



Thoughts, sermons and announcements from Grace Community Church in Minden, Nevada.

Friday, January 29, 2010

A Critique of the Family-Integrated Church Movement

A Critique of the Family-Integrated Church Movement

Brian Borgman

This critique concerns a specific church model which has grown into a movement. The movement's visible leader is Doug Phillips of Vision Forum. This brief critique does not address the various other issues that revolve around Phillips, but simply his structure of family-integrated churches.

Another preliminary point should be made as well. Our church does have Sunday School and various other age-segregated ministries, but we also have the children sit in both morning and afternoon services with their families.

I would personally share the concerns with FIC over the cultural forces which wage war against the family. However, my complaint is that their remedy to the attacks on the family are unbiblical, unhelpful and may be worse than the societal diseases they seek to fight.

1) FIC exalts the nuclear family to an unbiblical place

The nuclear family is seen as central to life and the life of the church. The primacy of the family, family roles, domestic order subtly undermine the truth that the family of Christ is central and primary for the Christian (Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 11:27-28; 14:26-27).

Although there is much Old and New Testament instruction to the family, it is the spiritual family that supersedes because of loyalty to Christ.

2) FIC redefines the church under the NC as a family of families

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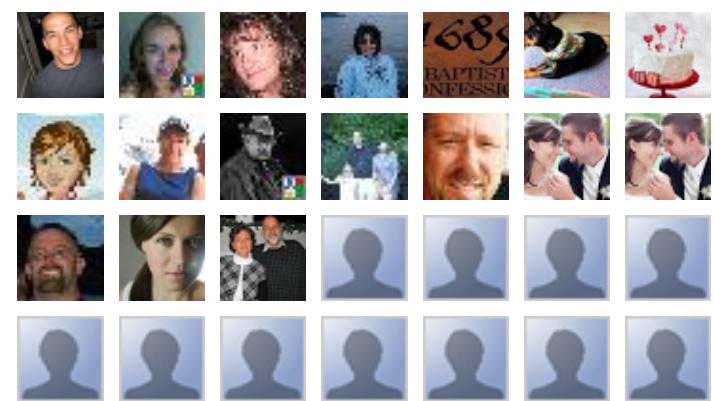
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Under the Old Covenant, Israel was a family of families, held together by blood lines and circumcision. Under the New Covenant, the Church is the family of God, not a family of families (Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 2:19-22). In fact, under the New Covenant, nuclear families may be fragmented because of loyalty to Jesus (Matt. 10:34-39).

- 3) FIC inadvertently excludes or marginalizes singles and others, which is contrary to the principles of Christ's Kingdom (Matt. 19:11-12; 1 Cor. 7:7).

Ask if a single person would feel welcomed as a brother or sister in Christ and a real part of the church family in a FIC.

- 4) FIC elevate certain principles of liberty or personal conviction to the standard of holiness and/or church polity (homeschooling, no women working outside the home, full quiver, no daughters in college, courtship only), which amounts to legalism. In such a church culture it is very easy for the Gospel not to be the main thing and to communicate to the next generation that being a Christian means you do these things (Mk. 7:13).

My overall evaluation assessment of this movement is not positive. I am aware that there are some churches in the movement which have identified these weaknesses and have sought to address them. Nevertheless, there are subtle inroads the movement makes through Vision Forum and their homeschooling and family-oriented materials. Although much (not all) of Vision Forum's material is helpful, it promotes a Victorian vision of patriarchy, rather than a biblical one. Many people are exposed to the materials and confuse biblical principles and ethics with those promoted by VF. They are not one and same.

For those families who use VF materials, I would simply caution them to be on guard against an unbiblical exaltation of the family, an unbiblical view of the church, and the subtle elevation of "family-centered" principles to the place of "the teaching of God's Word."



