

Charles Spurgeon on the Family-Integrated-Church View of Children's Ministries

Compiled by Pastor Phil Layton, as supplement to Family Shepherds study (www.goldcountrybaptist.org)

Spurgeon's ministry and messages from the 1800s speak to the 20th century's departures from healthy biblical ministry to children in the home and church, and also speak to 21st century voices in the Family-Integrated-Church movement who reject putting babies in a church nursery as a mid-20th century novelty and reject children's Sunday School classes as "age segregated practices...based on unbiblical, evolutionary and secular thinking" (www.ncfic.org/about/confession, article XI). Both traditional and FIC (family-integrated-churches rejecting separate nursery/kid's SS) can learn from the balance of biblically blessed ministries from the past like Spurgeon's, who preached strongly against parental abdication *and strongly for* children's classes as well.

In concerns over shallow entertainment-driven children's ministries, let's not throw out the baby (or nursery) with bad water, and let's not forbid little ones being brought to Jesus in corporate worship or SS classes. Let's test traditions and teachers of the past or present with Scripture and church history and our times, and let's temper it all with grace, humility, and charity to differing applications. Let's keep reforming and seek to be transforming parents, and fathers in particular, to the role and responsibility they have, so that godly churches and godly homes work together.

Spurgeon on Nurseries and Nursery Workers

In the 1850s Spurgeon's church was described as having 'a nursery for the babes of our Savior's family' (100 years before some claim churches had them). Spurgeon preached on the love and grace of God to the 'little...crying baby in the nursery of the Lord's house' as an encouragement to young believers (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 21, p. 503). In one sermon he spoke of how the earliest spiritual impressions are sometimes made in the nursery, and he urged nursery workers to speak the things of God to infants (Vol. 31, p. 579). In another sermon, he taught that ministry to infants is a special glory of God as it pictures God stooping to minister to little ones of His kingdom: 'It glorifies God's *condescension* ... His great condescension is seen in the nursery and the infant class' (Vol. 30, p. 334). In that sermon on Matt. 21:16 he also taught that the praise songs of toddlers can be truer worship than legalistic adults.

His encouragement to the 'nursery maid' out of the limelight, 'having the care of two or three children, teaching them the sweet story of the love of Christ, and seeking to bring their hearts to Jesus, may be more faithful than I am with a large congregation continually listening to me...It is not where you are, but what you are, and it is not how you are seen, but how you live in the sight of God. That is the thing that matters.' (Vol. LIX, p. 596)

Spurgeon on Children's Sunday School and its Teachers

From his sermon "Sunday School and the Scriptures": 'Wise teachers know how to lead their little ones into the green pastures beside the still waters ... Do not say that your office [position in the church], you who teach the young, is in the least degree inferior to ours, whose main business is with older folks ... the church has thought it wise to supplement the instruction of home ... I regard this as a very blessed institution. I am thankful for the many of our brothers and sisters who give their Sabbath-days [in addition to corporate worship] ... to the teaching of other people's children ... [But] Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday-school is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ...

Timothy had the great privilege of being taught by those whose natural duty it is; but where that great privilege cannot be enjoyed, let us all, as God shall help us ... forward, earnest men and women, and sanctify yourselves for this joyful service ...

Suppose we get the children together on Sabbath days, and then amuse them and make the hours to pass away pleasantly ... We have done nothing worthy of the day, or of the church of God ... but if we keep to holy scripture we cannot go aside. With such a standard we know that we are right. This Book is the Word of God, and if we teach it, we teach that which the Lord will accept and bless. O dear teachers — and I speak here to myself also — let our teaching be more and more scriptural! ... Do lay a good groundwork with the children. Let not Sunday-school work be slurred [as some disparage children's classes in church] ... In your schools sit our future Evangelists. In that infant class sits an apostle to some distant land. There may come under your training hand, my sister, a future father in Israel. There shall come under your teaching, my brother, those that are to bear the banners of the Lord in the thick of the fray. The ages look to you each time your class assembles. Oh, that God may help you to do your part well! We pray with one heart and one soul that the Lord Jesus Christ may be with our Sunday-schools from this day and till he cometh. Amen and Amen.' (Volume 31, p. 579-588)

Spurgeon's response to those denying a biblical basis for children's Sunday School

'It is the duty of the church, according to this command, to make known the gospel *to every creature* [Mark 16:15 KJV, and children are creatures] ... As soon as ever they can understand, you are to be ready with this gospel of Jesus Christ for them. The Sunday School does not want [lack] a direct text for its institution or foundation ... the very spirit of Sabbath School work lies in the words here — "every creature"' (Vol. 15, 900).

For Christians, classes should be in addition to, not instead of home instruction

'So soon as they become of years capable of understanding the things of God, we endeavor to bring them to Christ by *teaching them the truth*. Hence our Sabbath-schools, hence the use of the Bible and family prayer, and catechizing at home.' (Vol. 10, 581)

Spurgeon in his sermons saw this as a vital work of the church, and for young people he saw this as not limited to only what happens by parents or by the pulpit. In addition to the corporate worship service and in addition to family worship, Spurgeon taught the church should have smaller settings and classes with gifted godly teachers to make clearer the gospel on the level of each child as they interact. This was to supplement or support the ministries of Christian parents or pastors, never as a substitute for either. In contrast to anti-nursery and anti-children's-ministry voices, Spurgeon preached sermons encouraging children's ministry and Sunday School teachers. He also preached sermons exhorting parents to teach their children during the rest of the week.

Supplemental Bible classes for various ages did not originate in Sunday School movements of the 1800s (much less did they originate from Darwin's theory of evolution theory published in 1859!) but these ministries were a return to and development of the practice of some Reformers and Puritans in Sabbath schools or catechism classes in addition to (not instead of) corporate and family worship for children. These in turn were a development of early church practices of such classes that were in turn a development of Jewish Sabbath schools of synagogues and OT times.

For more on children's classes in Bible times go to: <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/416131336162.pdf>
For church history go to: <http://christiannurture.blogspot.com/2012/02/sketch-of-history-of-age-segregation.html>