buildings with a room for every age, grade, and life-stage replaced one-room churches.

While writing this book, I spent some time working in a renovated church building that was built in 1850—the dawning of a great conflict of two worldviews on education and the transformation of church life. This church building was designed as a one-room church where the whole church came together. There were no nurseries and no classrooms. As the switch in educational models entered the church, however, the one-room design no longer fit the function of modern church life. This church was converted into an office building because its architectural design no longer suited the requirements of modern, age-segregated church life.

As the one-room schoolhouse gave way to the twelve-room schoolhouse, so the one-room church gave way to the twelve-room church. The shape of the “egg crate” school demanded the new shape of the church.

### **John Dewey (1859-1952): The Age-Segregated Classroom**

No man would have a more profound influence in systematizing and institutionalizing age segregation than John Dewey, the father of modern education. An atheist, a hater of the Bible, a pragmatist philosopher, and a signer of the *Humanist Manifesto*,<sup>[14]</sup> Dewey embraced an evolutionary and messianic view of the state. In his

York: Random House, 1970), 166.

[14] “Humanist Manifesto I,” American Humanist Association, [www.americanhumanist.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/About\\_Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_I](http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I), Sept. 17, 2010.

view, educational theory was an offshoot of evolutionary theory, and evolutionary theory was the true antidote to the plague of Christianity. The age-segregated classroom would become the vehicle for capturing the minds and hearts of children and transforming society.

John Dewey believed that schools were the best tool to spread a common democratic and humanistic culture. He was very successful at normalizing and spreading humanist-based, age-segregated schools across America. The church copied the methodology but was largely unaware of the philosophical principles that Dewey intended for the children of America.

### **Charles Finney (1792-1875): Pragmatism's Poster Child**

Charles Finney represents a departure from the old methods of evangelism and discipleship. He epitomizes the abandonment of simple preaching, Scripture reading, personal evangelism, and prayer as the means of conversion. What is normal to us today, Archibald Alexander, first professor of Princeton Theological Seminary,<sup>[15]</sup> declared to be “new theology” in his day.<sup>[16]</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, it became the “new religion” in America.<sup>[17]</sup> Finney threw off biblical categories and invented his own, claiming that there were no discernable biblical patterns for us to follow.<sup>[18]</sup>

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[15] Princeton Theological Seminary. [www3.ptsem.edu/intContent.aspx?id=1264&menu\\_id=67](http://www3.ptsem.edu/intContent.aspx?id=1264&menu_id=67), Oct. 7, 2010.

[16] Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, 2002), 273.

[17] *Ibid.*, 277.

[18] “In discoursing from these words I design to show: I. That, under the gospel dispensation, God has established no particular system of measures to be employed, and invariably adhered to, in promoting religion.” Charles G. Finney, “Measures to Promote Revivals,” *Lecture XIV, Revivals of Religion* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company; United States of America), 280-81.



To those who opposed him, Finney gave three arguments: (1) the old evangelistic and discipleship methods of historic Christianity, characterized by the preaching of the Word of God and the establishment of biblically governed church life, do not work; (2) the ends justify the means; and (3) the Bible is silent on methods; therefore, we can do whatever it takes to reach people.<sup>[19]</sup> Finney is one of the great ideological grandfathers of the modern youth-ministry movement with its emphasis on pragmatics, the ends justify the means theology, and the practical rejection of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. These are the same arguments that the early practitioners of the modern youth-ministry movement embraced.<sup>[20]</sup>

Finney popularized many things that were new to the church in his time. He used the “altar call,”<sup>[21]</sup> the “old sawdust trail,” the “mourner’s bench,” the pressured appeals to receive Christ, emotional manipulation, counting converts prematurely, and other tactics designed to coerce an audience into particular results.

The pragmatism of our current environment has come

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[19] Charles Grandison Finney. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Company, 1835), 232.

[20] Gary Blair Zustiak, John Mouton, Kevin Greer, et al., *Student Ministry That Leaves a Mark: Changing Youth to Change the World* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2003), 16-17.

[21] “It was in this context that many of the best men stated the case against the altar call. Their arguments may be summarized as follows: 1. They alleged that the call for a public ‘response’ confused an external act with an inward spiritual change. 2. They argued further that this procedure had inevitable serious consequences. Those who come forward and who experience no saving change are liable either to go back to the world, hardened in the idea that ‘there is nothing in it’, or they may join the church, assured that they have done all that was required. Thus the anxious seat, in the words of Samuel Miller, favored ‘the rapid multiplication of superficial, ignorant, untrained professors of religion.’ 3. There was agreement on all sides that many who went forward in response to the appeal subsequently showed that they remained unconverted. 4. The altar-call evangelism not only confused regeneration and faith but it also confused the biblical doctrine of assurance.” Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, 2002), 366-368.

from the attempts of theologically compromised church leaders, like Finney, to synthesize biblical Christianity with the very philosophies that stand in opposition to it. Finney's pragmatism is an important historical marker for establishing the legitimacy of new measures and the favoring of manipulation.

### **The Invention of Adolescence**

Another emerging cultural force that promoted educational age segregation came in the form of a change in our understanding of youth itself. It is important to recognize that teen culture, as we know it today, did not exist in its modern form until the 1950s. At the beginning of the twentieth century, G. Stanley Hall popularized the term *adolescent* in order to categorize young people as having special needs.<sup>[22]</sup> As time passed, it became a fixed category of generational separation and cultural identification.

This principle stands in sharp contrast to Scripture. While the Bible does speak of various life-stage categories such as *fathers, children, nursing babes, and the weaned child*, Scripture only presents two major age categories: older and younger.<sup>[23]</sup>

As children began to be educated in a systematic, age-segregated world, the church imitated it. By the end of the 1940s, the practice of age-segregated education had come fully into the mainstream of church life, as this principle of separation began to be applied more and more broadly throughout Christian culture.

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[22] Robert Epstein, Introduction, *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen* (Sanger, CA: Quill Driver/Word Dancer, 2007), 73.

[23] John M. G. Barclay, "There Is Neither Old Nor Young? Early Christianity and Ancient Ideologies of Age." *New Testament Studies* 53.02 (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53: 225-41.

## **The Emergence of Youth Rallies**

During the 1940s and '50s, Percy Crawford saw how powerful music was in the lives of teenagers and used it as a way to relate to them. He rebranded Christianity with the sounds of modern music by adding Christian lyrics to secular songs. He held youth rallies and camps using the means of the pop culture.<sup>[24]</sup>

As youth rallies rose in popularity beginning in the 1950s, the concept of teen evangelism was born. It was activated primarily through Youth for Christ, whose first staff member was Billy Graham.<sup>[25]</sup> From the 1950s to the end of the century, this unprecedented method grew to become a dominant force in youth ministry.

However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that age-segregated youth ministry became a behemoth. It rapidly gained speed and increased in reach during this period. What was once informal and inconsistent became more and more formal, systematic, and formulaic until it reached industrial strength during the last quarter of the century. I, myself, sponsored a Campus Life group and held Child Evangelism's 5-Day Clubs. In towns all across America, churches were offering a variety of youth-oriented clubs: Pioneer Girls, Christian Service Brigade, Young Life, AWANA, Boys Brigade, and Royal Ambassadors.

## **A New Kind of Church Leader**

In the middle of the hubbub and clamor surrounding youth

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[24] Gary Blair Zustiak, et al., *Student Ministry That Leaves a Mark*, 16.

[25] "About Youth for Christ: Our Vision, Mission, and Story," Youth for Christ USA, [www.yfc.net/Brix?pageID=12575](http://www.yfc.net/Brix?pageID=12575), Nov. 25, 2009.

ministry, a new category of church leader emerged: the youth minister. Never before had anything like this existed. Youth ministers became program administrators whose job requirement was to deliver whatever would get kids interested in God.

Modern youth ministry burgeoned and became a big time consumer with high budget facilities, technology, and advertising. Inside the church, it meant doling out significant dollars for youth centers, concerts, and professional stage rigging and lighting.

I was a youth pastor and a senior pastor during this period of expansion in youth ministry. Even I understood how changeable and experimental it was. We were always tweaking in order to make the ministry more “effective.” We introduced one innovation after another to give it more crank.

While I understood the principle of experimentation, I did not fully realize at the time that this new kind of ministry represented a major shift in church life. What I was doing was a historical aberration in terms of church life.

### **From Novelty to Fixed Practice**

It was the age of creative, pragmatic Christianity. During the last half of the twentieth century, the spirit of the age exalted creativity and experimentation. In Bible colleges and seminaries, the common evaluation grid included: “If it works, it must be good.” Growth was king, and we told ourselves, “If it’s growing, we must be doing something right.” That was how we approached youth ministry.

These new methods were conceived to reach young people more effectively and grow churches. Because of the initial increase in church attendance, the widespread reception, and the years of practice, these methods are now accepted as a necessary part of church life. This happened in spite of the evidence of the inability of youth ministry to provide the soil to grow committed, mature believers in Christ.

The massive investment of the modern church in this system of youth ministry and the long acceptance of the philosophy, practices, and institutions that promote it, have led many to believe that this kind of ministry is authorized by Scripture. Furthermore, Christian leaders and parents believe that if we abandon modern youth ministry, we abandon youth. They feel it is the best way to teach and evangelize youth.<sup>[26]</sup>

### **A New Soil**

Modern youth ministry has risen out of a soil composed of many different elements. For over two hundred years, the soil in which the weed of age segregation grew was incrementally prepared with the lofty deposits of platonic philosophy, the loamy organics of rationalism, the ethereal waters of evolutionism, and the breathable but allergenic air of pragmatism. These diverse elements, which created a context for this growth, took time to accumulate; but by the end of the twentieth century, they had produced a new plant that had never been seen before.

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[26] Dean Borgman gives several reasons for the rise of modern youth ministry: "Adults lack knowledge of youth's difficulties, fear rejection and derision, have limited time and energy, are apathetic, and are preoccupied with the adult world. Consider the neglect of youth and youth ministry a little more deeply." Dean Borgman, *Prolegomena to Youth Ministries* (S. Hamilton, Massachusetts: Center for Youth Studies, 1988), [www.urbanministry.org/wiki/prolegomena-youth-ministries](http://www.urbanministry.org/wiki/prolegomena-youth-ministries), Sept. 30, 2009.

The fact is that systematic, age-segregated ministry is undeniably non-Christian in its origin. Men at war with God developed the philosophies that gave birth to it, and churchmen adapted those philosophies.

I am not suggesting that churches that use this practice are intentionally pursuing paganism. But I am suggesting that we have inadvertently adopted non-Christian philosophies and practices for discipleship of youth. While the *intentions* of churches may have been exemplary, our *inventions* overthrew the fixed revelation of Scripture. In so doing, we began to dismantle the biblical order of discipleship in the church and family life. However, the heart of the matter was this: the church gradually adopted radical, unbiblical ideas because we diminished our reliance on Scripture alone.

## CHAPTER 3

# *About Age Integration*

In sharp contrast to what we have been accustomed to, the Bible casts a very different vision of christian community. God loves to bring His people together. In contrast to modern discipleship, the gatherings that God has commanded and promoted have included all the generations meeting together—from nursing babes on up. These gatherings are important components in helping us understand the heart of God on the methods that should be used for discipleship.

Specific patterns for ministry are spelled out in Scripture. In both the Old and New Testaments, all ages participated in discipleship experiences that were, from all outward appearances, systematically age integrated.<sup>[1]</sup> By considering these gatherings we can better understand the heart of God regarding the methods that

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[1] Deuteronomy 12:6-12, 29:10-11, 31:12; Joshua 8:35; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Acts 20:9; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-22

should be used for intergenerational, age-integrated discipleship.

### **Examples in the Old Testament**

Throughout the Old Testament, we consistently find examples of age-integrated gatherings for worship, celebration, and instruction. However, we find no clearly defined examples of age segregation. In everything He does, God communicates something about His character, His heart, His wisdom, or His Son. A number of the Old Testament gatherings were to fulfill various elements of the ceremonial law and, being fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ, are no longer obligatory in and of themselves. However, they all communicate divine wisdom for the gatherings of God's people.

#### *Whole Households*

In Deuteronomy 12:6-12, Moses commanded parents to bring their whole families to celebrate before the Lord:

*“There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you ... And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.”*



In Deuteronomy 29:10-11, we find entire households gathered before Moses to listen to his speech just before his death:

*“All of you stand today before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives – also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water.”*

In Deuteronomy 31:12, Moses instructs the children of Israel to gather with their whole families: “Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law.”

In 2 Chronicles 20:13, we read of a gathering that took place before a great battle: “Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the LORD.” They were gathered to ask for divine help because the Ammonites and Moabites were ready to attack. God granted the help for which they prayed, and after the conflict, they assembled again to bless Him.<sup>[2]</sup>

### *Little Ones and Strangers*

Joshua 8:35 offers one Old Testament examples of age integration. Moses had instructed the children of Israel to gather on the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim for the reading of the blessings and curses.<sup>[3]</sup> After the people did this, Joshua read the whole Book

[2] 2 Chronicles 20:26

[3] Deuteronomy 27:11-13

of the Law before the entire congregation, including the children: “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.”

### *Nursing Babes*

In Joel 2:15-16, the prophet urged the people to enter into a time of repentance and issued a command to gather the whole congregation, including “children and nursing babes.” All were to be present, from the oldest to the youngest, even the bride and bridegroom on their wedding day:

*Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room.*

### **The Use of the Old Testament**

It has been suggested that my arguments emphasize Old Testament passages of Scripture which have no bearing on the church today. Whether you embrace this perspective or not, I submit that the arguments for age integration do not rest solely on the Old Testament. In fact, we do not need the Old Testament to prove that the normative pattern of church life was age integrated. The New Testament is clear on the matter of age integration and youth discipleship, and it is consistent with Old Testament patterns

and principles.

That being said, one of the hermeneutical premises of this book is that the New Testament supports the use of the Old Testament in the church today. For example, Paul the apostle often employs the Old Testament to make practical arguments of theology for the New Testament church, such as in Romans 3:10-18 where he uses eight Old Testament texts<sup>[4]</sup> to prove the sinfulness of man. Paul even uses Old Testament case law to argue that elders “who rule well be counted worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17-18) and those who “have sown spiritual things” ought to “reap . . . material things” (1 Corinthians 9:9-11). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus expounded the Old Testament to show that it spoke of Himself.<sup>[5]</sup>

Furthermore, the New Testament is filled with quotations from the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul draws upon Old Testament Israel as an example for God’s people today: “Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted” (1 Corinthians 10:6). In 2 Corinthians 8:15, he uses the gathering of the manna in the Old Testament to teach in the New. Paul also says, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). He displays the goodness of God toward His people in 2 Corinthians 9:9, which quotes Psalm 112:9.

It is important to note that the New Testament affirms the

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[4] Psalm 5:9, 10:7, 14:1-3, 36:1, 53:1-3, 140:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 59:7-8

[5] Luke 24:27

Old by demonstrating that the Old speaks of Christ and is fulfilled by Christ,<sup>[6]</sup> that the Old gives us a law to obey,<sup>[7]</sup> and that the Old provides examples of faith by which we ought to be encouraged to look unto Jesus.<sup>[8]</sup> All of these display the “general equity” of the Old Testament, declaring that it is useful for the New Testament church.

One of the most important New Testament texts on the use and authority of the Old Testament in the church is 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The phrase “All Scripture” has primary contextual reference to the Old Testament. Therefore, Paul is stating that every single verse in the Old Testament is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

We ought to use the same methods of handling the Old Testament as we see Jesus and the writers of the New Testament using. There are millions of people in churches who have a dark view of the Old Testament and, therefore, are unwilling to interpret it in the same way the New Testament writers did. Some people actually dislike parts of the Old Testament, and they are not afraid to tell you that the inspired Word of God in the Law and Prophets is offensive to them. They may falsely declare that the Old Testament is about rules, and the New Testament is about relationships. They may even say that the God of the Old Testament is harsh and the New Testament Jesus is gentle. They seem to be unaware that every word of the Old Testament is a word of Christ and written through

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[6] Matthew 27:46 cf. Psalm 22:1

[7] Matthew 5:17

[8] Hebrews 11:1-12:2

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

### **Examples in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, not only is there is no hint of age-segregated ministry, but the explicit examples are all age-integrated. Throughout the New Testament, the meetings of the church included children during the preaching of the Word of God and prayer.

#### *The Ministry of Jesus as the Pattern*

Jesus ministered to all ages. He demonstrated how to minister to youth, and there is no evidence that He segregated them or held special age-targeted meetings. He taught them at the same time He taught the adults. His incorporation of children in the daily activities of spiritual life is shown in Luke 18:15-16, where parents were bringing their children to Jesus and the disciples were rebuked for trying to send them away. Jesus wanted the children there.

*Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."*

Another example of Christ ministering to whole families is found in the account of the feeding of the five thousand. In Matthew 14:14-21, we see that Jesus taught all those who had come to Him. Notice Matthew's closing comment: "Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women

and children.” The account of the feeding of the four thousand is very similar, and once again we see the presence of whole families, including children.<sup>[9]</sup>

*During the Preaching of the Word*

In Ephesians, it is clear that children were being taught in the meetings of the church along with other age groups, because Paul addressed them directly in his letters that were to be read to the entire assembly. In Ephesians 6:1-4, he wrote:

*Children, obey your parents in the lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

Age integration can also be seen in the Colossian church through Paul’s address to the various positions in the family unit. In Colossians 3:18-22, Paul writes directly to the various categories of people who would be present when the letter was read:

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.*

[9] Matthew 15:38

*Body Life*

Children seemed to be present during times of prayer in the book of Acts. For example, on a very touching occasion, children joined in praying with the other believers upon Paul's departure from them:

*When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. (Acts 21:5-6)*

All of these show that youth were integrated into the gatherings of the church. Biblical writers seem to assume that youth should not be segregated from the other members. Since it has been God's plan in every era of redemptive history to include youth in age-integrated meetings for instruction, celebration, and worship, would it not be wise to receive this as a demonstration of the prime atmosphere for youth to grow in Christ? Should we not keep them with the rest of the church body, where they can be exposed to its various gifts, rather than pulling them out on their own? The words of Romans 12:4-5 are particularly applicable here: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

While the biblical record is clear that age-integrated gatherings were the norm in both New and Old Testaments, it is not my position that a gathering is biblically ordered only when all ages are present. For example, I do not believe it would be

wrong for elders in a church, with the blessings of fathers, to teach matters of theology to young men in the church. (I'll address this more specifically in chapters 6 and 9.)

### **Historical Precedent**

Throughout history, godly leaders have mirrored this same pattern of including all ages and life stages in the meetings of the church. For example, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and Matthew Henry explicitly expressed their passionate desire to have the Word of God preached to the youngest child.

Martin Luther understood how important it was to minister to youth during the meetings of the church:

*When I preach, I sink myself deep down. I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, of whom are here in this church above forty; but I have an eye to the multitude of young people, children, and servants, of whom are more than two thousand. I preach to those, directing myself to them that have need thereof. Will not the rest hear me? The door stands open unto them; they may be gone.<sup>[10]</sup>*

John Bunyan, the tinker-turned-preacher who gave us *Pilgrim's Progress*, spoke of the importance of having children in the church meeting:

*You should also labor to draw them out to God's public worship, if perhaps God may convert their souls. Said Jacob to his household, and to all that were about him, "Let us arise and go up to Bethel;*

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[10] Martin Luther, *Table Talk of Martin Luther*, updated and revised from a translation by William Hazlitt, Esq. (Philadelphia, PA: The Lutheran Publication Society, 2004), 284.



*and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress” (Genesis 35:3). Hannah would carry Samuel to Shiloh, that he might abide with God forever (1 Sam. 1:22). . . .*

*If they are obstinate, and will not go with you, then bring godly and sound men to your house, and there let the word of God be preached, when you have, as Cornelius, gathered your family and friends together (Acts 10).<sup>[11]</sup>*

Matthew Henry, one of the most popular Bible expositors in all of history, sat as a boy under the meaty expositions of his father, Pastor Phillip Henry, and then followed in his footsteps. He would later write: “Little children should learn betimes to worship God. Their parents should instruct them in his worship and bring them to it, put them upon engaging in it as well as they can, and God will graciously accept them and teach them to do better.”<sup>[12]</sup>

He carried this conviction all his life, as seen in this statement from his well-known biblical commentary: “It is for the honour of Christ that children should attend on public worship, and he is pleased with their hosannas.”<sup>[13]</sup>

The biblical record is clear; children were included in the gatherings of God’s people. And for most of Christian history,

[11] John Bunyan, “Family Duty: A Father’s Duty to His Family in General,” in *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*, accurately reprinted from the author’s own editions. With editorial prefaces, notes, and life of Bunyan, Vol. 2, Part 2, (Glasgow, England: Blackie and Son, 1863, originally published in “Christian Behavior,” 1663), 556.

[12] Matthew Henry, Comm. on 1 Sam. 1:28, in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008, originally published in *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. II [Joshua-Esther]*, 1708), 304.

[13] Matthew Henry, Comm. on Luke 2:41, in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008, originally published in *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. V [Matthew-John]*, 1721), 1459.

children were present in the corporate worship of the church. Why then, do most people still ask, “What can children really get out of church?”

The answer is this: children get something out of everything they experience. So we should abandon the idea that “my child gets nothing out of big church.” This is subterfuge and misinformation. Plus, nobody gets everything out of anything, particularly a sermon. We may say, “Our children don’t get anything out of the services.” but we can’t really believe that.

Consider what we believe about babies in the womb; we believe that the sounds and even the attitudes surrounding them are affecting their developmental process; therefore, some people play classical music, and sing to their children while still in the womb.

Children get something out of everything they experience. This is why there is great value, even for an infant, to experience authentic worship in the meeting of God’s people. As they watch their fathers give of the family’s resources during the offering, something is being communicated. As they watch the adults “worship in spirit and in truth” John 4:23, something is being communicated. And as they grow up, their understanding will increase. They don’t get everything, but they can get something as they observe the fervency and genuineness of the church’s expression of love for God. Children progressively understand what a parent and the wider church members love and appreciate. Year after year, their understanding builds. Year after year the well is filling up.

What effect does the teaching of the Word have on a child? Only God knows what a child gets from the teaching or the praying or the singing. Only God knows what a child gets out of seeing men standing up and speaking of the things of God. Only God knows what a child gets out of experiencing Christian community.

Let me illustrate how valuable it is for a child to be included in the corporate worship of the church. Many years ago, there was a family in our church who needed some help with their children during the church services as a result of a new baby and lots of little ones. My wife Deborah offered to hold their one year old in church. She held that child and had her sit with her for about two years. She is now 12 years old, and the other day I asked her what she remembered most about that time. Without pausing an instant she said, “The thing I remember the most was when the pastor would say something that Aunt Deborah loved, or if there was a song she cherished or if a prayer was prayed, she would say, ‘Mmmmm, Amen’. When my Aunt Deborah would sigh like that, I did the same thing.” This was what she was able to get out of being in church when she was an infant.

### **The Bible Alone**

If we only had the Bible as our guide, would children be separated from their parents during the meetings of the church? Would we set up children’s church? Is there any biblical evidence for nurseries? Would we have a singles group, or a senior class? Did the apostles ever organize a Sunday school, a youth rally, or any kind of age-segregated gathering? Are there any commands or examples to follow in Scripture for age segregation? Of course, the answer to all of these questions is “No”. The disciples suffered rebuke from their

## ABOUT AGE INTEGRATION

Master for trying to keep the children away while He was teaching the multitudes. Let us bring our children back into the meetings of the church in the way that is consistent with both the Old and New Testaments.

## Section II

A Recovering Biblical Order  
in Church and Family Life

## CHAPTER 4

# *Scripture Is Sufficient*

How do we make our way back to a biblical model of discipleship in the church and family?

The current design for discipleship breaks the church into a fragmented sociology of interests and ages. It creates new sub-cultures. It actually raises a social structure that stands in sharp contrast to Scripture, as the following chapters will illustrate. The real problem, however, is that it matches poorly with the clearly communicated contours of Scripture.

### **Turning to the Master Builder**

Imagine being left to the task of building a house without any blueprints. How much more daunting to be left to deal with eternal souls without instruction! What would you do?

Let us say that you have just become a pastor and you find out that God's message to you is: "I have given you the ability to reason and so I am leaving the methods of youth discipleship up to you to figure out. This is an area of Christian liberty, so you'll need to determine the best ways to reach the next generation through trial and error. Just remember that their eternal souls are on the line and you have to give an account for them." What a nightmare that would be! Sadly, this is how much of modern discipleship ministry is conducted, as if there were no instructions.

Thankfully, God has left us with instructions. The Bible is not silent on these matters; within its pages is a vast treasury of wisdom for every aspect of youth discipleship. The book of Proverbs alone contains 915 verses on the subject, and most of them are words of a father to his son. This does not count the hundreds of other texts and narratives, such as the many stories of family life in the book of Genesis, that instruct us in the attitudes and actions that are meant to fill all of life and, therefore, carry important implications for discipling young people.

It's hard to miss the beautiful design of discipleship that Scripture presents. God is the Great Designer and His designs are beautiful. When He made the world and all that was in it, He said, "It was good." (Genesis 1:4-25) When He gave His Word to His people He said that it was, "perfect," and (Psalm 19:7) and "pure" (Proverbs 30:5). It is through this wonderful medium that He has communicated His design for the shepherding of His people. He loves His people and He provides the very best. He is the Good Shepherd who leads His flock to the green pastures and still waters through wisdom. . "Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths

are peace” (Proverbs 3:14-18).

Gods’ design for His people has been shown from the beginning. For example, Adam and Eve were given clear instructions for how to live in the garden. Cain and Abel knew how God wanted them to worship. In the wilderness God explained in careful detail how His people would worship in the Tabernacle. In the promised land He showed them how to order every part of their lives from their legal system to their patterns of worship. God has not left it up to the imagination of man to conduct worship or discipleship. In the era of the new covenant, He explained its worship, leadership, and conduct. The apostle Peter affirms this: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him” (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing you could ever conceive could be better or more beautiful than God’s design for discipleship.

### **God’s Ways Are Beautiful**

Think about how God has ordered His people in the church. He makes them a “family” (Matthew 12:49-50; 1 Corinthians 1:10), “a body” (Ephesians 1:22-23), a “building” (1 Peter 2:5), a “flock” (Acts 20:28), a people for God’s own possession (1 Peter 2:9). He gathers people from every tongue, tribe and nation, as brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers in the faith. He brings them together as “one body” (Romans 12:4-5). They are a spiritual family. He brings them together rather than separating them according to age. This is His beautiful design. It is beautiful in so many ways.

Imagine with me a church without a generation gap. The



whole family worships together. Marrieds and singles and old and young and people from whole families and broken families worship together. A little child hears the singing and preaching while in his father's or mother's arms. This is a church where the biblical pattern of age-integrated discipleship is practiced.

Imagine a church, like the churches in Ephesus and Colossae, where it is assumed that the oldest to the youngest are involved together in discipleship, worship, celebration, and service (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20).

Imagine a church where fathers and mothers are daily fulfilling their responsibility to teach their children the Word of God in their homes.

Imagine a church where the excesses of youth culture are minimized and teenagers are growing wiser by walking through life with the older members of the church.

Imagine a church where every fatherless boy or girl worships and serves alongside mature spiritual fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers.

Imagine a church where groups of all ages talk together and minister to one another.

Imagine a church where the older teach the younger, the younger appreciate the older, and the older are energized and

motivated by the youth.

This is a church where Scripture is sufficient for the discipleship of all ages, where Christ is the focus, where traditions bow to the Word of God, and where the generations walk together—and love doing so. This is the church God planted.

Age segregation in the church unravels all this. We have to consider how and why it was that we set aside God’s design for our inventions that became our traditions.

### **The Instruction Clarified**

There are at least three broad categories presented in Scripture within which discipleship should take place: the family, the gathered church, and the relationships between individual Christians. The Bible also lays out the content of the discipleship that should take place in these three areas, providing a pure, perfect, and sure program for youth discipleship, which is both powerful and profound (Psalm 19:7-8).

Scripture also provides us with holy and reliable language that is designed to guide us as we make disciples of the rising generation. For example, we are specifically instructed to *teach, command, talk, tell, train up, instruct, guide, discipline, bring them up, and not provoke*.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Lord has given us all we need to know about a host of other important matters as well, such as the necessity of

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discipline,<sup>[2]</sup> why we must use God’s ways of discipline,<sup>[3]</sup> why we must reach the heart,<sup>[4]</sup> the critical importance of the disposition of children toward discipline,<sup>[5]</sup> and the indispensability of honor and obedience.<sup>[6]</sup>

Not only does Scripture speak clearly in matters of youth discipleship, it also declares how necessary it is. The whole of the Bible argues that youth discipleship is one of the most important priorities for the family<sup>[7]</sup> and the church. The church has a crucial part in that mission of preparing believing parents to perform that role. From Genesis to Revelation, there are many passages that uphold the importance of instructing children in the ways of the Lord.

### Unless the Lord Builds the House

These clear directions for how to minister to youth are authoritative, sufficient, and binding. We are not free to seek our own way. The psalmist makes it clear that it is the Lord who should direct the building of the household: “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

Knowing this, why would anyone want to experiment or copy others? Advocates of modern discipleship ministries often operate as if man could fabricate something better than God’s revealed plan, while God is telling us that all building is in vain

[2] Proverbs 13:1; 17:25; 19:18, 20, 25, 27; 29:17

[3] Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15

[4] Proverbs 20:11; Luke 6:45

[5] Proverbs 3:11-12, 15:20, 20:20; Hebrews 12:7

[6] Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:1-4

[7] Malachi 2:15

unless He builds the house using His designs, materials, and workers. We must not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds.<sup>[8]</sup> Conforming ourselves to the mind of Christ will lead us to think and act biblically.

The methodology that God gives us is one aspect of how He shepherds His sheep. In beautiful language, the Lord pronounces His kind intentions to lead those who have children. Isaiah declares, “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:11). He shepherds His sheep through what He feeds them, His Word.<sup>[9]</sup>

### **The Sufficiency of Scripture**

In this book, we are defining weeds in the church as those things within the church that are both foreign and contrary to Scripture. The French Confession captures the fundamental principle that is at stake: the sufficiency of Scripture for faith and practice. This confession speaks of the singular nature of the authority of the Word of God:

*[N]o authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations or edicts or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them.<sup>[10]</sup>*

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[8] Romans 12:1-2

[9] Matthew 4:4; John 6:63

[10] Arthur C. Cochrane, comp., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1966), 145-146.

Nevertheless, questions often remain in people's minds: Does Scripture speak specifically to the issue of discipleship methodology? Do the methods for evangelism and discipleship matter? When we go to the pages of Scripture, we discover that the answer to these questions is yes. There are many commands and examples in Scripture that directly address the matter of discipleship, as we will demonstrate in coming chapters.<sup>[11]</sup> These prescriptions are authoritative, practical, and powerful. Further, they offer great hope and blessing to many generations for those who obey them.<sup>[12]</sup>

The methods we use in ministry matter a great deal because they hinge on the important matters of ecclesiology,<sup>[13]</sup> hermeneutics,<sup>[14]</sup> bibliology,<sup>[15]</sup> and the sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>[16]</sup> They are ecclesiological because they impact the very discipleship methodology that is used in the church. They are hermeneutical in nature because they are formed by the way we interpret and apply the commands, patterns, and principles of the Bible. They are bibliological because the methods themselves are built upon a particular view of the nature of the Bible and how authoritative it is or is not. They are related to the sufficiency of Scripture because they either assume or reject the idea that Scripture is completely sufficient to instruct for every good work in every area of church and family life. These issues stand at the crossroads of any discussion among Christians, but they all point to one important question: What do the Scriptures say?

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[11] See Section 3 of this book for an extended discussion of this issue.

[12] Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 11:18-21; Psalm 78:1-8

[13] Ecclesiology: the doctrine and study of the church.

[14] Hermeneutics: the principles and methods of biblical interpretation.

[15] Bibliology: the study of the Bible.

[16] The sufficiency of Scripture: the doctrine that what God has revealed through the precepts, principles, and patterns of His Word is enough to govern all of a Christian's life.

The weight of my argument about discipleship methodology rests upon the sufficiency of Scripture; that is, that Scripture alone is all we need in order to conduct our lives. It contains everything necessary for “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). This doctrine, one of the five *solas* of the Protestant Reformation, is known as *Sola Scriptura*. It states that the inerrant Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone, are wholly sufficient and authoritative to govern all areas of faith and practice. Scripture supplies the only guide from God for the governing of our lives. It may not be superintended by any other source of instruction, knowledge, or circumstance.<sup>[17]</sup>

One of the challenges we have among modern evangelicals is that we are often willing to proclaim the sufficiency of Scripture for matters that are purely doctrinal, but dismiss it for the practical matters of church and family life. Thus we become like the Pharisees, who “laying aside the commandment of God . . . hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8). It has come to the point that many people operate in matters of theology and lifestyle with a double standard. They might say that the Bible is sufficient for salvation and other important theological matters, but they assume that it is not sufficient for other areas of life. They think that most areas of life are left up to personal preference or creativity, even such important things as education, church structure, clothing, music, entertainment, and choosing a spouse.

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The fact that Scripture is regarded as infallible, but not

[17] James Montgomery Boice defines it in this way: “When the Reformers used the words *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”) they were expressing their concern for the Bible’s authority, and what they meant to say by those words is that the Bible alone is our ultimate authority not the pope, not the church, not the traditions of the church or church councils, still less personal intimations of subjective feelings, but Scripture only.” J. M. Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 32-33.

considered sufficient, is one of the great errors of modern evangelicalism. However, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 explicitly says that it is complete, and that it “thoroughly equips for every good work.” It is all the spiritual food you will ever need: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). It is so sufficient that we are commanded not to add to or subtract from it.<sup>[18]</sup>

To acknowledge the sufficiency of Scripture is to acknowledge the sufficiency of Christ. When we say that Scripture is sufficient, the Bible makes it clear that we are also saying Christ is sufficient. John 1:1 declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Christ is the Word made flesh. Conversely, one cannot talk about the Son of God without simultaneously talking about the Word of God.

### **Not Our Playground**

The most critical implication of the sufficiency of Scripture is that the church is not the playground for our creative inventions. Scripture calls us to be faithful to His beautiful design, including the means that God has appointed. This is the essence of having confidence that God both ordained the means and controls the ends.

The proposition of this book is that modern Christian culture has become insensitive to the Word of God on the important matter of discipleship. God has spoken clearly and beautifully about how to minister to youth. He has given a detailed blueprint for training our children. Largely speaking, we have failed to recognize and embrace it. Rather than follow His plan, we have

[18] Deuteronomy 4:2

drawn up our own. We have exalted the world's methods over God's Word, and the outcome has been disastrous.