11 comments :



Andy Barlow February 12, 2010 at 11:02 AM

Pastor Brian,

Thanks for your thoughtful review. We have been getting FIC folks at our church and have discussed at length how to minister to them. Your critique is helpfully reveals that hidden beneath a pious (and no doubt sincere) exterior is a skewed ecclesiology and a Victorian, rather than biblical, ethic.

Andy Barlow

[Reply](#)



Anonymous June 14, 2010 at 6:12 AM

Pastor Brian,

Some of your concerns with FIC are valid. Yet, I would offer a few cautions.

1. As with any movement [for example, Reformed Baptists], there is not uniformity within FIC. You focused upon VF which does have some unbalanced tendencies. Yet, others such as Scott Brown, etc, have a more balanced view of family and church. These men do not believe the church is a "family of families." They believe that the church functions as families. That is, the families tend to stay together instead of being splintered up [youth group, etc.].
2. While some FIC people are radical and/or extreme, many are teachable and starving for truth. We have had three families over the past few years come among us from FIC [to varying degrees they are associated with FIC]. They have been nothing but a true blessing. They are growing in grace and knowledge, and have [and are becoming] a positive addition to the church.
3. I believe we can learn some important things from FIC. For example, to have more than five children is shocking to some of our churches; youth groups, sports, sports, and more sports, rule the day; daughters are treated as sons [move out when 18, marry with 50 thousand dollar school debt, etc.]; small groups replacing public worship. These are things that are more and more characterizing some of our churches.

Overall, I too share your concerns. Yet, I have other concerns as well.

Many [most] of these men are confessional [1689]. There has been fighting on both sides. Personally I think we can learn from each other.

For the good of God's family—the church!

Mike Waters
Heritage RBC

[Reply](#)



Anonymous June 14, 2010 at 6:27 AM

Pastor Brian,

Many of these points are the same straw man arguments proposed by Jason Webb at reformedbaptistfellowship.wordpress.com.

Of course many of these straw man arguments were addressed by Dr. Voddie Baucham way back in March 2009.
http://www.voddiebaucham.org/vbm/Blog/Entries/2009/3/26_Is_the

Reply



Grace Community Church June 14, 2010 at 11:31 AM

It should be pointed out to this anonymous comment that Pastor Brian did post Voddie Baucham's response on Feb. 19, 2010.

Reply



I am blessed! June 14, 2010 at 5:21 PM

Pastor Brian,

This is a topic of great interest to me and my husband who is a Reformed Baptist pastor. I've written extensively about this movement and what we can learn from it on my blog and agree with some of your concerns. However, this movement has largely been a reaction to the failure of the youth ministry model of the last 20-30 years. I can sympathize with the reaction. John MacArthur's preface to his recent edition of *Ashamed of the Gospel* points out the contribution that these youth groups have had on the seeker sensitive and emergent church movements.

I think any criticism of the FIC movement should also point out some of the things they do right, that many churches are failing in, namely discipleship and encouraging family worship in the home.

I have to disagree with your 3rd point. The FIC emphasizes hospitality and multi-generational relationships to the point that singles are incorporated into the church in more meaningful ways than in most churches, ie they're "adopted" into families. I was blessed as a college student thousands of miles from home to have two different Christian families take me under their wings and I'm forever grateful for the experience and mentoring I received. This was not, by the way, in a FIC.

I also agree with the comment that pointed out the diversity in this group. It's true that some have a low view of church and end up quitting church altogether. Others are some of the most committed Christians I've met.

And finally, one criticism you didn't mention, which is probably the main one that has prevented us from registering our church with the NCFIC, though we are very family-friendly, is the necessity of male discipleship in the FIC. My husband has pastored the same church for almost 12 years and he is very passionate about Bible study and discipleship. In all those years he's discipled maybe 3 guys due to poor response on the part of the men in the church. We can't in good conscience drop our catechism/Scripture memory class or SS classes when the parents are not doing anything in the home. The FIC model really falls apart when you have parents who are not doing family worship/devotions at home. Someone needs to give these kids the Word of God and ideally the parents will be responsible in this, but all too often, they're not.

