

A Critique of
Family Driven Faith:
Doing What It Takes To Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk With God
by Voddie Baucham

Voddie Baucham is the pastor of Grace Family Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, a flagship ministry in the Family Integrated Church Movement. The distinctive of the Family Integrated Church (FIC) is its strong emphasis on equipping parents to fulfill their biblical responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). As a part of the FIC's attempt to carry out that biblical mandate, such churches insist that families must not be separated by ages and are should be seated together for all public gatherings of the church (hence "integrated") and roundly rejects all Sunday Schools, youth groups, or other age-graded "niche" ministries. Baucham's book, *Family Driven Faith*, is an explanation of the philosophy behind the FIC's ministry structure.

Baucham's observation that many Christian parents have grossly neglected their God-given ministry of teaching the scriptures to their children is sadly accurate and his strong objection to the spiritually inane methods of many church youth groups is equally valid. But *Family Driven Faith* (FDF) offers solutions to these errors which are problematic on three fronts. First, FDF over-generalizes the issue by *equating* all involvement in age-graded ministry to children/students with abdication of parental responsibility. Second, FDF sets ministry within the family and within the church at odds. And third, FDF convolutes clear biblical mandates and Baucham's personal application of those mandates so that, at times, the two are virtually indistinguishable.

The following excerpts and comments will substantiate these very real concerns:

1. *Family Driven Faith* equates having children involved in a church's ministry to students with abdication of parental responsibility.

Baucham makes a clear case for the primacy of parents' ministry in their children's lives:

"Contrary to popular belief, the home, not the church, has been entrusted with the primary responsibility of teaching children the Bible." (p. 95)

"This is the linchpin in every argument I have made or will make in this book. God has designed your family - not the youth group, not the children's ministry, not the Christian School, but your family - as the principal agent in your children's lives." (p. 120)

The text also concedes that while a parent's role is indeed *primary* it is not *exclusive*. FDF does allow a place for the involvement of others in the spiritual development of children:

"That is not to say that parents should reject any help. If I believed that, I wouldn't have written this book. (p. 91)

“That doesn’t mean we would be the only ones who would teach, and nurture...on the contrary, we have had numerous partners in the process over the years. I am grateful for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends who have walked with us through the ups and downs.” (p. 93)

“...I’m not saying that I wouldn’t welcome help, advice, mentoring, and/or support from someone who has raised teenagers, has proven himself as a parent, and is well trained and competent in handling the scriptures. I am more than happy to rely on such help to assist and undergird me in my task.” (p. 179)

Inexplicably, however, Baucham contradicts himself by actually *rejecting* parenting-partnerships if it happens to come from the local church! FDF considers children or student ministry pastors as inappropriate “trained professionals” and uncharitably characterizes the church’s planned effort to teach scripture to children or teens as “systematic age-segregation” and “extra-biblical isolationism” (his terms, not evangelicalism’s p. 180 & 182). FDF and the FIC Movement seek to completely do away with any organized children’s/youth, even viewing them as threatening to the family and clearly equates age-graded teaching-formats with parental abdication as shown in the following excerpts:

“Moses saw the home as the principle delivery system for the transmittal of God’s truth from generation to generation. There is no hint – here or anywhere else in the Bible– of the multigenerational teaching of the truths of God being abdicated by parents in favor of ‘trained professionals’... we must be careful not to shift the responsibility for our children’s biblical training onto anyone else.” (p.91)

“Nor is there anything inherently wrong with seeking help when we need it. However, we have gone beyond seeking help to abdicating our responsibility. Unfortunately, this abdication has become... common in spiritual matters.” (p. 95)

“I believe one of the greatest crutches in the church is the nursery. Parents who have neglected to train their children have very little encouragement to do so when there is a place to hide them.” P.147

“It is *not* the job of the youth pastor to evangelize my child - that’s my job. It is *not* the youth pastor’s job to equip (disciple) my child - its mine. And it is *not* the youth pastor’s job to send my child out to engage the world; you guessed it-that’s my job too... I am also pleased to have other significant adults in my teenager’s lives. However, I am not about to turn my child over to a youth pastor for their discipleship. Again, that is my job.” (p. 179)

“Parents who take their disciple-making mandate seriously are beginning to be skeptical about turning their children over to the youth ministry.” (p. 183)