### **Success or Failure?**

How can we know that what we are doing is successful in the sight of God? Is it possible to have biblical assurance that our methods are God-ordained? Can we know today if we are doing the right thing? The answer to these questions is yes. Since it is by obedience to Scripture that we can know it will be well with us and our children,<sup>[19]</sup> we can have confidence that we are honoring God and doing His will when we conform our activities to Scripture alone. The way of true success is simple obedience to God. It is the only way we can know we are on the right track.

Jesus spoke about the danger of not building on His commands:

*“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.” (Matthew 7:24-27)*

Jesus is saying that if we do not build our houses on obedience to His commands, they will collapse. If we see something that has fallen, we ought to ask if it fell because the

[19] Deuteronomy 6,11, 32



commands of God were ignored. Jesus' last words to His disciples in the Great Commission affirm this. Our Lord's last command is our first priority. We must never forget that one aspect of fulfilling the Great Commission is "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:16-20). This has enormous implications for the design of discipleship in the church.

### **Returning to the Beautiful Design**

I wish to be clear that what I believe we need is not merely to alter the current discipleship methodology, but to truly reform it. To do this, we must believe and apply the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. As we seek to change our course for discipleship, we must assume the posture that Jeremiah the prophet was commanded to assume during his public ministry. Jeremiah lived during a time when the people of Judah had abandoned God's ways in favor of their own. They had become like the pagan nations around them. Jeremiah put his finger in the wound and said to them, "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles" (Jeremiah 10:20). Against this backdrop, God gave Jeremiah this two-fold command: "See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10).

We would do well to embrace this same two-fold approach: first, to root out, pull down, and destroy all that is unbiblical concerning modern discipleship methodology; and second, to build on the foundation of Scripture alone.

### **Extreme Compared to What?**

It has been suggested that this view of systematic age-segregation is extreme. This has also been proposed in books, blogs and web sites. It has been communicated from platforms at conferences, proclaimed in college and seminary classrooms, discussed on radio programs and brought up in church meetings. There have been church wide e-mails and sermon series warning congregations that this is an extreme view. I understand and sympathize with this reaction. And I must admit that the view is extreme when compared to certain things.

In order to determine if something is extreme, something must be presented for comparison. So, when trying to grapple with the charge that this view is extreme, the question must asked, "Extreme compared to what?" If this view is compared to the modern public school methodology or the current methodology of the church, then one must admit, it is extreme, because these educational methodologies are almost comprehensively age-segregated.

However, the more important question is this, "Is this view extreme compared to Scripture?" In sharp contrast, the only explicit, observable pattern in Scripture is age-integrated discipleship. Now this may sound like an extreme statement to most ears, but it is true. Secondly, there is not a single text of Scripture that advocates any kind of division in church discipleship based on age - not a breath of it from Genesis to Revelation. Not a single personality in Scripture ever practiced it and there is not a principle that promotes it. In this sense, Scripture would seem extreme as well.

There is however, from Genesis to Revelation, a rich record of age-integrated worship, celebration and discipleship. Many godly heroes of the faith spoke of it, practiced it and even commanded it. There are many principles of Scripture that support it. This means that there is a positive warrant from Scripture to practice age-integration.

So, if this view sounds extreme, then it may be that Moses, David, Joel, Nehemiah, and the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles were extreme because they seemed to only practice one thing. Therefore, in order to make the charge of extremism, you must ask, "Extreme compared to what?" Could it possible that the true extremists are those who establish children's church, youth groups, nurseries and other forms of age-segregation, as fixed patterns of church life?

So yes, I acknowledge that this position sounds extreme when compared to the modern church sociology that systematically and programmatically segregates people by age.

God, in the Bible, has revealed to us how to disciple our children and the young people in our churches. Do we not want to pay careful attention to what He has said, even if it is different compared to what we have been used to? If it were true that God's plan to reach children and teens, single moms and senior citizens is different from the age-segregated method, would we not want to embrace it? Even if it sounded extreme to our modern ears, shouldn't it be our desire to replace our current un-biblical practice with His beautiful design?

## CHAPTER 5

# *Get Jurisdictions in Order*

At the heart of the controversy over discipleship in the church is the matter of *jurisdiction*. In simple terms, jurisdiction answers the question, Who is responsible to do a certain thing? This is an area where we must think biblically in order to process the issue of discipleship in the church. Who is supposed to do what? Jurisdictions are out of order in the age-segregated world of most modern churches as we have gotten used to outsourcing our duties to others.

The biblical notion of jurisdiction means “the power or right of exercising authority . . . the limit within which power may be exercised.”<sup>[1]</sup> In a biblical context, jurisdiction means the God-ordained authority to govern according to the Word of God, apply its provisions, and exercise its sanctions. Since God has established

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[1] Noah Webster 1828, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse., 1828).

three essential governments—family, church, and state—it is vital that we understand that each of these governments has a distinct function and authority.

Getting this matter right is a critical step in understanding God's beautiful design for discipleship. God has allocated authority and responsibility to clearly defined parties for the discipleship of His people. In His wisdom, He has chosen to create various roles and responsibilities in order to carry out His will. Each of these jurisdictions provides a different aspect of the carrying out of His will. He uses these jurisdictions to perform various functions that add up to God's provision for His people.

This is a very important matter, for in the Bible, God explicitly assigns responsibility to certain parties and not to others. For example, when Eve sinned, God went to Adam to question him about the matter, not his wife (Genesis 3:8-9). Similarly, when Sarah laughed, God went to Abraham to question him about the matter, not his wife (Genesis 18:13). In the Bible, headship and responsibility is established in certain clearly defined jurisdictions. God makes the husband the head of the wife and she his helper (Ephesians 5:22-33). He puts children in families and makes their father the head and the teacher (Ephesians 6:1-4). If you read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, you find God assigning specific duties to three primary parties – parents, priests, and civil leaders. Furthermore, He holds these various parties personally accountable for their actions. They are responsible to perform a particular function and they are not authorized to shift their responsibility to another jurisdiction.

### **Thinking biblically about roles and responsibilities**

To think biblically about roles and responsibilities is to conform our minds to the counsel of God's will as revealed in His Word. Therefore, it is important to define biblical discipleship methodology in a way that includes the matter of jurisdiction. In short, biblical discipleship methodology incorporates God-ordained methods that arise from and conform to the Word of God that: (1) acknowledge the roles and responsibilities of the various jurisdictions; (2) promote age-integrated worship, instruction, and fellowship; (3) blend the diverse ages of God's people in one congregation; (4) utilize and depend upon parental authority; and (5) advocate relationships with wise members of the church, which will make youth wise.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Jurisdictions in harmony**

In God's economy, the family, the church, and the state have distinct functions and perform different roles in the world, all for the glory of God. Briefly, these functions can be described as follows.

#### *The family*

Christ, who is the Head of the family, ordained the government of the family and gave it power and authority to carry out its calling as established in the creation order, the dominion mandate, and

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[2] Proverbs 13:20

the rest of Scripture.<sup>[3]</sup> Christ appointed the husband and father as the head of the home. He is to lead his family according to God's Word, by word and example. The father's jurisdiction over his family includes their spiritual instruction (in harmony with the church), their physical care, and the education and discipline of the children. Hence, a father, with the God-ordained assistance of his wife, has been given authority to make all decisions concerning the physical development and spiritual training of his children. A father's right to direct the family is, therefore, vast and varied, but it is only over those in his household.

### *The church*

Christ, who is the Head of the church, ordained the government of the church and gave it power and authority to carry out His commandment to disciple the nations in accordance with the Great Commission and the teaching of the apostles. Christ gives His Word to define and govern the church's faith and practice. For the church's government, He appoints biblically qualified elders who preach and teach God's Word, pray for the congregation, and oversee its appointed ministry, its administration of the ordinances, and its discipline. The elders' authority over the church is much less than a father's over his household, because their authority is related to constraining sin, instructing in the ways of God, and leading worship. Their authority is, however, over a greater number: all of the saints that are in the church that they lead.

### *The state*

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[3] 1 Corinthians 11:3

Christ, who is the King of kings, ordained the civil magistrate to punish crime and restrain evil by the use of the sword and to protect and reward those who do good.<sup>[4]</sup> The state, in the structure of God's plan, has the least influence on society and the fewest duties. The jurisdiction of the state is limited to its own biblically defined sphere, and is usually geographic in nature (i.e., the state exercises its authority within defined political boundaries such as a municipality, county, state, or nation). Of all three spheres, the jurisdiction of the state is the greatest in its extent: governing over cities, counties, and nations.<sup>[5]</sup> However, the state's jurisdiction is also the most limited in scope, and able only to punish evil and reward good.

### **Society out of order**

Society is in chaos when God-ordained jurisdictions are confused, such as when the state governs education, as the American government does, or the family wields the sword, as vigilantes do, or the church usurps fatherhood, as many evangelical churches do. In fact, many of the problems with families and churches can be traced to the confusion of jurisdictions. These problems have biblical solutions.

Getting jurisdictions back in order is one of the critical matters for discipleship in the church. We need to get the family to do its job, the church to do her job, and the state to do its job. All of these are designed to work in harmony with one another. God as the Great Designer created these three great institutions to carry out His will. He has designed them to work in harmony.

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[4] Romans 13:1-14

[5] Exodus 18:21



**Does primary responsibility mean sole responsibility?**

To be a father is not simply a biological matter. The position of being a father is, in fact, an office entrusted to a man by God. The duties of this office are defined in Scripture, and a father is answerable to God for the fulfillment of them. A father cannot transfer or delegate his office to anyone else; therefore, he cannot transfer or delegate his responsibility for the duties of his office to anyone else.

A father can no more transfer or expand the duty and responsibility of his office than the church or the civil government can transfer or expand theirs. Many ills of our day are the results of fathers, governments, and churches attempting to do just that.

In Scripture, God has entrusted the duty of teaching and training children to their parents in general and to their fathers in particular. In the exercise of their unique office, the Bible teaches that God has given fathers the primary and ultimate responsibility for the instruction of their own children and to no one else. They may not, they cannot, delegate their office or their responsibility to anyone.

Therefore, when we use the term *primary responsibility* in reference to a father, we are referring to the fact that God has entrusted him with the training and discipleship of his children and has appointed that father to be the chief human authority over his children. The father alone will answer to God for every decision he makes in that capacity. However, this does not mean that a father cannot employ others in a limited fashion to help him carry out his

discipleship responsibilities. A wise father will utilize the gifts and knowledge of others to assist him in the great work committed to him. For example, he may ask his children to read books written by others, he may ask a man to teach his son a specific trade or skill that he does not have, and he must take his son to the meetings of the church to be edified by the preaching and teaching of the elders of the church.<sup>[6]</sup> In all of these things, the father is making the decisions and actively ensuring that his purposes are being fulfilled. He is not delegating his responsibility for his son or daughter; he is only delegating a specific task for a limited time and for a defined purpose.

Primary responsibility does not necessarily mean that he is the sole teacher of his children; he is rather the sole party responsible for anyone that does teach his children. For example, when I let my daughter learn logic from a member of my church who is teaching that class, I am not abdicating my authority or my responsibility; I am exercising both. When I take my children to church with me to hear the preaching of the Word of God, I am not shifting my responsibility to the preacher, I am exercising my authority as a father to teach my children through the work of another biblically qualified teacher. I am solely responsible for that decision. We can, therefore, delegate biblically legitimate instruction to another person, but we cannot delegate our responsibility.

God has designed a wonderful complement of sources of

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[6] It is important for fathers to bring their children into the meetings of the church where elders are proclaiming the Word of God. There are many examples in the New Testament and Old Testament of gatherings of God's people where there are qualified shepherds who are instructing gatherings of multiple age groups. Further, there is ample evidence that the body of the church builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16) and teaches one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). This is not a delegation of responsibility. Rather, it is fulfilling the divinely appointed responsibilities that God has bequeathed to fathers and elders.

blessing and authority in our lives. They are meant to operate in harmony with the others. When those sources of authority are malfunctioning, chaos reigns.

The current confusion in the church regarding discipleship will never be solved until we all understand that God is the designer and that His designs are all good and for our good. Furthermore, these three realms of government need to recognize and respect one another's authority and work in biblical harmony. Many of the problems we are experiencing with discipleship would simply disappear if Christians understood and faithfully walked within biblical jurisdictions.

## CHAPTER 6

# *Restore the Biblical Functionality of the Family*

One of the consequences of the innovations in the past years is that the critical functions of family life have gone into atrophy. The family's functions have not been strengthened through the systems we have been using. It is like a garden where the plants begin to shrivel because the weeds are stealing all the nourishment.

This has happened in spite of the fact that God has designed the family to provide the primary discipleship function for the rising generation. This by no means excludes the role of the church, but the role of the family is pivotal; and when the family is malfunctioning, everything else downstream malfunctions. If you have a broken family, you get a broken church; and if you have a broken church, you get a broken society. God has provided the functionality of the family to provide the most comprehensive

discipleship function.

God has given many ways for the family to function, as described in the previous chapter. In addition, He uses the home as a location to bring glory to His name.

Following is an explanation of the basic elements of the discipleship of youth that God has revealed in Scripture through the family. Unfortunately, most people are not satisfied with what God provides; they want something more. Something better. Something cooler. This is the essence of idolatry.

Scripture teaches that when it comes to family life, the discipleship of youth should be directed by parents and oriented around the family's day-to-day activities.<sup>[1]</sup> However, it is important to understand that this does not imply a casual or an outsourced approach. Rather, parents are to structure their lives in such a way that their children are regularly nearby so that discipleship can occur. This intentional approach is just as vital today as it was when Moses first introduced it:

*“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”*  
(Deuteronomy 11:18-19)

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[1] Deuteronomy 11:18-19; Acts 10:24; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1-2; 2 Timothy 1:5

The Bible displays many reasons for keeping the home the center of youth discipleship: (1) the natural makeup of family relationships is designed for youth discipleship, (2) the functions of the family are geared to provide youth discipleship, and (3) the occurrences in the home train youth for a multitude of situations they will encounter in life.

### **1. The natural makeup of family relationships is designed for youth discipleship.**

The principal elements of youth discipleship are designed by God to take place primarily in normal relationships of the family. This is an expression of divine wisdom. God designed the family to be a place where truly comprehensive discipleship of children can take place, from the cradle to the time of departure from the family. From this, it is clear that discipleship is not an optional or part-time activity. By ordaining the family—the only place where comprehensive, full-time discipleship can actually take place—God revealed the importance of youth discipleship in His plan for raising a godly seed.

#### *Discipleship through marriage*

God makes a man and woman “one flesh” in marriage and intends the reproduction of a godly seed through them. He, therefore, ordained youth discipleship to take place primarily in the context of a marriage. The prophet Malachi declares: “But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? *He seeks godly offspring.* Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth” (Malachi 2:15,

emphasis added).

A new marriage is a wonderful turning point because a family is a tool in the hand of the Lord to fill the world with well-taught “godly offspring.” This is one of the wonderful fruits of biblical marriage. When God brings children into a couple’s life, He requires the father to faithfully train his family in the ways of God. The father must shepherd his children so that they will grow up as godly seed.

*Discipleship through fathers and grandfathers*

Fathers are the heads of families. As such, they have been given the responsibility for youth discipleship, necessitating that their hearts are turned to their children (Malachi 4:6). This is strong language and indicates the high responsibility this is - one that should never be handed off to someone else. The primary commands about teaching children, in both the Old and New Testaments, are directed to the father. Because of this, church shepherds have a responsibility to instruct the only true “youth ministers,” *the fathers*, in their role. Fathers need to be exhorted and held accountable to perform their duty in leading their families.

In addition to fathers, grandfathers are involved in the lives and teaching of their grandchildren. Deuteronomy 4:9 says, “And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.” God loves multi-generational faithfulness, the declaration of His glory from grandfather and father to grandson and son.

*Discipleship through mothers and grandmothers*

While Scripture affirms the significance of fathers and grandfathers in the instruction of the next generation, it also speaks highly of the part that mothers and grandmothers play. The book of Proverbs consistently lists the mother's input in child training next to that of the father's, and Solomon urges youth to "not forsake the law of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8, 6:20). The book of Proverbs begins with an appeal to follow the instruction of a mother,<sup>[2]</sup> and it ends with the actual instruction of a godly mother to her son.<sup>[3]</sup>

In writing to Timothy, Paul reminds him of the important role his mother and grandmother had played in instructing him: "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

This is especially important in a family where only the mother is a believer. This teaches us that a home is still a home even though there is no father or believing father in the house. Many fathers today are absent physically or spiritually. In this case, when the mother is the only spiritual guide in the home, she must bear an additional load. We can help bear another person's burdens, but we have no authority to bear another person's responsibilities.

*Discipleship as a result of parental self-examination*

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[2] Proverbs 1:8  
[3] Proverbs 31:1



To disciple youth biblically requires parents to be humble and to examine themselves. Moses says, “Take heed to yourself” (Deuteronomy 4:9) as part of the duty of shepherding children. The apostle Paul uses the same language in Acts 20 to exhort the elders of the church at Ephesus about shepherding the flock of God. Self-examination is crucial for parents because instruction of children does not occur in a vacuum. It comes from one of two sources: either from a humble, repentant heart, or from a self-righteous, self-confident heart. This shows us that it is not only the content of instruction that matters, but also the genuineness of the life of the parent who delivers it. Parents need to keep their souls diligently as a foundation for the instruction of their children. As Moses instructed: “Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

## **2. The functions of the family are geared to provide youth discipleship.**

The second reason for keeping the home as the center of youth discipleship is simply the fact that the function of the family, by God’s design, makes home the ideal place to learn and grow.

