

Declaration of Family Ministry and Children in Ministry

Sovereign King Church

Introduction

The modern period can be described as an age of alienation.¹ In a time of great wealth, men forget God and family ties, instead becoming lovers of self. Children have become alienated from fathers and fathers from children. Wives and husbands have become alienated from one another. Brother-sister relationships, along with extended family bonds which include grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, have become increasingly strained and broken. The autonomous individual, a law unto himself, has taken their place.

Before falling for the trap of thinking that the former days were so much better than these,² we should remember that family conflict is normal and universal. Scripture records for us countless examples of serious familial sin and conflict.³ Scripture also holds forth for us strong respect for fathers as representatives of the Fatherhood of God, from Whom all fatherhood gets its name.⁴ Scripture commands us to honor our father and our mother that we may dwell long in the land.⁵

Some modern American Christians have taken notice of the negative social trends mentioned above. Not only have they realized how they and their own families fall short of God's commands, but they also have been awakened, by God's grace, to the glories of manhood and womanhood, to raising up a Godly seed, and to the need to restore father-rule (patriarchy) to the church, home, and society.

These Christians have labored to reform church and family life.⁶ They have sought to restore the place of fathers in authority in the home and church. Church offices of pastor, ruling elder, and deacon have been restricted to men.⁷ A renewed interest has come about in family worship and in at-home instruction of children in religion and other subjects.⁸

Many have come to reject the programs and separate worship services that have become common, particularly in modern evangelical mega-churches. For example, it is common for adolescents and young children to attend separate worship services from their parents or to hear separate sermons on the Lord's Day in mega-churches. In this way, some evangelical Bible-believing churches have unwittingly worked to further divide families, weaken father-rule, and divide the church. In response to this and other abuses, some Christians have instituted family-integrated-worship (FIW) practices in their worship services, providing for whole families to worship together on the Lord's Day.⁹

¹ The great prosperity and technological advances of the industrial revolution,, combined with the rise of ideologies that privilege individual self-expression above all else, have contributed to the fragmentation of families.

² Ecclesiastes 7:10

³ Many examples could be named just from the book of Genesis alone: Abraham's lying about Sarah being his sister on two occasions, Judah's sin with his daughter-in-law Tamar, or Lot's sin with his daughters

⁴ Ephesians 3:15

⁵ Fifth Commandment, Exodus 20:12

⁶ A motto of the Protestant Reformation was "The Church Reformed, Always Reforming."

⁷ I Timothy 2:12-14: "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."

⁸ In Reformed churches in particular, there has been interest in going back to old catechisms and confessions of faith written for children, such as the Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Shorter Catechism, and having fathers teach these to their children

⁹ Family integrated Worship is a modern term for teaching children to worship the Lord Jesus Christ with the rest of the family in the corporate worship gathering on the Lord's Day. There are many examples in scripture (e.g. Deuteronomy 29:10-12, Joshua 8:35, Ezra

As believers have welcomed their children back into Lord's Day worship with them, ecclesiology¹⁰ has been reformed to emphasize the membership of believers' children in the church, and to emphasize that children be disciplined by active and engaged fathers in the home and in the church. In some cases, this has led to a wholesale embrace of historic Reformed covenant theology and paedobaptism; in other cases credobaptism has been embraced with a historic Reformed Baptist covenant theology. In the case of Sovereign King Church and other churches in Evangel Presbytery, this has led to both paedobaptists and baptists sharing fellowship while agreeing to a common view of the membership of believers' children in the church.

Some churches which practice family integrated worship (FIW) have also begun to teach and hold to what is often called family integrated church (FIC). Family integrated churches do not permit any age-segregated or sex-segregated times of instruction at all, believing that, at church, instruction in the faith must always include the whole corporate body. Otherwise, this instruction should happen at home by fathers and mothers.¹¹ Family integrated church (FIC) has become a movement within contemporary evangelicalism that crosses denominational lines.¹²

As with any church reform, disagreements and divisions have arisen among believers regarding models of worship and discipleship. The following questions are at the forefront of these disagreements:

1. Whether age-specific or sex-specific ministries, such as separate classes or groups for men, women, young children, adolescents or college students, are lawful or wise. Some contend these ministries divide families, undermine fathers' authority and are unbiblical and that, therefore, they are prohibited.¹³
2. How children should be educated and whether homeschooling is the only lawful and wise method a father may choose for his children.

The purpose of this statement is to mark where Sovereign King Church will be united and where we will show charity to other brothers in regard to preferences. Schism over matters not touching the vitals of religion is a serious sin, and we wish to guard against this sin in our midst.

What We Believe in Unity

Sovereign King Church holds to the following:

1. Fathers are the heads of their households and are required by God to disciple their families, including children and their one wife.
2. Children are a gift from the Lord and are like arrows in the hand of a mighty warrior (Psalm 127:3-4). Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. (Psalm 127:5)
3. Children of believers are members of the church and, therefore, subject to the discipline of the church. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these. Whether paedobaptists or credobaptists, all members of Sovereign

10:1; Joel 2:16) where we find fathers, mothers, and children worshiping together. See this article by John Piper for an explanation and helpful advice for families during worship. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-family-together-in-gods-presence>

¹⁰ Ecclesiology means "doctrine of the church."