Certainly, parents MUST NOT “abdicate” their primary teaching role to anyone else! However, it’s one thing to say that many parents neglect their spiritual responsibilities, “pawning” their children off to youth leaders and other teachers in the church. It’s quite another thing to imply that **Scripture forbids** a local church from teaching truth in various contexts, on the Lord’s Day, to someone else’s children. The FIC movement insists that since God gives the primary role of truth-teaching to the parents, and because many (although they imply “all” outside the FIC fraternity) parents are guilty of using the church’s teachers as surrogates, therefore the Bible **forbids** formats on the Lord’s Day that allow others to teach truth to your children. Baucham may qualify such ideas during teaching venues or personal conversations, but his book attempts no such balance.

The concern about parental abdication is a legitimate one. Our culture breeds lazy, self-absorbed families, resulting in the gross spiritual neglect of children and unchecked parental hypocrisy. We applaud any movement that challenges fathers and mothers to take up their spiritual mantle. Self-centered neglect of the family is patently unbiblical. But mandating that churches do away with multiple teaching contexts in favor of corporate integrated family worship is just as unbiblical! The idea that parent & child must always be taught together in a worship service is no more authoritative than “age-segregated” formats. Neither is the issue. To use Baucham’s logic and phraseology, there is “no hint...anywhere else in the Bible” commanding parents and children to always be sitting together while being taught the truth in a worship service. While Baucham vigorously charges that “the American practice of systematic age segregation goes beyond the biblical mandate” (p. 180), unfortunately he seems oblivious to fact that the FIC’s “insistence on integration as an ecclesiological principal” (p. 196) is also not grounded in scripture and therefore “goes beyond the biblical mandate.” Solving weaknesses in the church and family with another brand of extra-biblical, personal preferences is confusing and prone to further weaknesses. The answer to parental abdication is clear biblical instruction (God’s actual mandates for the family), godly mentoring/discipleship, and praying for strength in the grace of Christ. This can be accomplished through a wonderful variety of resources within the body of Christ. The issue is not one of ministry methodologies, teaching contexts, or the inexperience of youth pastors—as Baucham implicitly admits when he says: ““...It wouldn’t matter if the youth pastor were a forty-year-old Ph.D. with five children of his own whom he had raised successfully. That would still not justify the abdication of parental responsibility.” (p. 180)

2. Family Driven Faith sets the ministry of the family & church in opposition to one another.

As a result of believing that all age-graded teaching formats cause parents to be spiritually derelict, FDF fosters a defensive posture toward churches who do offer healthy, scripture-centered ministry partnerships with parents. Baucham presents an unnecessarily polarized view of the

obligations/desires that both the church and parents have to minister the word of God to young people. In the view of the FIC, the ministry of the church and the ministry of the family is an “either/or” not a “both/and” proposition:

“If we believe that God calls us to...teach the word in our homes... then we must also believe that God intends for the church to aid and not hinder families in this process.” (p. 171)

“...revival in our family led us to a crisis of faith as our newfound commitment caused a clash of cultures between our family and our church.” (p. 172)

“... we are willing [to] adjust our entire lifestyle around the incredible responsibility God has given us to prepare our children...And if we do so, will there be a church there to wrap its arms around us, encourage us, equip us, and cheer us on? (p. 174)

“...I believe the modern American practice of systematic age segregation goes beyond the biblical mandate... [and] in some instances actually works against families as opposed to helping them pursue multigenerational faithfulness.” (p. 180)

“We must commit ourselves to family driven faith. More importantly, our churches must facilitate this commitment.” (p. 191)

FDF’s insistence that church leaders “must facilitate” (p. 191) and even “validate” certain church member’s personal, family, lifestyle choices” (p. 173) is a dangerous overstatement. Local church leaders should allow parents the freedom to make decisions for themselves about which ministry opportunities they choose to utilize as they teach and evangelize their children. Pastors and church leaders are not required by God to change the overall structure, eliminating certain ministries (Youth Group, Sunday School, AWANA, etc.) in order to “validate” a particular family’s philosophy.