### *Discipleship of family worship*

Family worship is a key element in the instruction of youth. If the most important thing that a father needs to do is teach his children how to worship God, then the most important part of his discipleship is family worship. It is more important than math

and science. The pattern of family worship, where a father gathers his wife and children to remember God's covenant and to rejoice in His faithfulness, is found throughout the Scriptures. The first example of a family worshipping together is presented to us in the early chapters of Genesis, where we find Cain and Abel offering sacrifices. Worship began in the family. We see the same pattern in the family life of Job, where he is an exemplary father seeking the sanctification of his children by regularly praying and sacrificing and visiting his family members. His chief concern is that they are not overcome by sin. This pattern is put forward as an essential responsibility for fathers to maintain.<sup>[4]</sup>

One memorable way for a father to lead his family in worship is simply to express his love to God in the hearing of his children. Isaiah 38:19 says, "The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children."

The Passover is an old covenant example of family worship. God commands fathers to include their children in celebrations of Passover.<sup>[5]</sup> Moses states the indispensable nature of this act because it is for a grand purpose: to inspire belief in his sons and his sons' sons. While it is true that Christ is our Passover, and that the church has been released from practicing this ceremony, there are still principles of family life that are revealed.

In Exodus 10:1-2, God instructs Moses that it is the role of fathers to teach their children the mighty works of God, to the

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[4] Exodus 12:43-50; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 78:1-8

[5] Exodus 12:24-27

end that they might know that He is the Lord—“that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.” The Passover that was celebrated by the family, for the family, and for the communication of the gospel is one such example of this.

### *The discipleship of Sabbath-keeping*

Another aspect of family worship is the weekly observance of the Sabbath. God places fathers and mothers under divine orders to make sure that everyone in their households celebrates the Sabbath. Corporate worship on the Sabbath is the jurisdiction of the church, but it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that the whole family participates.

The practice of Sabbath observance is designed to give the whole family a day for biblical rest, which is not the same as leisure. It includes spending the day with thoughts of the Lord, while ceasing economic activity. It is a day for delight, as Isaiah makes clear:

*“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:13-14)*

I often think that if God's people were faithful to observe the Sabbath in a biblical way, we would lose much of the stress and agitation that seems to characterize us. This is one more way that we have attempted to improve upon God's ways and are paying a higher price for it than we realize.

*Discipleship through celebration*

The discipleship of youth includes family celebrations. This principle is deduced from the passages explaining the duties of the family to rejoice, for example:

*“You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide.” (Deuteronomy 16:11)*

The instruction of youth was meant to include times of family celebration. While the specific feasts were part of the ceremonial law that was fulfilled in Christ, they still express the heart of God for families.<sup>[6]</sup>

*Discipleship of happy family life*

Faithful family discipleship includes joyful family living in an atmosphere of gratitude and respect. Psalms 127 and 128 picture happy home life, indicating that youth discipleship best occurs in

[6] Deuteronomy 12:7, 12; 14:26; 16:11; 26:11

an environment where the father and mother take delight in their children and bestow love on them as gifts from the Lord. The result of such delight is a joyful atmosphere in the home.

*Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate . . . Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways . . . Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table . . . Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel! (Psalm 127:4-5; 128:1, 3, 6).*

### *The Discipleship of wisdom*

God gave the entire book of Proverbs to guide fathers in training their children. Solomon explained the breadth of all youth discipleship when he wrote, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). He proclaims that the acquisition of wisdom is the primary objective of youth discipleship.

### *The discipleship of confronting rebellion*

The teaching of youth must also address rebellion.<sup>[7]</sup> "Do not withhold correction from a child," Proverbs 23:13 reads, "for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die." The book of Proverbs later shows the disastrous results when discipline in the instruction of youth is not used:

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[7] Proverbs 10:13, 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 26:3, 30:11-14; Ephesians 6:1-4

*There is a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother. There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed from its filthiness. There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. (Proverbs 30:11-14)*

These verses make it clear that biblical youth discipleship must include confronting various sins of rebellion.

*Discipleship of instructing the rising generation*

One of the most important functions of family life is to deposit the knowledge of God in the next generation. In Psalm 78:1-8, Asaph poetically shows the importance of one generation passing on the knowledge of the wonders of the Lord to the next generation.

*Give ear, O my people, to my law;  
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings of old,  
Which we have heard and known,  
And our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children,  
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,  
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.*

*For He established a testimony in Jacob,  
And appointed a law in Israel,  
Which He commanded our fathers,  
That they should make them known to their children;  
That the generation to come might know them,  
The children who would be born,  
That they may arise and declare them to their children,  
That they may set their hope in God,  
And not forget the works of God,  
But keep His commandments;  
And may not be like their fathers,  
A stubborn and rebellious generation,  
A generation that did not set its heart aright,  
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

Unlike Joshua's generation, who failed to teach their children who God was and what He had done, David expresses his desire, in Psalm 71, to communicate the majesty and glory of the Lord to the coming generations: "Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (Psalm 71:18).

### **3. The occurrences in the home train youth for situations they will encounter in life.**

The third and final reason for keeping the home the center of youth discipleship is found in the training youth will receive through the "normal" situations of home life.

We now live in a world where children are sent out of the home to institutions for education. Fathers leave the home for a corporation, and mothers vacate to a cubicle. Modern home life is not what God designed it to be. While the home used to be a place of education, economy, and spiritual life, it is now more of a flophouse. Today, a home is a place where people come and go, with little connection to one another or with the things God has ordained for the family in Scripture.

In sharp contrast to our day, the ministry of Christ and the apostles was often conducted in the context of a family and a home. As Michael Green has said, “One of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes.”<sup>[8]</sup>

The home in the New Testament was the center of spiritual activity. Even a casual reading of the New Testament reveals that the home was a haven for prayer, healing, biblical teaching, breaking of bread, hospitality, ministry to the sick, and genuine relationships. In short, it was a place to display the truth, justice, mercy, and goodness of God.

### *The discipleship of hospitality*

The home can and should be a place of hospitality. The term hospitality is key in understanding how to use a home as a center of evangelism and discipleship and for the care of the fatherless

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[8] Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 2004. First published in 1970, Cambridge: Hodder & Stoughton), 318.



and the widow.<sup>[9]</sup> None of this should come to us by surprise, for the very terms that God has chosen to describe the church explain its familial nature. The church is the family of God, the body of Christ, and the community of believers.<sup>[10]</sup>

Much of early church life and worship took place in homes, as we learn from Acts 2:46-47: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The hospitality commands, when obeyed, make family life so much richer. When hospitality is practiced, the whole family is involved in service toward others to create an environment of love and mercy. As people come into the house, children get a front row seat on the interesting people and the issues that are discussed. For example, Jonathan Edwards was known for maintaining a household of hospitality. In 1740 his daughter Esther was eight years old. In her diary, she wrote of the scenes of hospitality. She recalls times in the evenings with their house full of guests and particularly of the “divine fire” and “grand itinerant” that was George Whitefield. The likes of Great Awakening personalities Gilbert Tennent, James Davenport, David Brainerd and Thomas Prince were there in the Edwards’ home. The value of an open heart and an open home is a wonderful help in the discipleship of the rising generation.

### *The discipleship of evangelism*

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[9] Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:10; Hebrews 13:1-2; 1 Peter 4:9

[10] Romans 8:14-17; 12:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:27

The home is a place for evangelism. For example, the household was one of the places where sinners came to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 7:36-38 says:

*Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.*

God through the apostles brought the gospel to families. Examples of this include the conversions of Lydia<sup>[11]</sup> and the Philippian jailer whose whole families believed and were baptized.<sup>[12]</sup> In addition, Peter came to the household of Cornelius in order to proclaim the gospel to the family and friends of Cornelius.<sup>[13]</sup>

*The discipleship of teaching from house to house*

The home is also designed to be a place of teaching. In Acts 5:41-42, we see the apostles teaching in homes during their ministries. In addition, Jesus actively taught in Matthew's home while having dinner, eating with and instructing a number of "tax collectors and sinners" who came:

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[11] Acts 16:15

[12] Acts 16:31-34

[13] Acts 10:24

*Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Matthew 9:10-12)*

As godly pastors visit the homes of people in the church, the children are there looking on, and hearing the things of God. What a blessing this is to children, as "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Just as godly teaching can bring health to a home, false teaching can bring destruction. In Titus 1:11, Paul warns families of the danger of false teachers who enter into homes "whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain." Here we learn that elders have a responsibility to confront false teaching, even when it is taking place in the home under the jurisdiction of a father.

### *The discipleship of prayer*

Homes were used for the purpose of prayer in Acts 10:30-32 and 11:13 where Cornelius reports:

*"Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in*

*bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter.’”*

Peter explained . . . , “*And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter.’”*

### *The discipleship of compassion*

It is clear from Scripture that the home was designed by God to be a place of ministry, as an outgrowth of the compassion of Christ for broken and lost people. In the gospels, we constantly see Jesus ministering in homes. On one such particular occasion, men lowered a sick man through the roof of the house in order that he might be healed.<sup>[14]</sup> Jesus had compassion on him and healed him on the spot.

### **A church in the house**

For the first three centuries of church history, churches met primarily in homes. We find examples of this throughout the New Testament:

- Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. (Romans 16:5)

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- **The churches** of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet

[14] Mark 2:1-5

you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.  
(1 Corinthians 16:19)

- Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house. (Colossians 4:15)
- Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, [t]o Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house . . . (Philemon 1-2).

These were not like the leaderless house churches of today. Rather, they were ordered by the patterns of the apostles and were marked by biblical doctrine, practices, leadership, and discipline.

God gives us ample commands and examples to demonstrate the structure, operation, and functionality of a family and the home. In addition, God speaks abundantly about the necessity of youth discipleship. It is our duty to understand, believe, and obey what He says through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Phillip Goodwin captures the heart and soul of this kind of life:

*We should bring the word publicly taught home to our children, by repeating it to them, and requiring it of them. It is not enough that we with others teach them, but we must see what they learn, enlivening things upon their hearts at home, by holy counsel. At our houses we should harrow in that good seed which hath been publicly sown, that so it may be covered the closer and root the*

*better in the hearts of the children and servants.*<sup>[15]</sup>

Will not that generation be lost to us whose love for God is not learned first and foremost in their homes? And if not lost, at the very least be significantly weakened? As parents, and particularly as fathers, we must take up once again the mantle of true spiritual leadership by discipling our sons and daughters. Do not attempt to delegate what God has clearly given you to do.

However, the family is not enough, nor is it the only thing God has designed, as the next chapter will reveal.

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[15] Phillip Goodwin, *Family Religion Revived, or a Treatise as to discover the good old way of serving God in private Houses; so to Recover the Pious Practice of those Precious, Duties unto their Primitive platform* (1655), 401-402.

## CHAPTER 7

# *Recover Biblical Fatherhood*

Recovering the practices of biblical fatherhood is critical for returning to the beautiful design of Scripture for discipleship in the church and the home. Unfortunately, the practices of biblical fatherhood have been nearly lost in our modern society. This was driven home to me several years ago, when I was speaking at a conference and asked the group of around 700 Christian men if their fathers had ever read the Bible to them. Only 2 or 3 percent of the hands went up. The rest could not remember their dad *ever* reading Scripture to them. It was also clear that they longed for a relationship with their fathers. These were like most men - able to provide for their families, run companies, hang glide, and water ski, but when asked about the relationship they had with their fathers, their eyes get watery, their knees knock, and their voices crack. Deep inside they wanted—and still want—a relationship that was stolen from them. Not only that, they desperately want to be better fathers themselves.

It is time for a new generation of fathers to throw off the past, to lay aside the fatherhood paradigms that are promoted in our culture, tolerated in our churches, and clearly contrary to Scripture.

### **Fathers are confused**

Most fathers simply do not know what God has called them to do. As a result, their fatherhood practices are a mix of their own creative thinking, of what their fathers did, and of what their friends are doing. This is why there is so much confusion about fatherhood today, even in the church. It is also the reason why most men have a powerful hunger to know how to fulfill their roles as fathers.

In the broader society, the fallout from neglecting God's pattern for fatherhood is enormous and is at the heart of poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, teen pregnancy, and sexual abuse.

Broken fatherhood is at the heart of the brokenness of the rest of society. The impact on churches is significant in that it keeps the church in a tailspin. Richard Baxter spoke clearly about what happens when fatherhood is on the rocks:

*If we suffer the neglect of this (the equipping of fathers to do their duty), we shall undo all. What are we like to do ourselves to the reforming of a congregation, if all the work be cast on us alone; and masters of families neglect that necessary duty of their own, by which they are bound to help us? If any good be begun by the ministry in any soul, a careless, prayerless, worldly family is like*



*to stifle it, or very much hinder it; whereas, if you could but get the rulers of families to do their duty, to take up the work where you left it, and help it on, what abundance of good might be done!?”<sup>[1]</sup>*

The modern revolution of church discipleship has not come without consequences. One of the most grievous consequences is that it neutralized fathers.

### **The spread of the gospel hindered**

The most damaging effect of this is that it hindered the spread of the gospel in the way that God designed it to be spread, through the institution of the family. The new discipleship superstructure that arose gave men permission to delegate their duty to the Sunday school and the youth group. It put fathers in the easy chair, while a small number of professionals did all the work.

The Bible calls fathers to preach the gospel to their children every day: “when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:7). A father is to pass on the knowledge of God to the next generation, by “teaching them to observe all things I have commanded” (Matthew 28:20). He is commanded to expose his children day by day to the greatness of God (Psalm 78), the perfections of His ways, and the great stories that explain His nature and character. This kind of instruction gives children a true understanding of the gospel.

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[1] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, “The oversight of the flock,” Introductory note, 100.

The new discipleship methodology that segregated the ages and usurped the role of the father, gave many children a false gospel. The gospel they heard was reduced to a formula, a ritual of walking aisles and praying prayers and “accepting Christ as their personal Savior.” They were not taught the whole counsel of God. They did not understand the breadth and depth of the gospel. They could not see how the gospel is more than a formula, but includes the holiness of God (1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 86:8-10), His wrath toward sinners (John 3:36; Isaiah 26:21), His sinless perfection (Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5), His substitutionary atonement (1 John 2:2; 1 Peter 2:21-24), His call for repentance (Acts 17:30; Acts 3:19), and the evidences of faith (John 15:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17). They did not know that true Christianity is evidenced by hating sin (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 10:26-29), casting down idols (Jonah 2:8; Luke 9:25), and obeying all that Christ commanded (John 14:15; 2 John 1:6). They did not understand the sweep of redemptive history, because they were given a formulaic version of the gospel that was divorced from the whole counsel of God and how it is lived out in everyday life.

### **Consider the evangelistic impact of faithful fathers**

Think of the evangelistic impact that we as fathers would have in our generation if we would only heed this command. Consider the example of the faithful father: Daily, he praises God to his children with hundreds of words and practical principles. Day after day, he cries out to them, explaining the stories that glorify the kindnesses of God, His wrath toward sinners, and His vanquishing power over all things. In so doing, he reflects the heart of the heavenly Father who cries out, “Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:7-8).

In turn, his children observe their father as he personally delights in the Word and places himself under its wonderful teaching. They behold how good and mighty God is and how foolish it is to turn away from Him. They see how their father is comforted and confronted by it and is changed before their eyes.

Under this kind of loving and happy ministry, children hear the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation. They see the flow of history from God's perspective. They hear of the great doctrines of the faith that have sustained humble people from one generation to the next. They observe the mighty hand of God working against all human odds. They see the beginning and the end of history and where they themselves stand in its stream. They know who wins the battle. They know that nothing can stand against the will of our Sovereign Lord.

### **Program-oriented discipleship**

How different this is compared to sending your children to an evangelistic crusade or a concert or a Sunday school or a youth group in the hope that they might be saved.

The story is all too common: a young person goes to a Christian concert and walks down the aisle or makes a profession of faith absent a real conversion. They go forward because they have an emotional response or a guilty conscience or perhaps because a friend went down, but not because they really understand the gospel. This is why so few who "make decisions" at evangelistic meetings ever continue in a normal Christian life. Without the background understanding of sin and repentance or

the specifics of the life they are turning toward, they are like the seeds that fell on the shallow soil that sprouted up and died away because they had no root in themselves (Matthew 13).

Sadly, our churches are filled with young people who have “walked an aisle,” but who have never really understood the full breadth of the gospel message. For them, the gospel has been trivialized and reduced to simply “accepting Christ.” In contrast to this, the daily diet of a father’s gospel teaching gives a detailed understanding of the gospel. It provides both the context and content that is necessary to become a true follower of Christ.

### **God’s clear commands to fathers**

One of the most destructive influences of this radical revolution of age segregation is that it marginalizes the role of fathers in their homes. God’s requirements for the evangelization of children are clear: fathers are commanded to diligently teach their children and care for their souls day by day. The sad reality of fathers’ lives in modern churches is that they are satisfied with Sunday schools and evangelistic crusades (which are never mentioned or commanded in Scripture), but they reject God’s direct and undeniable commands to personally teach their children daily. This is outright rebellion against the Lord.

Unfortunately, many fathers continue on in this rebellion because they feel good about their efforts, especially when they compare their parenting practices to their Christian brothers. Fathers often feel great about their involvement in their children’s lives because, rather than defining faithful fathering by what

Scripture prescribes, they define exemplary fatherhood as going to the kids' recitals and games and getting them into a good Sunday school or youth group. This is not biblical fatherhood, it is abdication.

In order to rescue this lost generation of children in Christian homes from hell, we must first help fathers understand what God has commanded, and exhort them to embrace their responsibilities before the Lord. We must speak clearly of what God has mandated so that fathers do not miss the opportunity to touch the hearts of their sons and daughters with the message of the gospel.

