

Senior Pastor Motion for Consideration to Cease the Practice of Systematic Age-Segregation of all Corporate Gatherings, Ongoing Discipleship, Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies

by: Paul Thompson
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of
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The following is my formal motion to be considered by the church body of Eastside Southern Baptist Church on April 17, 2011. I present this motion for consideration and examination to determine a right and obedient response to our Lord's instructions concerning the church.

The motion is presented after a thorough personal investigation and meetings with a Ministry Evaluation team made up of a cross section of the membership over a four month period of time. My conclusion and observations are from primary and secondary documents.

The following resources were researched and discussed; the Holy Bible, the Baptist Faith and Message (1925, 1963, and 2008), 16th Century French Confession, A Weed in the Church (Scott Brown), Divided (documentary on the state of the modern church), LifeWay Christian Resources, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

²¹ But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

1 Thess. 5:21-22 (NASB)

Reason for Examination:

Two places of examination from the Eastside Southern Baptist Church Constitution:

ARTICLE IV. MEETINGS

SECTION 1. This church shall hold regular meetings for worship, teaching, training, and fellowship.

SECTION 2. This church shall hold regular business meetings at which time the material and spiritual conditions of the church will be discussed, and plans projected for its material and spiritual growth and outreach.

SECTION 3. Other meetings of the church as a whole, or of authorized groups within the church, shall be set according to the needs of the congregation.

ARTICLE II. OTHER CHURCH OFFICERS

SECTION 2. Sunday School Superintendent. The Superintendent of the Sunday School shall have general oversight of the entire school and shall administer its affairs in cooperation with, and according to, the plans and methods of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, subject to the approval of the local church. He shall acquaint himself with the best methods of religious education and endeavor to adopt them in his school. It shall be his duty to counsel weekly or monthly with his teachers and officers through officers' and teachers' meeting, in the work of the school, giving advice and receiving suggestions from his co-workers. He shall see that a full and accurate report is made of the work of the Sunday School in the regular business meetings of the church.

SECTION 3. Training Union Director. The Training Union Director shall have charge of the activities of the Training Union. He shall acquaint himself with the program and methods outlined by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for this organization and shall endeavor to adopt such programs in this church, subject to the approval of the church. He shall see that a full accurate report is given at the regular business meetings of the church.

For many years I have had a growing unrest when I examine the generational movement away from the local church in the churches I have served. It seems as though we have more resources available to the local church than any other time in the history of the church and yet there is a notable decline in Biblical knowledge among many.

Being that Baptists are a self-governing people who historically adjust ourselves to the plumb line of God's Word; we are most comfortable with the sufficiency of Scripture. Sufficiency of Scripture has historically been a trademark of Baptists. Our historic and current documents give clear instruction...

1925, 1963 and 2008 Baptist Faith and Message

I. The Scriptures (emphasis mine)

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and **the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.** All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

1743 Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith

I. The Scriptures (emphasis mine)

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved.

1559 French Confession

II. The Scriptures (emphasis mine)

We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from Him alone, and not from men. And in as much as it is the rule of all truth, containing all that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels to add to it, or to take away from it, or to change it. **Whence it follows that no 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.**

² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;

³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 2 Peter 1:2-3 (NASB)

Acknowledgement:

I understand that there has been eternal, lasting fruit that has resulted from the practice of systematic age segregated teaching in the past and by the grace of God some may continue in the future. I am not

bringing into question the motivation of any Sunday School teacher from the past or present. I believe that the intent of all such persons is motivated to produce lasting fruit. I am thankful to God for those who have taught the Bible to all ages and in various ministry settings in the history of Eastside Southern Baptist Church. My conclusion is not based on the failure or success of those who have taught the Bible in age specific endeavors.

What is in question is methodology. Secular methodology verses Biblical methodology. After much examination and discovery of education philosophy, historic Baptist confessions, and most importantly Scripture, I am at peace to be at odds with the majority of modern philosophy and stand with the sufficiency of Scripture.

Conclusion:

Our Lord expects His church to separate her association with the world, not to be molded by the world's standards but rather His standard and His alone. Because of the historical position of Baptists, no Baptist agency or board shall mandate any creed, statement, or resolution to an autonomous, independent church; we are charged with this important task solely.

This is not an issue of acting in Christian liberty; this is an issue of obedience to God in Biblically doctrine given to us by the authority of His Word.

After much research and personal interviews, I am persuaded that the practice of systematic age-segregated teaching of the Bible in what has become a modern tradition of children's ministry and youth/student ministry is not in agreement with the whole of Scripture; Old Testament and New Testament. On the contrary, the overwhelming evidence from Scripture places the jurisdiction of teaching the Bible to believers children is the God breathed responsibility of the family. The Bible is not silent on this topic, but rather, it is quite explicit in both the Old and New Testaments.

