

Family Integrated Worship

Written by Josh Winslett

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When people first glance at our worship service they will notice that we have family integrated worship. That is to mean that all ages, from newborn to retiree, worship in a non-segregated fashion. To me, this is a very intimate family activity. Nonetheless, we have to ask ourselves; why do we practice family integrated worship? We do this for three reasons; biblical, historical, and practical.

Biblical:

Let's review some bible verses.

Mt 18:2 "And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,"

Mt 19:13 "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them."

Notice, in both of these verses we see that children were present during the discourse that Jesus was giving. Jesus would further go on to prove the worth of children among them in the latter verses.

In John 21:15-17, Jesus commands Peter to feed his sheep and lambs, the person that feeds sheep is the same person that feeds the lambs. The understanding of a child can often be greater than that of a wise and prudent adult (Mt. 11:25; 21:15). To imply that children cannot learn on the same level of an adult is contrary to words of our savior. Galatians 3:28 gives the final understanding that within baptized believer, there are none superior or inferior; all are

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treated on the same level. Through these examples we can see that there is no New Testament precedent that gives any reason to segregate because of gender, rank, race, or age.

Historical:

Pliny, a Roman governor, from the second century writes to the emperor, “namely that they were accustomed on a stated day to assemble before sunrise, and to join together in singing hymns to Christ as to a deity; Their worship being concluded, it was their custom to separate, and meet together again for a repast, promiscuous indeed, and without any distinction of rank or sex, but perfectly harmless”

This quote from Pliny shows that early Christians were not segregated but worshiped together without any distinction.

Also note that The Black Rock Address, written 1832 by Primitive Baptists, formally addresses the issue of Sunday schools and reinforces the biblical ideal that children should worship with the adults and be taught by their parents; “*The Scriptures enjoin upon parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord...*”

From the time of Christ until the mid 1800’s family integrated worship was the norm. It wasn’t until the modern era that we see the rise of the “get rid of the kids so the parents can worship” mentality.

Practical:

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Think about what children learn when they are only around peers of their own age. They do not see how to react to situations because they are only viewing it through the lens of inexperienced youth. The one place in the bible where children were recorded being by themselves, they were eaten by a bear (2Ki 2:23-24). Sorry, I couldn't resist. The bible constantly reaffirms that children are to learn from the adults (Titus 2:1-8). If we send children to only be around children, they will always be children. Look at society, society constantly (whether in school, television, church, or any activity) segregates adults from children. This has created, what I call, the "generation of perpetual children". We see 30 year old men and women acting more adolescent than preteens acted in earlier generations. Also, if segregated worship was profitable, do you not think that our country would be godlier? Furthermore, Christian denominations in the United States have segregated by age and gender for over 150 years. If this tactic worked successfully, do you not think that our country would be in a much higher moral and spiritual state? Children learn best by example. Children learn best when they have something to aspire to be. Children learn best in view of adults.

I thank God for children. They are the future of the church. David calls children the heritage of the Lord (Psalms 127:3). They should never be overlooked or taken for granted. May God grant us grace to guide them in worship. Let us worship together in one unified voice glorifying God.