### **Consider the enormous leverage of fathers for evangelism**

A very telling report related to the father's role in discipleship was published by The Baptist Press in 2003. It stated that if a child is the first person in the household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5 percent probability everyone in the household will follow. If the mother is first, there is a 17 percent chance everyone else in the household will submit to Christ. However, if the father professes Christ first, there is a 93 percent probability that everyone else in the house will heed the gospel call.<sup>[2]</sup>

I encourage fathers to return to the biblical role as the head of the household and to preach the gospel and make disciples of their children. I also urge church leaders to have the courage to cancel the programs that steal the father's creation-order role and put their energies into fulfilling the clear commands of God.

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[2] "Want Your Church to Grow? Then Bring in the Men," Baptist Press, April 3, 2003, by Polly House, [www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=15630](http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=15630)

The great messianic prophesy of Psalm 22 shows how God brings the glory of salvation from one generation to the next through those who take seriously the charge to teach their children: “A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this” (Psalm 22:30-31).

Please pray that we as fathers would not miss the greatest untapped evangelistic opportunity before the church today. Let it be said of this generation of fathers that we did our part to fulfill the Great Commission. May we preach the fullness of the gospel to our households daily as the Bible commands, and give our children a thousand reasons to believe.

All crises are not equal. Some problems in the modern church are worse than others. The most devastating problem the church faces in any era is the perversion of the gospel; therefore, the church must always endeavor to preserve and to present the gospel clearly. Perversions of the gospel of Christ should always be met with the most aggressive stance and authoritative arguments after the pattern of the apostle Paul, who said, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

While the crisis of systematic age segregation does not rise to the same level as that of a false gospel, it is a serious error. I submit that it is a symptom of the same problem that leads to a false gospel: laying aside the commandment of God for the traditions

of men.<sup>[3]</sup> When men leave the mooring of the all-sufficient Word of God, false gospels abound and worldly, pragmatic practices arise within the church. When someone preaches a false gospel, it is because he has ignored the truth of Scripture. And when the church advocates unbiblical methods, it too has ignored the truth of Scripture.

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[3] Mark 7:8

## CHAPTER 8

# *Capitalize on Corporate Gatherings of the Church for Discipleship*

The discipleship agenda of the family is only part of the design for discipleship that God has ordained for His people. Not only does the church need the family, but the family also needs the church. The family needs the gatherings and experiences that God has prescribed for the discipleship of His people. The author of Hebrews makes it clear how important this is: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

### **The family alone is inadequate**

Biblical youth discipleship, as the normal matter of course in church life, utilizes several resources. Even though fathers are the



shepherds of their families, they are not the exclusive source of instruction. Scripture indicates that children are to also receive instruction, both formally and informally, from others. For example, God calls for church shepherds to formally address children simultaneously with their parents during the meetings of His people. In addition, there is informal, relational, one-on-one edification through biblically ordered relationships in the local church. God expects the members of His body to build one another up, such as when He calls the older women of the church to instruct the younger women.<sup>[1]</sup> These aspects of “body life” work to bring instruction to all ages. One key difference between these means and modern youth ministry is that the discipleship and training is not occurring in a systematic, age-integrated fashion. Rather, it begins with the family submitting to Christ and includes following God’s patterns of instruction during the corporate gatherings of the people of God. It is part and parcel of a family’s devotion to the church, and it involves biblically ordered, personal relationships.

### **The rich pastures of church life**

Getting our children out of youth groups is not enough if it is not aided by the rich pastures of true biblical intergenerational discipleship. The family is not the sole answer. If the family is the only tool that we use for youth discipleship, we fall short of the whole counsel of God. If families neglect the local church and exempt themselves from the instruction by the elders, the building up of the saints, the “one another” relationships, and the maturation that church life provides, they do so at their own peril and to the demise of the next generation. Our sons and daughters need to learn much about that nature and ways of God. In order

[1] Titus 2:3-5

to train our children properly, parents will need the help God gives through His church.

### **Personal discipleship in the church**

Not only does the family need the gatherings of the church for their discipleship, they also need the relationships that expose them to the giftedness of the body of Christ. He provides young people many spiritual fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. Each of these has been gifted by God to build up the body in love.<sup>[2]</sup> This is one reason families need to be involved in local churches. Involvement broadens and deepens their opportunities to be built up in love, as well as their opportunity to build up others. God bestows gifts to each member of the church for the edification of the whole.

Throughout the New Testament, social life in the early church was characterized by intergenerational relationships. The older teach the younger rather than the young being gathered by themselves to be instructed in their peers. The richness of these intergenerational relationships is pictured in Paul's bond with younger men. There are three who are identified as his "sons": Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus. Such relationships in church life are blessed additions to parental guidance and instruction.

### **The gifts of the Spirit**

Ephesians 4 focuses on the unity of the body of Christ.<sup>[3]</sup> It displays the rich diversity of discipleship that God has ordained for His people. His discipleship is not monotone. The men who are listed

[2] Ephesians 4:1-16

[3] Ephesians 4:4

are gifted men operating in a unified church where the whole body is building itself up in love. These are not classrooms, but rather men who are gifted. An example of this could be found in the instruction and discipleship of Apollos by Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:24-26. If the gifted men of Ephesians 4:11 were carrying out their teaching ministry in age-segregated classes, they were teaching in a manner and setting not found anywhere else in the New Testament.

### **The body building itself up in love**

In a unified church, the body builds itself up in love through the various spiritual gifts the Lord has provided in that church. We would expect that the generational and gender connections necessary for edification are in full operation - the teaching ministry of the elders to the whole body, and the people building one another up in love with the older men teaching the younger men and the older women teaching the younger women in informal, relational ministry.

This intergenerational nature of church life is clearly communicated in Paul's letter to Titus:

*But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.*

*Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (Titus 2:1-8)*

Titus 2 describes a highly relational atmosphere where older men teach younger men and older women teach younger women. It does not describe a one-to-many ministry of the church that requires a program to fulfill; rather, it pictures a personal, one-on-one ministry of Christians to one another - older men teaching younger men and older women teaching younger women. There is no indication that systematic, age-segregated, peer-group-oriented training was involved. This is simply a command to Christians to participate in personal, intergenerational discipleship.

### **The fatherless**

Some may object that my emphasis on the home being the center of youth discipleship—fathers in particular—shows little regard for those who have no family or whose families are not believers. To those objections I would simply say that the church is the answer. A church that is truly functioning in a New Testament way (the previously cited Titus 2 passage being a good example) is sufficiently equipped to take care of them far better than any programmed approach ever could. The family of God provides what family members might be missing in this world. God brings the fatherless into His household of spiritual brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but*

*fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)*

The church has dedicated the specific office of deacon to allocate time to care for widows:

*Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:1-4)*

The direct point of this passage is the requirement to care for widows; it is not a new requirement to establish programs or committees. While care for widows was not the only duty of deacons, it is striking to note the clear instructions and accountabilities for this important ministry.

The family is also supposed to care for the fatherless and the widow, but in an even more intimate manner than the church. Moses communicated to God's people that their families were

to provide some type of subsistence for the fatherless and the widow.<sup>[4]</sup> This same principle is bound up in the New Testament admonition that families were to show hospitality<sup>[5]</sup> and, therefore, include the fatherless and the widow. Thus, there is a sense that families bear a part of the responsibility of the evangelization and discipleship of fatherless children.<sup>[6]</sup>

The ministry to fatherless youth is also carried out through men in the local church. The repeated call in the New Testament to show compassion and hospitality implies this responsibility. We have also been given a biblical example in the Old Testament where Job calls harsh judgment upon himself if he neglects either the widow or the fatherless:

*“If I have kept the poor from their desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or eaten my morsel by myself, so that the fatherless could not eat of it . . . Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket.” (Job 31:16-17, 22)*

Notice the harsh judgment Job calls upon himself should he fail in obedience in this area. This is such an important task. Job believes that neglecting it should result in his dismemberment!

Christians should also *individually* care for the fatherless and the widow. James says: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

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[4] Deuteronomy 24:19-21

[5] Romans 12:13

[6] Job 29:11-13; 31:16-17, 22

In an age where our impulse is to create new methods and programs to reach a lost and fatherless generation, we should remember that God has already made His will in this matter known. God's way includes the rich fabric of personal relationships provided by families, local churches, and individual Christians. As people love one another from the heart, the gifts are operating and the whole church is edified, from nursing babe to senior citizen.

## CHAPTER 9

# *Define the Content of the Instruction*

While we have talked much about the method for discipleship, let us now turn our thoughts to the content of the instruction. God has been equally clear about what youth should be taught as He has been about *how* they are to be taught.

The first aspect of the content of the instruction is derived from the purpose of it all, which is to promote the glory of God. Therefore, the biblical motivation for discipleship is rooted in a desire to pass on a vision of the majesty, glory, and strength of the Lord God. Deuteronomy 6:4 declares, “The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” This was repeated twice per day in godly Jewish families. Asaph commands:

*Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark*



*sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. (Psalm 78:1-4)*

The curriculum matters. God is not silent about it. Here are the elements of what the Bible says should comprise the content of our instruction.

### **The law of God**

Youth discipleship includes instructing children in the laws of God. Moses says:

*“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)*

Later in the same chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses explains to fathers how to answer questions that their children ask about the laws of God. They are to show how God’s statutes fit into the glorious plan of redemption for His people, a people called to be peculiar from the world and set apart unto Him

*“When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments*

*which the Lord our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.’”*

### **History and the works of God**

The psalmist indicates that youth discipleship must also include the teaching of the historical works of God. Parents are to recount to their children what God has done in the past, including their own family’s history, and what He is doing in this world today. In Psalm 44:1 the psalmist highlights the communication of a faithful father when he says, “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, the deeds You did in their days, in days of old.”

David reveals that the father whose mouth is full of God’s praise proclaims His mighty works to his children: “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:3-4).

In addition, Moses commands fathers to be family historians,

in the sense that they tell the accounts of God’s mighty acts in the past. His objective is clear: “And that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son’s son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 10:2). In this way, children are to be raised up hearing the accounts of history from God’s perspective. Scripture teaches that youth must be inspired by a vision of God, His praises, strength, and wonderful works.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **The wisdom of God**

Biblical discipleship of youth is wisdom focused, which means it should direct youth to seek wisdom. This focus is seen in the book of Proverbs, which is dedicated to the discipleship of youth. This is clear from its stated purpose, its language, and its structure. The controlling message of the book and the most important principle youth can ever grasp is that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). The goal of Proverbs is to cultivate maturity in sons and daughters through the acquisition and application of godly wisdom.

In the worst versions of modern youth ministry, leaders are cultivating worldliness instead of wisdom by moving God and His ways to the edge of all things rather than the center. This contradicts Proverbs, which asserts that we should draw young people away from ungodly culture, not toward it. Paul said to Timothy, “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22), showing how the godly understand that “to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). In Joshua 24:15, we

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[1] Psalm 78:4

see a clear example of this as Joshua proclaims, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Here is a courageous father with a firm resolution to lead his family on a counter-cultural path of obedience to God.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Long-range instructional plan**

As parents disciple their children, the content of the instruction should be interwoven with a multigenerational vision. When Scripture speaks of teaching the rising generation, it includes a plan that focuses on “you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 6:2). Here fathers are taught to embrace a vision bigger than themselves, implying that people of all different ages are interacting together as part of a cohesive, multigenerational unit. In this way, each member recognizes his role and responsibility and seeks to help the others grow in their responsibility. God uses the means of faithful, biblical, youth discipleship to propagate the gospel to the rising generation and to grant blessing to His people. This is one of the most important and successful means of evangelism known to the church.

Many of the major events in the Old Testament were designed by God to be a testimony to the children of the coming generations. This was true of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, the deliverance from Egypt, the Passover, and the events on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.<sup>[3]</sup> All of these things took place . . .

*“so that the coming generation of your children who rise up after*

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[2] Cf. Psalm 37:27, 101:1-8; Romans 12:9; Ephesians 5:11

[3] Exodus 10:1-2, 12:24-27; Leviticus 23:43; Deuteronomy 27:1-10, 29:10-29; Joshua 8:30-35; Psalm 78:1-8

*you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the plagues of that land and the sicknesses which the Lord has laid on it . . . ‘Why has the Lord done so to this land?’ . . . ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.’” (Deuteronomy 29:22, 24, 25)*

Walking with your children, by applying the ways of the Lord to everyday life while maintaining a multigenerational mindset, is more successful than any other method. It is characterized by long-range thinking that is saturated today with Christ. It is an intensely personal, day-to-day activity, with hours of time invested. It affects every aspect of our relationships and behavior because it assumes responsibility and authority and requires honor and obedience.

Historically, the covenants and the promises of God were communicated from one generation to the next through fathers and sons.<sup>[4]</sup> The prophet Jeremiah declares the purpose of the New Covenant: “Then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them” (Jeremiah 32:39).

### **Fathers envisioning many generations**

This has enormous implications for the subject of retirement and how fathers should spend their senior years. Father-led discipleship calls for something our culture neglects: fathers must deliver the content of the instruction not only to their own children, but also to their children’s children. In other words, the whole matter of retiring and leaving the child-training mode when it comes

[4] Genesis 9:12; Isaiah 59:21; Jeremiah 32:39; Luke 1:72; Acts 3:25

to grandchildren and great-grandchildren is a rejection of God's commands and comes from the thought that, that time is ours rather than God's.

Psalm 78:3-4 proclaims this multigenerational vision: "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done." In other words, God has designed that we continue to communicate the content of the glory of God from one generation to the next.

A father's duty does not end with his own children. In Scripture, he is specifically commanded to teach and minister to his grandchildren as well:

*"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged." (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)*

Imagine a time later in the life of your child, a time when he is no longer under your roof and when some life circumstance has brought him to a crisis. What he knows and believes about God he learned from you and from the church. Did you deliver to him what God commanded you to deliver? Will he stand, or will he fall? This scenario reveals how crucial it is for you to teach your children

the truth about God. This is the kind of curriculum that God has prescribed.

## Section III

### Answering the Objections



## CHAPTER 10

# *The Objections Are Tested*

As a result of many years of involvement in consulting with and planting age-integrated churches, I have heard many questions about and objections to age-integrated ministry. Here I would like to address the most common of these. For the sake of clarity, I have categorized them as:

- (1) Biblical arguments that arise from specific passages of Scripture
  
- (2) Pragmatic arguments that focus on specific problems that might occur
  
- (3) Experiential arguments that are drawn from personal history

## **Biblical arguments**

Ultimately, the only authoritative arguments for or against anything should be biblical in nature. Scripture alone is our guide, and when we consider any question of life and godliness, we have a responsibility to search from Genesis to Revelation in order to find our answers. When questions arise regarding discipleship, our screen of evaluation must be the Bible. In this section, I have included various arguments of those who have used Bible verses against the propositions of age-integrated ministry.

*Argument 1: Nehemiah 8:1-3 is a biblical example of age segregation because only those “who could hear with understanding” were present at the meeting.*

*Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.*

The argument for age segregation from this text rests on what might be implied by the six words “all who could hear with understanding.” We should ask several key questions in order to understand the meaning of this passage more fully.

First, how does the text describe the nature of this gathering? It says that this was a large and explicitly gender and age-integrated gathering. At minimum, it stands as an example of a significant level of age integration, including adults, youth, and children. The phrase, “all who could hear with understanding” is far more inclusive in meaning than it is exclusive. Mervin Breneman writes:

*“Men and women and all who were able to understand” involved the entire community, including young people and children. The Jews became known as “the people of the book.” The Old Testament emphasizes that God’s Word is to be known and used by all the people, not only the priests and leaders. Early Christians adopted this same principle. This changed as time went on as fewer and fewer people had access to the Bible. The Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on sola scriptura (on the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice) returned to the biblical principle that every believer should read Scripture as God’s Word for their lives.<sup>[1]</sup>*

If we heed the testimony of Paul, we can conclude that children were included in this phrase. Paul gives instruction directly to children (Ephesians 6:1-3), clearly implying that they have some degree of cognitive ability to understand the preaching of the Word. Further, the text in Nehemiah states that men and women (the adults) were there. This would presumably mean that those “who could hear with understanding” were children.

Second, does the text say anyone was excluded? The language does not demand the removal of certain age groups, and verse 1

[1] Mervin Breneman, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; The New American Commentary, Vol. 10 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 224.

seems to dispel the argument that any person or group of persons was deliberately excluded. Nehemiah never says this is what happened; his observation only refers to those who were present for the hearing of the Word. Nevertheless, people consistently approach this text assuming exclusion.

Third, what categories of people are identified? Neither children nor young people are ever mentioned. To dogmatically maintain that those who could not hear with understanding were only children goes beyond the text. No doubt very young children are in view, but this phrase could include others who, for various reasons, could not hear with understanding either.

Fourth, what does it mean to hear with understanding? The word used for hear in Nehemiah 8:2 is *shâma'*. This word is used both for physical hearing and the cognitive ability to understand something. Therefore, the text could exclude those who spoke a different language and thus could not hear with understanding. *Shâma'* is the same word used to describe the lack of ability to understand which took place at the Tower of Babel: "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand [*shâma'*] one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). The elderly that have gone deaf and those who were mentally handicapped may also be included with those who could not hear with understanding. If this text is used to drive youth from our church services, then it can be used to drive anyone else who cannot hear with understanding out of our services as well.

For these reasons, Nehemiah 8:3 cannot be used as a proof text for age segregation as it is practiced today. Rather, this passage

is an example of a generally age-integrated gathering with the only possible segregation being one of comprehension, not of age. Matthew Henry writes:

*The persons that met were all the people, who were not compelled to come, but voluntarily gathered themselves together by common agreement, as one man: not only men came, but women and children, even as many as were capable of understanding what they heard. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore concerned to acquaint themselves with the word of God and attend on the means of knowledge and grace. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercises of religion.<sup>[2]</sup>*

Argument 2: Ephesians 4:7-16 presents a picture of many different gifted members of the body who have different ministries to different age groups.

