

The current teen church trend has sparked a controversy among Protestant churches as to whether or not it is Biblical and edifying to the church body. Many parents have reported sending their teens to youth group parties hoping to strengthen their Christian walk. Apparently, nothing productive occurred, unless you would count loud rock bands and endless card games to be among them.

One home-schooling leader in Tennessee was shocked to find the mid 20's youth pastor engaged to a 16 year old, who was promoted to co-leader. Cases of youth pastors committing adultery with their students (practically their peers) has also provoked criticism. The most concerning to parents is the humanistic, permit-all attitude prevalent in youth groups today. Condoning the questionable lifestyles and behaviour of those in the youth groups with excuses like: *"Hey, at least they're at church having fellowship!"* is all too common. ***"Those who walk with the wise become wiser still but the companion of fools suffers harm."***

Proverbs 13:20

Many youth groups are not distinguishing between evangelism and discipleship. In an effort to reach unsaved teens, youth groups are watering down their lectures and outreaches to tolerant, accept they neighbour, entertainment style services. This creates a dilemma for those attending. Who's saved and who isn't? Creating such a seeker friendly environment has evidenced damaging results. Teen pregnancy rates among churchgoers are now nearly identical with those of unchurched teens according to research done by Josh McDowell. Many church teens can't even tell the difference between right and wrong, as documented in his book *"Right from Wrong."*

Youth groups should be focusing on
"take up your cross and follow Christ"
instead of
"what's in it for me?"
entertainment.

Rather than producing a harvest of faithful Christians, the entertainment saturated youth ministries of our churches are resulting in superficial converts. Instead of instructional materials, edifying films and desperately needed resources, many teen church rooms are filled with pinball machines, pool tables and video games. The worship service has been replaced with flashy lights, loud rock bands and watered down *"love-songs."* Outreaches and evangelism have been replaced with
"Pumpkin Halloween Night"
"Pajama Night",
water-skiing trips, and mall shopping
"fellowship"

. In an effort to bring in worldly teens, the youth ministry has let the world seep into the church through the front door. Rather than encouraging youngsters to

“flee youthful lusts”

(2 Timothy 2:22), many youth ministries provide a venue for youthful lusts to be pursued.

Many churches have neglected teaching proper family leadership (now shelved as *“old fashioned”*)

and have sought to fill the gap with teen church and youth pastors. It has become normal for teens to leave church early or, worse still, not even attend main Sunday morning worship services at all, because they have their

“own church.”

The Bible teaches that the father is the head of his family, directly accountable to Christ for his children. One mother of six shared that she was shocked after hearing that the youth pastor had singled out her daughter and said:

“I know you can’t really open up to your parents, so I’m here to listen to whatever you can’t share with them.”

Unfortunately, this is quite common. More Protestant churches are hiring youth pastors to become counselors and buddies with the teens. After all, isn’t a complete stranger better able to guide a teen than his own parents?

We must reject the prevalent notion of the model youth minister being a recently graduated extrovert who looks and behaves as badly as a high schooler himself. The leadership of the family should be the father’s responsibility, not the children’s ministry or youth group’s.

The Bible never mentions teenagers. In fact, the word teenager was never mentioned in any dictionary until the middle of the 20 th Century. According to the Bible, children grew up into adulthood, not eternal teenhood. *“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put childish things away.”*

It has only been in the last fifty years and heavily influenced by evolutionary social theory that age segregation has been practiced in churches. Instead of being trained into righteousness, many teen ministries are leading their flocks into worldliness. However, the Bible never mentions any

“teen”

years or youth ministries in which to

“find yourself”

and embrace your

“uniqueness.”

What can be done? Youth should attend all church services with their families. After all, the church is **one** body. ***“For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body: as also is Christ.”***

1 Corinthians 12:12

All ages/abilities should be integrated into the church, because all ages and gifts can be used to glorify Christ as **one body**.

The youth are part of the church of today, not only the church of tomorrow. Serving the elderly, assisting the less fortunate and training for the mission field, will prepare the younger members for leadership by firmly establishing them in their faith.

It really shouldn't surprise us when so many teenagers leave the church after high school. They just can't seem to make the transition into the *“adult church.”* Those that stay in church will usually attend their own college service or young singles groups. The church is one body with many members, not many categories with many groups.

The best way for teenagers to step into roles in the church is through ministry, outreaches, evangelism and service. The church is designed to train believers for the work of the ministry. No ministry should do the work for the believer! ***“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”***

Children and teenagers should not be in their *“own church”*

until the day when they are deemed ready to sit in a sanctuary service. Parents should be raising up their children in fear of God, in fellowship with

all believers and under the instruction of the pastor. Those that are raised committed to their local church are more likely to remain disciples of Christ.

Under the leadership of parents and elders, the youth can be equipped for the spiritual battles ahead. By allowing our youth to share their ignorance and immaturity with each other as they see fit, we are undermining the authority and stability of our churches. Just as a member of the body exposed to the elements will eventually weaken and make ineffectual the whole body; so will the spiritual life of the youth if we allow unBiblical practices such as youth groups and other special interests groups to have such unchallenged authority.

Scripture places the responsibility for youth ministry on fathers (Deuteronomy 6:6 – 9; Ephesians 6:1 – 4). Church social events should involve families. Youth ministry should be returned where it belongs - to families and fathers.

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