I am resolved that ESBC should walk with great caution in relation to the precepts of Scripture. The methodology of teaching the children of believing parents is without question the jurisdiction of the family, namely the father. It is the duty of the church to instruct, council, and provide training to parents to obey the mandates of Scripture to train up their child in the ways of the Lord. "examine everything carefully." (1 Thess. 5:21)

I am resolved that ESBC should apply all diligence to the duties of her jurisdiction; Evangelism, discipleship, church discipline, preaching, praying, and the care of orphans, widows and poor. All duties of the church are age-integrated where families; wither singular or great in number gather regularly for corporate worship and perform the above mentioned duties of the local church. Families, namely fathers, are to conduct family worship, discipleship, Scripture memory, and all disciplines of a follower of Christ.

Furthermore, this does not mean ESBC is opposed to evangelism of any segment of the general population. On the contrary we are mandated by Scripture to Go, and make disciples of all nations... That is a command that knows no limit of gender, age, nationality, language, geographic boundaries, social-economic status, or political affiliation.

We reject all attempts to pursue growth for the sake of growth and long to be subject to the authority of God. Above all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions we submit ourselves to obey the

Word of God in all things by letting this Holy Word of God examine, regulate, and reform us. When we discover any method that stands opposed to this God breathed Word we will boldly reject it and rather, with joy, cling to God.

God holds this local church responsible for her actions, and in this light I find no other option but to cease the practice of systematic age-segregated education of the children and youth of believing parents and equip families for the duty of this Biblical mandate.

I believe that the only resolution to this problem is repentance and reformation. We must boldly reject the traditions of men that stand in contradiction to the Holy Bible, confess our failures and without reserve return to God's revelation for the establishment and nurture of the family in loving obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. We believe there is a watching world looking for Truth, and so long as we employ the world's method of systematic, age-segregated teaching of the Bible and its precepts, we will continue to witness a diminishing fruit of Truth to all generations who follow us. Our fervent prayer is that God will rise up among us, a Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, age-integrated assembly of believers from the rubble of this self-filled, man-centered, family fragmenting current generation.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that the church and the family are holy institutions, ordained and established by the Sovereign Triune God Who created the heavens and the earth. God's infallible revelation, the Bible, reveals that the family is an integral part of the unfolding of His eternal purpose for the redemption of sinners. This great and gracious salvation—purposed by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit—is in great measure passed on to succeeding generations as parents faithfully disciple the children God gives them. Therefore, the biblical order and unity of the family are crucial to the stability and health of the Church of Jesus Christ. In light of this, we recognize that the family—and especially fathers—are the focus of a fierce and unrelenting attack by the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This has escalated to the point that Christians must rise up in defense of the church and family in uncompromising biblical defense.

Rather than helping in this battle, church leadership has sometimes unwittingly contributed to the problem. Despite the good intentions of many of these leaders, they bear a level of responsibility for the vulnerability of the family in the face of its enemies. Lack of understanding and even unfaithfulness to God's Word in our pulpits have contributed to the decline of biblical Christianity and the dissolution of the family in our churches. The minimizing of scriptural authority in the church leads to unbiblical practices. This in turn leads to the perversion of the biblical roles of men and women, the destruction of our children, and the collapse of our society. Traditions, which have originated in the minds of devils and fallen men, are counterfeits to God's authority. False doctrines derived from Darwinism, Marxism, Feminism, Secular Humanism, Psychology, and countless other unbiblical sources, have emerged from a society that has discarded Divine Revelation and have contaminated or replaced God's standards in many professing churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the bitter fruits of this is the fragmentation of the family.

(A Biblical Confession For Uniting Church And Family: A 21st century statement on the necessity of harmony between the separate jurisdictions of the local church and the family. <http://www.ncfic.org/confession>)

Motion:

I move that Eastside Baptist Church repent and cease the practice of systematic age-segregation of all corporate gatherings; wither worship, small group (Sunday School, Wednesday night, etc.), prayer meetings, or discipleship. We call all fathers and mothers to reclaim their God breathed jurisdiction of teaching their children the things of God. We submit ourselves to the patterns of Holy Scripture and reject secular methods opposed to this Holy Scripture that shows all ages gathering together for worship, teaching, evangelism, ministry, and prayer. We do so boldly knowing that few in our city, state, region, or nation may understand. A nursery may be provided for ages 3 years and younger for all parents wanting this provision for corporate Sunday worship, we also welcome children of all ages at all times in all gatherings.