*( . . . He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind*

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[2] Matthew Henry, Comm. on Neh. 8:1, in Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Complete and Unabridged in One Volume (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008, originally published in Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. II [Joshua-Esther], 1708), 505.

*of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Age segregation in the church is not only absent from this passage, but would contradict the entire context. Ephesians 4 focuses on the unity of the body of Christ.<sup>[3]</sup> The men who are listed are gifted men operating in a unified church where the whole body is building itself up in love. Classes and age-group meetings are never mentioned or implied. While there may be good reasons to provide specialized instruction on evangelism, pastoral care, or some other subject that may utilize a particular teacher's gifts, this chapter does not suggest that the instruction should be based on any kind of age segregation. Rather, it implies instruction where people involved in a particular ministry are brought together to be equipped for the work of that ministry.

In a unified church, the body builds itself up in love through the various spiritual gifts the Lord has provided in that church. We would expect that the generational and gender connections necessary for edification are in full operation - the teaching ministry of the elders to the whole body, and the people building one another up in love with the older men teaching the younger men and the older women teaching the younger women in relational ministry.

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[3] Ephesians 4:4

*Argument 3: Titus 2:1-8 gives an example of age segregation.*

*[O]lder men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.*

*Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.*

Rather than serving as an example of age segregation, Titus 2:1-8, is actually one of the evidences of age-integrated discipleship where the older are teaching the younger. Here Paul is instructing Titus on various kinds of teaching that should be operating in a church. One aspect of this teaching is the interaction of the various ages and life stages in the church. Here Paul specifically addresses the importance of the personal ministry of older women to younger women. Older women are not being instructed to have age-segregated classes for the younger women. Rather, Paul is exhorting them to personal discipleship on very specific topics. There is no indication that this discipleship is in the setting of a church program or official ministry with structure and leaders. Rather, it is personal in nature and part of the body-life of a healthy church.

While this instruction is definitely gender-segregated because of the nature of the subjects discussed, there is no indication in the text of any kind of age segregation. In fact, the instruction is by definition age-integrated because the older women are teaching the younger women.

*Argument 4: Jesus was sent to the temple to be taught. Why shouldn't we send our children to be taught by godly teachers in their own age groups?*

In Luke 2:41-52 we read of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple. He was found “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (vv. 46-47). Is this an age-segregated environment? The clear answer is no. There was one boy with several adults. In this sense, it is the exact opposite of all age-segregated youth ministries in the church today. There was no age-specific curriculum, it was not a formal program of the local synagogue, and it was a temporary three-day event, following which Jesus was “subject” to His parents, not to a local youth pastor.

In this situation, Jesus was clearly on a mission. He was not, as some might suggest, in the temple to be catechized by the teachers there. Jesus did not go to meet other young people and fellowship with His peers. It is clear that He went to the temple in order to be about His Father's business, not to attend age-segregated youth discipleship classes.

*Argument 5: Jesus disciples were a youth group.*



The pattern of discipleship that Jesus used is absolutely what we should follow. However, many people believe that Jesus was like a modern-day youth pastor who took twelve kids out of their homes and displaced their fathers. Let's explain some facts about the ministry of Jesus. First, Jesus' ministry on the earth lasted for a period of about three years. Second, Jesus had twelve men that consistently followed him during that time. Third, these men came from many different walks of life. Fourth, we do not know if they were teenagers, but we do know that Peter owned a house (Matthew 8:14), was married, and had a mother-in-law. Matthew also owned a home (Mark 2:15), which he used as a staging place for the ministry of Jesus and had a career as a tax collector. Some of the others were professional fishermen. Fifth, there is no indication whatsoever that Christ's pattern for choosing his twelve disciples was based upon their age or life stage.

Looking through the biblical examples of training, the pervasive means God teaches in His Word is discipleship, and Jesus with His disciples was no exception. Life-on-life, Jesus walked with His disciples for three years, training them, molding them, and teaching them the things of the kingdom of God. Jesus with His disciples is one of the most vivid and detailed examples of active, biblical discipleship in the Word of God. It was not age-segregated or age-specific discipleship. It was the discipleship of fishers of men.

Jesus, the Son of God, did not have a youth ministry. He was a disciple maker engaging a broad range of people of different ages, life stages, genders, and social strata.

*Argument 6: The wording of 1 John 2:12-14 implies education in classes separate from the rest of the family in order to address specific needs.*

Instead of a proof text for age segregation, 1 John 2:12-14 is rather another example of the way the apostles addressed the church – all ages and stages of spiritual maturity together with one message for one body. The purpose of 1 John is clearly stated throughout the book. John is presenting various tests for assurance of salvation. Through his letter, the apostle John is seeking to help all of his readers to determine if they are truly in the faith.

The references to “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers” do not indicate the physical age or status in the lives of John’s audience. Rather, John is viewing the church as the family of God and designating the members of that family according to their spiritual development. The little children are recent converts, the young men are more established Christians, and the fathers are the spiritually mature members of the church. Note that instead of writing three separate epistles, one for each group, John has written one epistle wherein he addresses all of them at the same time. In doing so, he follows the practice of Paul who always addresses all the members of the church, young and old, male and female, new believer or mature Christian, together in one epistle that is read to the whole church. If anything, 1 John supports the understanding that the consistent pattern of Scripture is, when the people of God gather for worship and instruction, they do so as one body.

*Argument 7: Galatians 4:1-3 implies that it is normal that children be put under “guardians and stewards” during their teenage years. What’s*

*wrong with giving this kind of experience to our children?*

*Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.*

Is Paul actually promoting the practice of age-segregated stewarding here? In order to determine this, there are three questions we need to address.

First, what is the nature and scope of Paul's use of the illustration of a steward? While Paul does not denounce the practice of using stewards, his purpose is not to endorse the use of stewards by fathers. Rather, his purpose is to prove a theological point. Paul's use of stewards in this case does not signify his approval of the practice any more than his reference to athletes in 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 meant that Paul endorsed sports where the competitors were naked. The example of a child under "guardians and stewards" is to show the status of Old Testament Israel under the Mosaic covenant.

Second, what is the wider context and meaning of the section in which this verse appears? The purpose of Paul's illustration (children under guardians and stewards) is to demonstrate the purposes and uses of the Law of God, particularly in reference to the Mosaic covenant. Paul is arguing against the Judaizers who were trying to bring the churches in the Galatian region into the bondage of legalism. The context is not about principles of

child rearing, nor is it meant to give us instruction on the use of stewards in the education of children. He is using this illustration in chapter 4 in particular—where the father represents God the Father and the children are the children of Israel—to teach how Christ has brought the people of God out from under the Mosaic covenant into the freedom and maturity of the New Testament church.

Third, were the stewards and guardians referred to actually practicing age-segregated instruction or pupil-specific instruction? Does this text imply that in the normal course of child rearing, parents are to put their children in age-segregated youth groups? Do youth pastors find their justification in being “guardians and stewards” of children “until the time appointed by the father”? The answer is clearly no.

The term *steward* is meant to communicate a broad theological principle regarding the use of the Law in the Old Testament in order to explain the use of the Law in the New Testament. It is not a proof text for age-segregated teaching in the church.

*Argument 8: There is no command against age-segregated ministry.*

If we accept the premise that we are only obligated to obey the Word of God when there is an expressed command, then we are forced to grapple with a number of other issues. For example, there is no command against polygamy, but Christians believe polygamy is wrong because of the patterns and commands of

Scripture that define marriage, not because of a direct command against it. Gambling and the smoking of marijuana are not condemned in the Bible, yet there are principles of Scripture that make it clear that these are sinful. Polygamy is not expressly forbidden in the Bible, but it contradicts important principles regarding marriage. There is also no direct command against cannibalism (though there are principles and examples against it), yet it is sinful to engage in this practice.

This idea comes from the assumption that if the Bible does not expressly forbid something, it is therefore allowed. There are serious problems with making this the standard for determining the will of God. It denies the authority of principles, positive commands, and normative patterns established in Scripture. It also denies the principle that the Bible speaks to all areas of life and that it is sufficient to equip the man of God “for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Explicit negative commands are, therefore, not necessary to show that something is contrary to the Word of God. Even though there is no expressed command against systematic age segregation, we argue against it because it does not properly fulfill the principles and commands of Scripture that apply to youth discipleship, and it goes against the primary examples of gatherings involving the whole people of God.

*Argument 9: To claim that we must follow a biblical pattern explicitly is to require something of us that God has not.*

I am not attempting to take a biblical pattern and turn it into a moral law, nor do I believe it is appropriate to do so. As someone once said, “Narrative is not imperative.” What I am doing is taking the commands for fatherhood and keeping them as such, thereby observing and honoring, as divine wisdom, the corroborative evidence of Scripture.

One aspect of my argument is derived from direct commands to fathers such as those found in Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:1-4. These are representative texts that argue for a father’s teaching role. In the Bible, whenever the role of teaching children is explicitly given to someone, it is always given to parents. In addition, every child-rearing command in the Bible is given to fathers.

In addition, I build my case on a principle that is derived from the commands that require the people of God to enter into age-integrated worship and celebration. For example, Moses commanded parents to include their children in the celebration of the Passover,<sup>[4]</sup> the Feast of Weeks,<sup>[5]</sup> and the Feast of Tabernacles,<sup>[6]</sup> and Joel commanded them to come to a “sacred assembly.”<sup>[7]</sup> This is consistent with other meetings for worship, celebration, and instruction.<sup>[8]</sup> These commands reveal how the Law should be communicated to the next generation.

There are also several instances where church leaders spoke to children in the context of the corporate meetings of God’s

[4] Exodus 12:21-27

[5] Deuteronomy 16:9-11

[6] Deuteronomy 16:13-14

[7] Joel 2:15-16

[8] Mark 10:14

people in both the Old and the New Testaments. In these settings, the pattern of instruction was age-integrated.

The question that needs to be answered is this: Does Scripture regulate how the church is to operate, or is the church free to operate on its own accord? I believe that Scripture is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. To me, it is clear that the examples of corporate church gatherings and the instructions pertaining to discipleship in the Bible all support age integration; this is also how the church throughout history has understood them.

*Argument 10: There are many things we use that are not in the Bible, such as film, microphones, etc. We have to be given some latitude when it comes to the changing times.*

Critics contend that my argument is fallacious because many things are not “in the Bible” - air conditioning, computers, cars, and film. Consider two things:

First, comparing the discipleship of the people of God with inanimate objects such as microphones is a categorical mistake, where two very different matters are being compared. The methods and means of discipleship are in a different category compared to microphones and computers. Discipleship methods are defined and commanded in Scripture and are matters of explicit biblical order (i.e., God’s revealed will that we are to obey). In contrast, things like microphones, computers, and films are matters of technology (i.e., practical tools we can use as means to

be faithful to the Word of God). In regard to technology and other practical aspects of church life (where we meet, the length of our meetings, type of seats we use, etc.), these matters are not clearly spelled out in Scripture and, therefore, are matters of liberty that are under the biblical guidelines for the practice of liberty. This means that Scripture must be consulted to see if they contradict anything that Scripture maintains.

Second, the subject of discipleship methodology is plainly taught in Scripture. The Bible is clear about discipleship, and it gives the full range of that teaching including who, where, why, what, and when. It is the Bible that tells us what is central. When you split people up according to age, you are doing something that is contrary to the explicit, revealed commands and patterns of Scripture.

*Argument 11: You are arguing from silence.*

Our primary argument is not from silence - that age segregated ministry does not exist in the Bible and, therefore, should not exist in the church. While the modern form of systematic, age-segregated youth ministry has neither precept nor example to support it in either the Old Testament or the New Testament, I do not rest my argument on this fact. What is more important - and this is the main point to be made - is that the positive commands and examples in Scripture call for the practice of age-integrated worship and discipleship in the church and the responsibility of parents to disciple their own children. Deuteronomy 4:2 commands us not to add to or take away from the teaching and commands of Scripture in this regard. To engage



the church in systematic age-segregated youth ministry adds to God's instructions on how youth are to be taught and trained, and it takes away from God's commands to parents to teach their own children (Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:7).

*Argument 12: The rabbis had youth groups and so should we.*

Acts 22:3, says that Paul was a disciple of the rabbi, Gamaliel. People often say that the age-segregated discipleship system is biblical because it was practiced in the rabbinical schools in Israel during the time of Christ. They conclude that it is legitimate to adopt the pattern of the rabbis.

There are several observations that must be made when encountering this argument.

First, this is an argument from history rather than Scripture. While arguments from history can be interesting and helpful, they are not the guide of the church. The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* argues that the practices of the rabbis are not our patterns. Scripture is our sole pattern and guide.

Second, we must recognize that the spiritual state of the people of God during the time of Jesus was deplorable. Jesus was continually correcting the wrong thinking of the people of Israel. Our Lord called that generation "an adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39). They had multiplied man-made laws and had invented practices that were contrary to Scripture (Mark 7:9-12). This was not a righteous society; it had been seriously corrupted

by the traditions of men. Our Lord, during His ministry on earth, spent significant time correcting their views. For example in Matthew 19 alone, He corrects their views of salvation, humility, marriage, divorce, singleness, and children. This was not a society that was doing the will of God. This is why Israel during the time of Christ is not the place we ought to look for our patterns. When we say, “The rabbinical schools are valid because they were used in Israel,” we have forgotten that Jesus was correcting many of their traditions, not validating them. Therefore, Jewish traditions should always be evaluated through the lens of Scripture alone.

Third, many practices of the Greeks were working their way into mainstream Jewish life. Hellenization was being progressively favored by the Jews in Palestine during the time of Jesus. There were many expressions of this. For example, the educational practices of the gymnasium were being embraced. The gymnasium provided educational and athletic opportunities to Jewish children. Some parents in Jerusalem were sending their children to these gymnasiums in addition to the rabbinical schools. Our word *gymnasium*, which comes from *gymnos*, means naked. In ancient Greece, athletes competed nude in appreciation and glorification of the human body. The fact that Jewish parents were sending their children to the rabbinical schools and the gymnasium for education is no evidence that it is legitimate for the church to do the same.

Cultures are always in flux, but it is for the people of God to establish Christian culture wherever they dwell. Even though the Jews, during the time of Jesus, were sending their children to the rabbinical schools and to the gymnasium, this does not argue that

we should follow their patterns and set aside biblical practices and patterns of education that are clearly established in Scripture.

### **Pragmatic and experiential arguments**

Having considered the biblical arguments that are often raised against age-integrated ministry, let's now consider some of the more popular pragmatic and experiential questions that are often asked. Again, pragmatic arguments tend to focus on specific problems that might occur while experiential arguments draw from events and circumstances of personal history.

*Argument 1: If we eliminate age-segregated youth ministry, we lessen our effectiveness in reaching a lost generation.*

The assumption that often underlies this idea is that systematic, age-segregated youth ministry is actually effective in reaching lost youth. Conversely, this assumption asserts that if the church gathers all the generations together, it is going to be ineffective in reaching the rising generation.

It is vital that we check our assumptions, making sure they are biblical. In this particular case our assumption should be that the best results in reaching youth come from obeying biblical commands and honoring explicitly biblical principles. Faithfulness to God's Word is success. If we can agree on this, then we can take the next step of debating which methods are biblical and which ones are not.

We must also be careful to accurately identify where these lost youth are. The unevangelized generation can be found both inside and outside the church. We should not forget that many of today's lost generation are in families that are already in the church. They are lost in their sins and remain unconverted until God regenerates them and they repent and believe the gospel.

The lost youth outside the church may have no Christian parents. They can be found throughout our neighborhoods, apartment complexes, workplaces, coffee shops, and other places. Scripture shows us at least four major ways that a lost generation like this can be engaged.

First, we need to follow the ministry pattern of Christ and the apostles. The Lord Jesus ministered to people as they passed by. To reach the lost, we need to live like Christ did and take the opportunities that God gives us. We see the same pattern with the apostles. They ministered to the people on the streets, in the synagogues, and from house to house. Wherever they were, they did not shrink back from delivering the message of the gospel.

Second, we must be involved in fulfilling the Great Commission. This is the responsibility of every Christian. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus Christ charged believers to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Believers are also commanded to preach the gospel to all men, both "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). This personal ministry is critical for youth discipleship.

Third, fathers should take their God-given responsibility to care for the fatherless. We need more men like Job who brought the fatherless into his home and to his table.<sup>[9]</sup> James says that this is “pure and undefiled religion” (James 1:27). No new program needs to be created for the care of the fatherless. God has already told us how to reach them.

Fourth, we need to have biblically functioning households. Psalm 68:5-6 states that God is “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families.” Open homes are able to fulfill this divine purpose. When a home is used for hospitality, ministry opportunities to a lost generation are increased. God, who designed the resources of a household for ministry, has called His people to use those resources for His glory, not only for the saints, but also for the lost.

These means of reaching the lost are all a natural outworking of obedience, and they expose a lost generation to the love of Jesus. However, putting children in a youth group gives them a skewed vision of life. Churches with biblically ordered meetings and relationships are far better at reaching a lost generation than an alternative that does not reflect the structure God has ordained.

Can you imagine a less stable group in which to put youth than with a group of peers? In contrast, can you imagine a more life-giving group than a well-functioning church? Or, think of the impact of a God-centered home in which a husband and wife are functioning biblically. The relationships there depict the gospel: husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church; wives

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[9] Job 31:16-22

submitting to their husbands as the church submits to Christ; and children, who have a genuine love for Christ, displaying honor and obedience to their parents. A God-centered home is a powerful force for evangelism.