¹¹ See <https://www.gotquestions.org/Family-Integrated-Church.html>

¹² The family integrated church movement "is not a denomination but rather a loose association of churches and organizations represented by a variety of denominational perspectives."
<https://faith.edu/faith-news/united-families-dividing-churches-an-assessment-of-the-family-integrated-church-movement/>

¹³ Those who hold to this position may not directly call age-segregated ministries sinful but would argue that they are so unwise as they might well as be sinful and unlawful.

King Church agree that their children are members of the church. This belief does not obligate parents as to the timing or mode of the sign of the covenant (Baptism).

4. Fathers should ensure that children receive a Christian education. Fathers are free to choose different means and methods of education¹⁴, depending on many different variables as seems right to them: their child's personality and gifts, their own or their wife's gifts, their financial situation, and other circumstances. Fathers and mothers must be willing to receive advice from pastors, elders, Titus 2 women, and fellow believers concerning their children's education. Though fathers are free to choose different means of education, they will be held accountable before God for their children's instruction, so they should not merely outsource this duty but be actively involved.
5. All of God's people should gather for worship on the Lord's Day. All ages are welcome and encouraged to participate in worship. It is good for families to be united in the church. The worship gathering is for the visible church.
6. The church is called to preach the Gospel to all people—male and female and all age groups—and has the authority to do so. The church has been called to make disciples and to teach all that God commands. Historically, the church has used various means to instruct children, young people, men, and women outside of the corporate worship gathering.¹⁵ The church may continue to make use of these means.
7. Fathers should make their families church-centered. Worship with God's people should be given the highest priority, with only extraordinary Providence hindering a family from worship. One day the immediate authority of the father will be changed as children leave the home. The need to be committed to the church will remain throughout life.
8. The church should strengthen families and uphold the authority of the family in its own sphere of authority. The church should make sure that it does not contribute to unnecessary division within the family.
9. The church should help those who are orphans and widows. The church can be a place of comfort for those who are barren. The church is a spiritual family that welcomes all believers and has many fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters.
10. The church ought to strengthen those who are weak, including those who are new to Christian faith and worship. Part of this ministry is to instruct parents to discipline their children so that they are a blessing to the congregation during worship.
11. The worship gathering should be joyful and reverent. All believers have a duty to work toward these ends. Mature believers should be willing and able to help new believers and visitors to grow in the proper worship of Christ. All should be willing to receive the help and encouragement of their brothers and sisters, remembering that we are not only to consider ourselves but to think of others more highly than ourselves.

¹⁴It is our judgment that public schools in America are not only built on providing a godless education but have become places that radically indoctrinate children into sinful and evil ideologies. We would not encourage any father to make use of these schools but would exhort them, as they are able, to seek alternatives. We also acknowledge that there are some rare and exceptional circumstances where a family may make use of public education, and therefore we will exercise discernment, patience, and love when dealing with these cases.

¹⁵ In synagogues and the early church, men and women sat in separate areas. Paul, as a young man, learned with other young men at the foot of Gamaliel. Hannah sent Samuel away to the Temple to be instructed. During the reformation, Calvin catechized young people in Geneva outside corporate worship.

12. Nurseries and children's ministries can give immature or negligent mothers and fathers a crutch, or an excuse not to discipline their children as they ought, but both can also be tools for a faithful father and mother to utilize.
13. The training of children to properly participate in corporate worship must not only take place on Sunday, but fathers and mothers should instruct their children throughout the week to be attentive in worship.
14. Radical personal autonomy and individualism are not compatible with biblical faith and faithful church membership. While we affirm that the father is the primary disciple-maker in the home, he is not the only authority given the responsibility to make disciples. We believe that the Family Integrated Church movement wrongfully downplays the authority of the church to make disciples.
15. The unity of the Church is not founded on methods of education or discipleship,¹⁶ and therefore, Christians should not divide from faithful churches purely on these matters. We believe the Family Integrated Church movement divides the church on unbiblical grounds.¹⁷
16. Whatever we do must be done by faith (Romans 14:23).

Conclusion

We will be committed to unity in the confession that Jesus Christ is King, in building up families, and in raising our children in the truth of His kingdom. (Psalm 10:16). Therefore, we will not divide over family integrated worship or in the methods of the education of our children in the Lord. We believe it is lawful for churches to have ministries to men, women, and children. We condemn schismatic movements that reject the authority of the church.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ephesians 4 lays out the grounds of Christian unity. It is the work of the triune God and our faith in that work that unites believers.

¹⁷ In our judgment, the family integrated church movement is schismatic. See footnote 12 for an article assessing the movement. In addition see this series of articles by Pastor Tim Bayly <http://baylyblog.com/blog/2017/03/good-father-family-centered-church-movement-1>

¹⁸ I Timothy 4:13, I Peter 5:1-5, Titus 1:9, Titus 2:15, Titus 3:9-11