Just a few thoughts.

Reply



Grace Community Church June 15, 2010 at 11:54 AM

Here are two helpful links regarding the Family-Integrated Church

movement.

The first is by Dr. Sam Waldron on the relationship between the family and the church.

<http://reformedbaptistfellowship.wordpress.com/2009/09/09/the-relation-of-church-and-family/>

The other is a letter that Voddie Baucham posted by Sam Waldron in a follow-up to his original article.

http://www.voddiebaucham.org/vbm/Blog/Entries/2010/1/5_Sam_Waldron%20%99s_Open_Letter_on_the_FIC.html

[Reply](#)

 AJ June 15, 2010 at 1:29 PM

It is amazing how many people these days who claim to be "reformed" are demanding more and more, that the churches be family integrated. They will leave their current biblical church because it is not FIC or they will visit a biblical church only to leave for the sole reason it is not a FIC. These "reformed" believers are not following dogmas of the reformed faith regarding the church and her prominence in our life.

The FIC movement seeks to solve the problem of fathers relinquishing their responsibilities to the church, by the church relinquishing her responsibilities to the fathers. They have rightly recognized a legitimate problem and then swung the pendulum to the other extreme rather than simply teaching the biblical duties of the father's to their wives and children, wife's duties to their husbands and children, children's duties to their parents, and the family's duty to the church. Proper scriptural teaching on the family is the solution, not taking the church from one extreme to the other. My pastor, from an ARBCA church, taught us well when he said, "Proper theology always has scriptural BALANCE."

The other glaring problem of this movement is the FIC churches find their identity in the movement. I talk to so many families that are drawn to this movement and all they want to talk about is FIC. I am weary of so many brothers finding their identity in the idolatry of the FIC movement rather than in Christ alone.

May God grant us grace and mercy as we seek to answer the challenge of being biblical christians in Christ-glorifying churches in the world today.

[Reply](#)

 sbrogden June 30, 2010 at 7:56 PM

Brian Borgman makes assertions that are NOT problems with the FIC model, as much as they may be problems with some FIC churches. FIC done rightly - as a delivery mechanism for discipleship, not as a Gospel - are more biblical than any other model. Singles are welcomed into homes to see what marriage looks like. Integration by ages is most helpful.

This article is bad form all around. And I have been greatly blessed by listening to Borgman on the 5 solas and the 5 points. But he is full of beans on this issue.

Reply



Chris Stobart August 13, 2010 at 4:20 PM

I've only recently come across the doctrine of family-integrated to the point of "no Sunday School". I find it exclusive and pharisaical.

And I believe that just because in Jewish culture the woman stayed at home until a husband was found doesn't mean that we're commanded to do the same. I think a lot of what we see is God graciously working within the way that culture just happens to be shaped. If we took the principles that far then we'd have to say that all sons must follow their fathers into business. Not easy - I flunked Chemistry at 16 while my father got a degree in the subject from Oxford.

I'm no Calvinist (cast me as out as a heretic if you like) but I do believe in grace.

Reply



Church Planter's Wife November 25, 2010 at 4:38 PM

The devil is a smart guy...my husband always says he is much more concerned with distraction of believers than he is the un saved. He knows how to take something with good values, and good motives, and seemingly good results...and use it to distract as many Christians as he can from accomplishing the thing we are called...commissioned...commanded to do! To share the Gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. HIS TIME IS SHORT. So if he can take something good...and elevate it to take the place of God's work, he will pounce on the opportunity! The apostle Paul compared his love for Christ with hatred toward family relations (he didn't really hate his family....but compared to his devotion to Christ, that love looked like hatred!) ...my prayer is that Christians would care for the lost...and take their family right along with them....teaching their children to do the same!

Reply



Anonymous October 31, 2012 at 8:37 PM

Amen Church Planters wife.

The FIC is a distraction to the real work of christ, be weary.

Reply

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