When we consider how to reach a lost generation, should we invent something alien to Scripture? On the contrary, we should approach lost and broken people in the same ways that Jesus and His apostles did. Scripture does not suggest that we use a systematic, age-segregated method to reach lost people, but rather an integrated method of bringing them into the body of Christ.

*Argument 2: We have to offer something for the children in the church whose fathers are not teaching them.*

To begin with, it is important to recognize that the apostles established no schools to disciple children of spiritually indolent fathers. Do we think that in the early church, all fathers were somehow functioning biblically in their homes? Ephesians 6:1-4 seems to imply that not all fathers were doing their duty. The problems of disobedient or disfigured fatherhood and family life existed in the first century, just as they do today.

Church leaders need to exhort fathers in our present day with the same intensity as Paul did the fathers in the Ephesian church: “Bring [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Paul *commanded* them to do their duty.

Wisdom will be required to biblically handle a situation

in which children are not being trained in their homes. Since fathers are commanded to train up their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, a negligent father is sinning. However, all situations are not alike. Some involve ignorance and others a refusal to repent. Some children do not have a father at all. Consequently, the first issue that church leaders need to address is what type of situation they are actually dealing with. Is this a father who needs instruction and personal shepherding, or is this an unrepentant father who needs rebuke and correction? Is it a divided family where the father is not a professing Christian, or is it a family where there is a severe ailment of some type, which disables the father in his duty?

Whatever the case, a breakdown in the family does not mean that we are to jettison the biblical pattern of discipleship. Young men who have no father in their lives should witness firsthand what a real Christian household looks like. Men of the congregation should embrace them as brothers and bring them into their families.

*Argument 3: Implementing both ways is even better—age-specific ministry in the church and fathers teaching in their homes.*

Can a man's children receive direct benefit from a youth pastor's influence and teaching without upsetting the divine order of the father as the primary teacher? If throughout the week fathers were discipling their children, would not doctrinally accurate instruction from youth pastors who have the gift of teaching be the best of both worlds?

While these seem like reasonable questions, I propose one more that is more to the point: *Why would we want it both ways when Scripture presents only one way?* Are we longing for something that God did not give? Scripture only presents elders as the primary teachers in the church and fathers as the primary teachers in their homes. I, therefore, reject the pattern of age segregation in the church because God's Word does not give us a precept, principle, or pattern for youth groups or age-segregated discipleship.

Having it both ways never works anyway. In church settings where the discipleship of children is outsourced to others, fathers usually do not to play their biblical role of discipling their children in the home. If anything, fathers grow weaker in their roles, not stronger. Where discipleship is outsourced from the family to the church, robust discipleship in the home is the exception and not the rule.

*Argument 4: God greatly used youth group in my life.*

Yes, many of us were saved and received spiritual nourishment and encouragement in youth groups. We ought to give thanks to God for His kindness toward us. His mercies are exceedingly great. He graciously reached for us in the most untenable places and plucked us out of many dangerous waters. However, many people also romanticize the youth group that they were in and do not recognize the things that were out of biblical order.

We often forget that youth groups, by their very nature,



deprive participants of other relationships in the church. Who can calculate the loss of biblical, generationally connected fellowship in the whole body of the church? Consider the wisdom that was never gained, or gained much later in life that it could have been. Think of the reciprocal service (between the young and old) that was never rendered. In addition, consider the influences that youth group exposed us to because of the concentrated immaturity that afflicted the group. When we walk with our peers, they influence us. This kind of influence does not prepare us to be adults. How much farther along would we be? How much better prepared for marriage would we have been if we had not gone to youth group, but had had a broader and more biblical experience?

Today, youth in our churches are not growing up. They are swallowed up in immaturity for years on end. They are not ready for marriage or work. This is one of the results of the generational fragmentation in the church.

When we look back at youth group, we often remember what we were blessed by instead of the bad things to which we were exposed. We should remember primarily the good things because we are commanded to dwell upon what is good.<sup>[10]</sup> Nevertheless, here is the danger: We should not base our theology upon our personal experiences but upon the Word of God.

*Argument 5: Age-segregated youth ministry and Sunday school can't be all that bad for children; after all, it's only an hour or so per week.*

The relative number of the hours spent in a class is not the

[10] Philippians 4:8

issue. The real issue is what we are teaching our children when we segregate them. When we systematically segregate, we are simultaneously teaching children (and affirming to parents) something wrong about the church, the family, and fatherhood. Regardless of the time spent or the content delivered, the very practice of systematic age segregation undermines biblical teaching on a number of fronts.

*Undermines the unity of the church*

The practice of age-segregated classes undermines the biblical definition and function of the unity of the church. Since fathers are required by God to teach their children the statutes and judgments of the Lord, segregating children in the church misleads them about the nature of the church itself. Just having an age-segregated class can defeat the sound doctrine that a father is required to disciple his own children. Furthermore, the church is “one body” and made up of brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers, and is never fragmented by age or race. It is contrary to what the gospel produces—a congregation striving together for unity—to split people up into groups that dissolve that unity, a blood-purchased unity, that is demonstrated by gathering all generations, genders, economic statuses, and races at one table.

*Promotes unqualified teachers*

Age-segregated classes formalize a reliance on a high percentage of unqualified teachers. Scripture says, “Let not many of you become teachers” (James 3:1), yet most modern Sunday

schools require multiple teachers that are simply unqualified for such an important task. Anyone who has ever participated in trying to run a Sunday school ministry knows how few truly qualified teachers there are. The system is so demanding of personnel that it forces churches to fill the slots with warm bodies, regardless of the teacher's biblical qualifications. Such a practice is unbiblical and anti-church.

*Provides an unhealthy safety net for fathers*

Fathers will see the safety net of Sunday school as an escape hatch. On the other hand, when fathers are told it is their responsibility to teach their children and there is no safety net in the church for them, then regenerate fathers will rise up. By providing a safety net, we are actually hindering the fathers in the church who would otherwise fulfill their duty.

*Consumes resources*

The resources necessary for maintaining age-segregated programs are massive. They demand enormous amounts of administration, significant real estate capacity, funds for curriculum, and outings that affect nearly every person in the church.

This fact speaks to the problem of time and energy in a local church body. Age-segregated ministry creates a machine that demands energy to run it. Age-segregated churches are almost always very busy churches program wise, with multiple

meetings each week. Rather than uniting families, these programs usually fragment them. We cannot pull parents out of the house almost every night of the week and still expect them to teach their children at home. Consequently, multiple age-segregated, programmatic activities are energy drains that detract from the life of the church and the family.

It is common for people to observe, “It’s only one hour per week. What’s the big deal?” The big deal is that the percentage of opportunity that a youth group might rob is very large even though it may be a small amount of time. For example, the majority of fathers work during daytime hours. This means that the premium time for family discipleship is during the evening and weekend hours when the family has finished their work for the day and is winding down after supper. We might have twelve hours in this zone during the week, but a lot of things are competing for those twelve precious hours.

Youth groups invariably have meetings and events during the evening and weekend hours. Even though youth group might be just one or two hours a week, it is not two hours in the middle of the workday. It is two hours of premium evening family time that has to be sacrificed for youth group. It competes directly with the parents for prime time with their children.

*Overthrows biblical jurisdiction*

As we have said, the heart of the matter is our view of God and the sufficiency of His Word. Is Scripture sufficient for all life

and godliness? Do we think we can invent something that is better than what God has given us? Surely if systematic, age-segregated ministry for youth were good or helpful, God would have prescribed it. But He didn't.

*Argument 6: It is more effective to gather a large crowd of youth so we can minister to hundreds or thousands of them. Fathers can only minister to a few.*

People say that it is difficult for fathers to reach large numbers of lost youth, while youth ministries are able to do this effectively. The reason that youth pastors draw many more youth at a time than fathers ever could is that they use a culturally relevant format.

Statistics seem to indicate that most of those “reached” by youth ministry will eventually fall away. When youth ministers document the fruit of their ministries, they find that most of the fruit comes from youth who had biblically functioning families. The fact is that the majority of youth for whom the youth ministry is actually beneficial are those who have parents that are actively teaching and training them.

Even though fewer young people may be reached by age-integrated discipleship and worship in the short term, the evidence argues that more are actually benefited over a longer period of time. The illusion of numbers “reached” needs to be replaced by the biblical goal of raising up disciples who remain steadfast in Christ's Word.

*Argument 7: Our youth group is Bible based. We are not about silliness and entertainment but serious Bible study. Is that not the kind of youth group we want?*

There are four issues to consider here. First, it assumes that an age-segregated group setting is the best means for ministering to youth. Providing this kind of service to youth presupposes that all the youth are essentially the same and have the same needs. The approach is broad, offering the same teaching to all instead of personal counsel that addresses the various questions of each individual.

Second, by offering an age-segregated ministry that isolates youth into a subgroup, we are cutting them off from valuable mentoring relationships with older people.

Third, the establishment of children and youth ministries is often an admission that fathers are being allowed to walk in disobedience to the biblical commands concerning the discipleship of their own children. In effect, we are saying, “The fathers of our youth have not told their children about God; therefore, we have to tell them.” This proclaims that since we have failed to equip the fathers, we now have to take over their job and make up for their lack. Do we have the right to usurp their authority and go directly to their children? Do they think that if the fathers aren’t tithing, the church should tithe for them? Or if the husbands are not loving their wives, we should find men to stand in for them?

Fourth, this kind of serious youth ministry mirrors biblically

ordered gatherings. Why not put the youth in the meetings of the corporate church that reflect a biblically faithful picture of church life? In the context of an age-integrated church, the elderly can benefit from the youth, and the youth from the elderly. The range of gifts is wider, and all are better equipped by the presence of mature believers.

*Argument 8: Not every man is gifted to teach his family.*

It is true that we all have different gifts and different capacities of those gifts. No man is adequate for this task, yet every man is called to fulfill it. Our adequacy is of God. If a man has children, he is appointed as their primary teacher in the home. Every man, apart from the grace of God, is unable to teach his children. If we know that we are called to teach our children, then we also need to know that we are completely dependent upon the mercies of God in order to do our duty. There is no indication in Scripture that personal weakness ever abrogates the divine commands to fathers to teach. If a man feels he is inadequate or has judged himself incompetent, he does not somehow become exempt from his God-ordained function and responsibility.

There will be unusual situations in which a father may be so significantly impaired that he will need help from others. These situations require biblical wisdom. However, these situations are not the norm nor are they a reason to nullify the requirement for the majority of fathers. We cannot point to any place in Scripture where the father's responsibility is withdrawn; no man was ever relieved of this duty because he felt himself unqualified. Men, remember: God is sovereign in placing children in families, and it

is the wisdom of God that has placed children in your house. You must rise to the occasion.

*Argument 9: You are overreacting to the negative influences of the worst examples of modern youth ministry. God has not called us to be reactionary but to positively embrace biblical Christianity.*

My viewpoint is not one of mere negative reaction, of complaining that the world, and even the church, has sold us short. I am calling on all who will listen to reject the world's system and in its stead embrace the clear and sufficient guidelines God has given in His Word about discipling youth. I believe this begins with an honest recognition that popular age-segregated practices contradict explicit practices in Scripture. If we embrace the biblical patterns, we will usually find no room for the unbiblical ones. This is not reactive, but rather proactive.

*Argument 10: Unruly children disrupt worship.*

This is true, but I suggest that the fix is not to remove these children from the rest of the church body, but to use it as a means of training them and their parents in proper behavior. Teaching a child to be sober-minded, worshipful, attentive, respectful, and so on are all matters of discipleship.

*Argument 11: Age-integrated churches end up being focused on the family and cannot be truly evangelistic.*



This question presupposes that the church does well in evangelism. It makes one think that we are being effective with age-segregated ministry.

No church should be centered on the family. It is the work of Jesus Christ that matters most. Furthermore, a family that lives in seclusion and cares nothing about the lost in the community is a disobedient family.

The “traditional family” has many advantages for evangelism in the community. First, it is a hospitable family and is ready to put its resources into service by bringing people into its homes in order to bless them through the proclamation of the gospel. Second, it is an attractive family because it is a happy family, for “happy are the people whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 144:15). Third, it is an evangelistic and instructional family because it is under obligation to fulfill the Great Commission. Fourth, the traditional family is flexible because it is composed of various ages and can easily adapt to the wide age range of the people in the community.

Traditional families who are functioning with genuine love for Christ and are operating in biblical order are powerful demonstrations of the gospel.

*Argument 12: Age-segregated youth ministry can be reformed.*

Many people ask, “Why can’t we just reform instead of uproot?” It was Voddie Baucham who said, “to reform something, you have to take it back to its biblical roots. Age-segregated

## THE OBJECTIONS ARE TESTED

ministry, as it is practiced today, has no biblical roots and no biblical affirmation, so how do you reform it? We have built this entire structure from the culture up rather than on the Word of God.

So how do we rebuild? What steps do we need to take to reverse the destructive trends in our discipleship?

## Section IV

# Replanting the Garden

## CHAPTER 11

# *The Problem With Pulling This Weed*

### **Recognize the problems of making the change to age integration**

Returning to biblical order in the church and family is dangerous business. It can split your church. It can get you fired. Why? It requires you to change major elements of your life and beliefs. It makes you seem odd, and people will often marginalize you for it.

For example, Mike had been a Christian education pastor for ten years, but was increasingly concerned with the culture that was developing among the youth in his church. He tried to see that the youth meetings focused on serious matters such as Bible study and the singing of doctrinally sound songs, but these efforts were not proving sufficient to fill up the shallowness that only seemed to be increasing. He worried about the kids in the group because they mostly appeared to disregard their parents. Of the ninety-five

kids in his high school group, only a handful, maybe five, seemed to be truly genuine and serious about their faith. These did not really need him at all because their parents were actively discipling them. When he talked to the rest of the parents about getting more involved in their children's lives, they said they were just too busy. Over two years, he tried to organize meetings for the parents to encourage them to engage in biblical family life, but only a few would come. Even though he knew the family was the key to the spiritual lives of these young people, he had little hope that these families would ever change.

Then one day something happened that changed his world. What touched it off was his oldest daughter's thirteenth birthday. This joyous occasion turned into a tumultuous watershed moment in the direction of his whole family life and even his career. As he looked at his precious daughter during that birthday party, he realized that she would soon be entering his junior high group at church, and it would destroy her. He had seen it a hundred times. Girls would enter junior high with some level of innocence and quickly get swallowed up in the typical junior-high girl culture of fashion, shallowness, insecurity, depression, boys, and inappropriate relationships.

That night Mike made a decision. While his daughter was blowing out the candles on her birthday cake, he whispered to himself, *Over my dead body will I ever let my daughter attend the junior high group.* As the Christian education pastor, it was awkward when people noticed he kept his daughter with him instead of sending her to the youth group. The senior pastor caught wind of it and called Mike into his office to discuss the matter. Mike told him

the whole story and ended by saying, “Something has to change because this youth group is destroying our young people.” When those words left his mouth, he knew that he was calling into question the whole methodological foundation of the church. The church gave him a few months to ponder his position, but after a while, the board of elders declared that Mike no longer bought into the vision of the church and he was let go.

Mike discovered that there are serious implications when you pull on the weed of age-segregated youth ministry. He, like many who have also pulled, found that it had a very large root system that was wrapped around almost everything in church life.

I have many personal relationships with men who have called into question the validity of age-segregated ministry in the church. They all ended up realizing that they were pulling against enormous philosophical and institutional roots that would not move. It became very clear to them that what they hoped to uproot was so entrenched that it would take enormous resolve to hold their positions. They also found that if they exercised that resolve, they might be removed from their positions. There is always a cost that one must consider when he tampers with established traditions.

### **A weed with roots**

I’ve likened age-segregated discipleship to a weed. You may think that is too harsh, but my reason for calling it such is that I see the way it has wrapped itself around so much of modern church life. Both the pervasiveness and the entanglement—weed-like qualities

to be sure—become painfully clear to those who endeavor to make the change to age-integration. Consider just some of the western church’s investment in modern-age segregated ministry.

*Significant financial resources are dedicated to it*

If we question the principles and practices of modern youth ministry, there are financial issues that must be immediately considered, including salaries, budgets, building programs, and strategic plans that are tied to youth ministry. Jobs are on the line. Mortgages are threatened. Institutions are at stake.

During the rise of modern youth ministry, there was a shift in church spending. Money began to flow to finance youth ministers, advertising, games, youth outings, and youth centers. Youth gatherings changed from edification and evangelism to entertainment under the guise of evangelism.<sup>[1]</sup> Money was shifted from the support of preaching, missions, and ministering to “the fatherless and widow” to in-house entertainment for the young people. Youth ministry became event-driven and geared

[1] One youth minister writes, “In the course of an average year, if a student were to participate in every event we offer, they would probably have to shell out between \$1,000-\$2,000. But parents don’t mind since the price of golf memberships here run \$30,000 or more, with \$5,000 annual fees. ‘A few grand to keep my kid involved in church is a great deal,’ they would say.

“Now for students who cannot afford it, we offer scholarships to ensure that every single student can go if they want to. But again, everything revolves around money (and in a sense entertainment).

“I realize this is where our culture is, and I do believe in embracing culture. But I also believe in the power of Jesus to transform culture in areas that are counter-biblical.