Baucham gives very disconcerting counsel to those who share the preferences of the FIC but are not presently in churches that are a part of that movement:

“Begin to cry out to God for these truths to come to the fore in your church. Talk about these things with your friends. Start to implement them in your home. Perhaps God will use you as a catalyst to wake the sleeping giant and move your church toward family integration.” (p. 204)

It is spiritually irresponsible to label these extra-biblical preferences as biblical “truths” that must “come to the fore.” As a Pastor, Baucham must surely realize the very real potential for divisiveness in his urgent call to ‘talk about these things with your friends.’ Members should be encouraged to either defer to the ministry structure of their local church or communicate concerns to God-appointed leaders, not other church members! When individuals with strongly-held personal

preferences begin voicing their dissatisfaction on any church related matter to others, unnecessary division is inevitable.

On page 176, Baucham articulates the ultimate questions raised by the FIC movement regarding the role of the church and the family:

“If the Bible clearly gives parents the responsibility of disciplining their children, what role does the church play in the process? And if the church is not playing that role, what options do those of us pursuing family driven faith have?” (p. 176)

To be consistent with the teaching of the book, perhaps the questions could be restated as follows:

“If the Bible clearly gives parents the responsibility of disciplining their children, what role does the church play in the process? And if the church is not playing that role *by refraining from giving virtually any input into my children’s lives unless they are sitting in close proximity to me as a parent* what choice do I have *but to pray that my elders will see that my chosen method of parenting is the best, to talk to others in the church and thus gain consensus and momentum to bring about conformity to my preferences, to insist that leaders exclusively endorse my parenting approach and thus change the entire church’s ministry structure to fit my concept of biblical parenting, or leave the church to find one that does implement my preferences?*”

Ironically, what the FIC sees as separating the family—age-graded teaching formats—has actually led to another kind of division in the church by separating brothers and sisters over personal preferences.

3. FDF so freely mixes clear biblical principles and Baucham’s chosen methods of applying those same principles that, at times, the two are virtually indistinguishable.

While Baucham’s fervor is commendable, too often his diagnosis and cure is a confusing blend of general biblical principles and his own personal practice within his family. The danger of FDF is that it presents the FIC methods as the *sole* expression of faithfulness to scripture. Baucham is so convinced of his chosen methods for fulfilling his spiritual responsibilities to his family and his congregation that he equates the FIC’s chosen worship structure with “New Testament worship” (p. 149) and that “the homeschooled movement, and the family integrated church movement constitutes a modern revival on the American landscape”(p. 171).

The strong impression that one takes away from the book is that anyone who takes seriously their biblical mandate to teach their children must: First, adopt Baucham’s preferred method of formal

family worship (pp. 137-150). Second, attend a local church with this preferred ministry structure. And third, never even consider sending your children to public schools. Baucham asks “How can I effectively ‘make disciples’ of my children if I send them off to the government school forty-five to fifty hours per week?” (p. 125). He encourages parents to “Do everything in your power to avoid the influence of government schools that are incapable of bringing our children up in the ‘discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (p. 128).

In his evaluation of local churches, Baucham fails to differentiate clearly between biblical non-negotiables—church discipline and baptism, expository preaching, church planting, and government by elders—and preferential matters like family integration ministry structure (p. 175). A serious concern about the influence of FDF is that parents don’t often see the difference between strongly held personal preferences and explicit biblical principles, and therefore their consciences often become the “rule” of what defines a “godly” home life. It isn’t long before various forms of elitism and legalism can have the appearance of more “spiritually faithful parenting,” and particular preferences (e.g. prescribed, formal “family worship” times, educational choices, etc.) are viewed as biblical mandates.

Even the cover of the book encourages “doing what it takes to raise sons and daughters who walk with God.” There is no parenting method that can guarantee such a desirable outcome! Only the grace of God can accomplish that goal! While dependence on such intervening grace is no excuse for parental laziness, it is unfair to create the expectation in parents that following any the parenting advice between the covers of FDF will guarantee a regenerate child.

In summary, FDF narrowly focuses on the problem of parental misuse of the church rather than **exclusively** on biblical answers. Sadly, the ultimate flaw of FDF is that its author seems to have neglected to follow his own counsel:

“It is very important that we live by biblical standards. However, it is equally important that we continually examine those standards to ensure that we don’t fall prey to legalism. When we begin to make hard and fast rules based upon cultural norms rather than on the Bible, we will always end up in trouble. And if we have convictions that are not necessarily scriptural, we should admit it. We must be able to say, “This is a personal conviction to which I hold myself not a standard to which God holds us all.” (p. 89)