“It appears to me in the books of Acts that monies collected in the early church went directly to help the widows and orphans and to feed the hungry. At some point, even Paul argues, that those who do the Lord’s work should receive money for it so they don’t have to work elsewhere. But I wonder where in the history of Christianity did the tithe money go towards funding students’ boat trips on the Sea of Galilee, their ski trip to Sinai, and purchasing the latest lights to trick out the synagogue’s teen room?” Dan Haugh, “Money-less youth ministry,” YouthWorkers.net, Oct. 13, 2009, [www.youthworkers.net/index.cfm/fuseaction/blog.view/BlogID/104](http://www.youthworkers.net/index.cfm/fuseaction/blog.view/BlogID/104), Sept. 25, 2010.

toward keeping youth in church by making it appealing to them. Youth-group ranks were filled with non-believing kids eager to be entertained. The youth from church families were sent to these groups by parents who did not want to do the work of discipleship but were paying for their children to be discipled in a “safe Christian” environment. How wrong they were. This mixed youth group presented a greater corrupting influence than they could have imagined; they paid for it with cash on the front end and were repaid with corrupt teens on the back end.

How much money is spent on youth ministry and age segregation in the church? We do not really know the cumulative annual spending rate. If you calculate personnel, facilities, events, curriculum, and the volunteer manpower invested in the church, it adds up to an enormous expenditure of resources. When you add in the money spent on age segregation and the things supporting it in parachurch organizations, Bible colleges, and seminaries, it becomes very obvious how expensive it really is.

*Significant personnel resources are allocated to sustain it*

During the 1970s and '80s, pastors believed that getting a youth minister was a strategic priority. By the end of the twentieth century, trained youth-ministry professionals were thought to be indispensable for church growth. They were regarded by many as the only ones who knew how to deal with the problems of youth. Fathers were expected to willingly leave their children's spiritual well-being in the hands of a new crop of mostly young youth ministers. Unfortunately, most fathers willingly accepted this innovation. For the first time in history, the church hired trained



youth ministers to maintain a youth program.

*Major industries have grown up around it*

The innovative techniques of the 1960s led to the new and promising ministries of the 1980s. These ministries created a requirement for money, which in turn gave rise to various industries that were necessary to service them.

Modern youth ministry and the whole age-segregated enterprise is now being fueled by a multimillion-dollar industry supported by churches, parachurch organizations, publishers, nonprofits, and educational institutions. Money is freely spent on staff, curriculum, stage lighting, high-tech electronic equipment, bands, talent, games, retreats, vacation Bible schools, youth centers, and classrooms. Age-segregated ministry has become a profitable business.

**Vast root system**

The roots of this weed have had plenty of time to grow and spread. Because of this growth, if you pull on the weed of age segregation, you find yourself pulling on almost every program, philosophy, and capital asset in the church.

When you pull on that weed, you are pulling on the nursery workers, including that wonderful grandmotherly woman who has served faithfully for thirty years. You are pulling on the senior adults' class, the singles' class, the youth group, and the third-

grade class. You are pulling on the Sunday school program and all the planning and administration necessary to support it. You are pulling on the staff configuration and the personnel plan. You are pulling on the curriculum and the budget that supports it. You are pulling on the financial structure of the church and the priorities that the people have been asked to finance for decades. The roots are wrapped around the financial priorities of the church, the strategic plan and vision of the church, and the budgeting process that is connected to them.

Not only are you pulling on much of the church's structure, but you are also pulling on people's affections. When you pull on the weed of age segregation, you pull on the desires of parents who want to worship on Sunday mornings with no children to bother them. And you pull on the desires of the youth themselves—their media center, gymnasium, and coffee bar.

Lots of other things are disturbed as well. While it needs to be uprooted, we must acknowledge that there are problems that come with the uprooting.

### **What to do**

Is there a step-by-step plan for dealing with this problem? Is it realistic to expect pastors to remove age segregation all at once? Usually, the most daunting hurdle is one of leadership. Without biblical conviction and resolve to obey, there will be no hope for change. What is required for such a task?

First, in order to reform this area of church life, it is critical

to have a vision for what biblical church life looks like. With that vision in mind, the journey is more accessible.

Second, courage is required; it takes drastic measures to deal with such firmly fixed realities. A. W. Pink captured this principle when he said, “Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies.”<sup>[2]</sup> Martin Luther as well understood what kind of disposition was required, stating, “Timidity is no help in an emergency.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Third, a biblical foundation must be laid. Many people in modern churches do not know how to think biblically through issues. They do not understand the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Church leaders, therefore, need to take time to preach in such a way that the Bible is regarded as the sole source of authority for all matters of church life. Though it may take some time, people need to see pastors demonstrate before them that Scripture alone is enough through careful expositional preaching and illustrating the sufficiency of Scripture.

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[2] A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1984), 14.

[3] Martin Luther, “The Estate of Marriage” (1522), trans. Walther I. Brandt, in *Works*, Vol. 45, 17.

## CHAPTER 12

# *Making the Necessary Changes*

Now what? If you are a church leader, here are some practical suggestions for making the transition to an age-integrated ministry.

1. Lead your fathers to conduct family worship.
2. Encourage your families to study what the pastor is preaching on.
3. Embrace the sufficiency of Scripture.
4. Provide biblically qualified elders.
5. Build strong families through biblical methods.
6. Teach the church how to be a true family.
7. Work for biblical headship in the home.

8. Encourage biblical womanhood.
9. Minister to youth without creating a youth culture.
10. Begin the process of leading your church to unify and bring the ages together.

If I were a pastor of an established age-segregated church, and I wanted to begin to change the discipleship methodology of the church to include age integration, I would begin with repentance. I would repent from embracing a worldly method of discipleship. Then I would go to work in the following reforms.

*1. Lead your fathers to conduct family worship.*

This is the easiest to do and will produce enormous fruit. Gather the fathers and tell them that God has called them to teach their families, and that this is not a new program emphasis, but rather is a biblical requirement for fathers. Challenge these men to begin reading the Scripture to their families daily. Something that I suggest to fathers is to find a reading plan that will take them through the Bible in a year, and then simply open the Bible with their family every day and read it aloud with them. Have everybody participate in the reading, taking turns. Spend significant time with your fathers on this effort. This will have an enormous impact on the whole culture of the church. It will set the stage for the changes you need to make. This is a good first step in changing the culture of the church and especially recovering biblical fatherhood.

*2. Encourage your families to study what the pastor is preaching on.*

If you are the pastor, redirect the families by informing them of the biblical texts you are studying for your sermons. Send them an email with your sermon text at the beginning of each week. The practice at the local church where I am a pastor is to get together with the men at a weekly morning gathering in the back room of a local restaurant to study the upcoming Sunday's sermon text and to discuss it. My objective is to show the men how to interpret the passage so they can teach their wives and children. In this way, I disciple the men who disciple their families. Focus on the men and you will win the whole family.

*3. Embrace the sufficiency of Scripture.*

A pastor must reorient the thinking of the congregation. Through his preaching, writing, and personal counseling, he must dislodge the pragmatic spirit of the age. Many people in evangelical churches are almost incapable of thinking "Christianly," and it takes significant investment to change this. A pastor will need to explain how Scripture is sufficient for everything work, child raising, relationships, counseling, and discipleship.

*4. Provide biblically qualified elders.*

Families need good examples to follow. When a church establishes biblically qualified elders who manage their households well,<sup>[1]</sup> they are providing for long-term change. As biblically qualified elders lead by example, the whole church begins to understand how a biblically ordered family functions.

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[1] 1 Timothy 3:4

*5. Build strong families through biblical methods.*

The church needs to be informed that we have missed the mark by doing things that have kept their families weak. Instead of challenging unbiblical practices, we have coddled them, thus institutionalizing our weakness. In our sensitivity, we have lowered the bar so we do not offend or chase anyone off. By this, we ensure generations of weakness. Somehow the cycle has to be broken, and it will never be broken until we are willing to upset the current system and our traditions for the sake of truth and righteousness.

In order to turn the tide, we must stop creating weak families through unbiblical programs. Age segregation gives us fragmented families, corrupted teens, and divided churches. Defective discipleship methods breed weakness. We cannot have godly teens without the input of the older generation. We cannot have a unified church when we are segregated. We cannot effectively minister to the weak families unless we have strong families. If we never have healthy families, then we will never have healthy churches.

This means that churches must receive instruction on matters of jurisdiction and family and church life. Husbands and fathers need to be encouraged to lead, and wives and mothers need to be exhorted to play their role, as do the children. Families must begin to understand the trans-generational worldview that runs throughout the Bible, the principles of biblical discipleship methodology, the relationship between the church and the home, and the biblical role of fatherhood.

*6. Teach the church how to be a true family.*

We must give to modern families biblical church life that exemplifies Christ's love for the church and the familial nature of the local church. It is in a healthy church family that people with broken families learn how to be a healthy family. It is here that men learn to lead, women learn to follow, and children learn to honor.<sup>[2]</sup> It is by observing Christ's love for His bride and the saints' love for one another in a healthy church that families learn how to prosper according the heavenly vision of Christ's love. By and large, people today do not know how to create biblical family life. This is where a biblically ordered church can come to the rescue. Since the relationship of Christ and His church is a spiritual family—where the fulfillment of the “one another” commands<sup>[3]</sup> is a normal part of church family life—a biological family can learn how to live with one another by watching and participating in a healthy church.

*7. Work for biblical headship in the home.*

How do you define a broken family? It starts with evaluating the role of the head of the household. Families are largely broken by men and women and children who do not fulfill their God-ordained roles. If the church ever hopes to minister to broken families, she must start by going back to Scripture to find out how men are to be spiritual leaders in their homes. We need to be about the business of equipping men for biblical manhood.

Exhort your men to pick up their mantle of leadership. It will

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[2] Mark 10:30

[3] Romans 12:9-21; 13:8; 14:13; 15:5, 7, 14



be hard, and it cannot be avoided except at great cost. Encourage your men daily with your words and Scripture.

*8. Encourage biblical womanhood.*

Titus 2 gives a picture of older women (in strong families) ministering to younger women. Paul is speaking here of a woman in her latter years. There is this idea that says, “It doesn’t really matter how old you are; if you are older than the next guy, then minister to him (or her).” And yet, Paul says “older women” But where are these women? To our detriment, they are office workers, health care professionals, CEOs, beauticians, lawyers... We must recover the biblical role of a woman. Not only does she have a job to do for her husband, she has a job to do for the church. When we promote “Titus 2 women” who will instruct the younger women, we provide a key component to church and family life that generates strong women and strong families. If we do not encourage women to be holy keepers at home, we will never be able to have strong families. Exhort your women to stay home. This call to biblical womanhood is a culture-defying act, but it must be done because it is a key component to biblical Christianity.

*9. Minister to youth without creating a youth culture.*

We must deliver our young people from the corrupting effects of peer-inspired youth culture and raise up godly families and intergenerational churches which will provide what young people so desperately need - mature adults who will be their examples and their teachers.

Discipling the next generation must be done in the context of strong families and a church that is committed to building strong families. In other words, we must build family-integrated churches where both the family and the church work together closely to create the optimal setting for training young men and women for Christ.

While the interactions of family heads and church leaders need to be clearly defined, we must always come back to the clear teaching of Scripture, that fathers have the overriding responsibility and authority in the discipleship of their children. Scripture places the responsibility on parents to bring up children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

All of these elements create healthy and beautiful life in a church. They all reflect the vibrancy, joy, and gospel-centeredness we see in Acts 2:42. In this picture, the whole community of faith is rising up to be a blessing to one another.

*10. Begin the process of leading the church to unify and bring the ages together.*

Bring the children into the worship service, eliminate youth programs, and cancel children's church and the nursery. Either cancel Sunday school or make it age-integrated. Taking these steps does not mean that all staff members are now fired. If the staff members are biblically qualified, then redeploy the youth pastor, the Christian education director, the children's minister, or the other staff members.

## How and when

Perhaps you are motivated to make the change to age-integrated discipleship but prefer to move incrementally. But, can you afford the consequences of delay? What costs will a generation pay while you are seeking to change the course slowly?

Change is always problematic. There are many people in our churches who do not want to change. Many simply will not change. Most people enjoy the programs. Others actually prefer the generational separation. For some there is simply too much money and job security in systematic, age-segregated youth ministry. Quite frankly, some who hold onto this youth ministry do so to please men. Some appreciate the respectful greetings in the marketplaces more than they desire obedience to God's Word. Many of these people realize that if they reject systematic, age-segregated ministry, their friends will turn away from them, their churches will belittle them, and the institutions they love will marginalize them.

When there are pressures such as these, John's admonition can embolden us:

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)*

God calls us to be a holy people, one who is set apart to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

How much harm may be caused because of delayed repentance over destructive patterns? How many years do you have? I know pastors who want to change slowly, but they are losing their children now. They felt they had time. Consequently, they did not try to change and bring their churches to repentance at the speed the crisis required.

We ought to acknowledge that large numbers of people in our pews do not believe that the Word of God applies to all of life. Scores of church people do not believe that the Bible is supposed to, and able to, regulate church and family life. They think that it is silent on education, politics, economics, counseling, and intergenerational ministry. Perhaps now is the time for our mindset to change and our hearts to grieve.

Are Christian leaders who are encouraging and condoning modern age-segregation practices aiding in the corruption of the rising generation? Are we harming biblical family life? Are we contributing to the weakness of the church? Are we creating an aberrant sociology in the church?

Let us say that you believe that systematic age segregation is contrary to Scripture and destructive. Now what? If you recognize there is a problem, do you think you have time to alter your course

slowly? How long will it take, five years or maybe even ten? You say, “I am in it for the long haul, and I want to take everyone in our church with me.”

Here is the bottom line: Sometimes we have to bite the bullet and do the right thing. It may seem like an unpleasant and disruptive thing to do because of the pain it will cause. But refusing to give priority to the making of strong families in our churches ensures that we will never end up with strong families. In fact, by continuing pragmatic methods, the church is caught in a never-ending cycle of weakness.

CHAPTER 13

*A Garden of Renown*

*“I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,” says the Lord God. “You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,” says the Lord God.*

—Ezekiel 34:29-31

As the people of God, we are daily involved in the mission of gardening. Before us is a fertile garden with fragrant plants and beautiful fruit. The glory of this place is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is always refreshing and renewing His garden. And yet, because we labor in a fallen world, we are, and ever will be, in the business of pulling weeds.

Every generation has its prevailing weeds. They differ from season to season and century to century, but until the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, they will persist. The satisfaction of a clean and beautiful landscape is thrilling to the soul, yet every gardener knows that it is short-lived. Sometime in the future, he will return to the carefully cultivated garden only to discover that new weeds have sprouted. This is one reason God appoints workers in His vineyard.

The proposition of this book is that the age-integrated discipleship is the only observable practice in the Bible. Further, that the philosophy and practice of systematic age-segregated ministry, as I have defined it here, is unbiblical in its pattern, inherently destructive in its impact, and unchristian in its origin. Therefore, it qualifies as a weed in the church. This culture of age segregation is harming the younger generation, fragmenting the family, and dividing the church. It was adopted in the church as a result of a departure from Scripture, and it was embraced for erroneous and pragmatic reasons. Now, after decades of practice, it has proven to be harmful to youth, to the family, to the church, and thus, to the communication of the gospel and the glory of God.

Our mission, and the mission of our children, is to repair what has been broken. This mission may require arduous work in blistering heat. Pulling weeds will definitely require getting our hands dirty. This mission is not for the fainthearted. It requires the ability to see, through the Holy Spirit's illumination of the Bible, the beauty and potential of what the garden can look like when the weeds have been removed. Finally it requires the courage to put your hand on the weed and pull.

*Other Books by Scott T. Brown*

Building a God-Centered Family

Feminine By Design

Family Reformation

Building a Godly Home

Preparing Boys for Battle

It Can Be Done

Preparing for Marriage



Helping Them to Choose

Moment of Courage

Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer

# A WEED IN THE CHURCH

Almost everyone involved in modern youth ministry agrees there is a crisis in the modern church as young people are leaving biblical Christianity. Brown suggests that this crisis has an identifiable cause, arguing that while Scripture commands youth discipleship, the premises of modern youth ministry are at odds with biblical teaching. *A Weed in the Church* unfolds the history, the nature, the effect, and the root problem of systematic, age-segregated youth ministry and presents hopeful solutions built on Scripture's sure foundation.

As I have watched what has happened in most of our churches, I have become convinced that Scott Brown is far more right than wrong on this matter. I am extraordinarily grateful that he has gone to the trouble to write this book and articulate the position. May God grant that many will listen to it before our families are totally lost and with them the churches also. Our families simply must have some time when they worship and study together.

**DR. PAIGE PATTERSON**

*President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

The tragic fruit of families torn apart by their churches—which should be holding them together—surrounds us on every side. The experiment of age segregation in the churches has run its course, and the findings are clear. It's time to pull the plug and go back to the old paths, the path God prescribed...Scott Brown's book is a clarion call for just that—and it has arrived at a crucial time.

**E. CALVIN BEISNER, PH.D.**

*Church historian, theologian, founder of The Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation*

Scott Brown offers a thoughtful and gracious challenge to the prevailing model of systematic age-segregation in church. The author's heart beats with passion for the authority and sufficiency of the Bible...He also traces the historic roots of the modern philosophy which would isolate children from the formative influence of godly fathers...One does not have to embrace all of his conclusions to realize that his book can make a helpful contribution to the current debate on how to disciple our children. This provocative book will challenge you to ask whether you are doing God's work in God's way.

**DR. JOEL R. BEEKE**

*President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

*A Weed in the Church* is something of a "Wittenberg Door" for the evangelical community. It calls us to examine our present practices in light of the Scriptures and to make the necessary changes to bring the church and the family in conformity to them. May God give us the wisdom and courage to do so.

**PAUL WASHER**

*Director, Heart Cry Missionary Society*

