

A Biblical Rationale for the Pastoral Position of Student Minister

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Abstract

Scholars have argued that the concept of adolescence is not in the Bible but a relatively recent one. Then, they asserted youth ministry and student ministers are not biblical but secular so that churches should abolish youth ministry and student minister. However, do youth ministry and student minister deviate from the biblical principle? The purpose of this paper is to verify a biblical rationale for the pastoral position of student minister by examining historical, theological, and biblical research about student pastors.

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Introduction

Many scholars have argued that the concept of adolescence is “a relatively recent one in the history of civilization.”¹ G. Stanley Hall coined the term “adolescence” in his book, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* in 1904. In developing the term, Hall interpreted the radical biological and emotional changes of adolescence in a negative way—as the period of “storm and stress.”² Against the modern concept of adolescence, some Christian scholars and ministers asserted that student ministry and student ministers are not a biblical concept but a secular idea, so that churches should do away with student ministries and ministers.³

This reasoning process seems a little bit rash. Just because Hall, an evolutionary psychologist, developed the idea of adolescence, does that mean any ministries associated with this time period should automatically be cast out? Indeed, this line of thinking raises many questions without providing satisfactory answers. First, in what ways does the existence of student ministers and ministries deviate from biblical principles, if at all? Second, is an argument

¹ Bertha Geraldine Lambert, *Adolescence: Transition from Childhood to Maturity* (Monterey, CA: Brooks and Cole, 1972), 20.

² Gary M. Ingersoll, *Adolescents*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 4; Hall invented the term “storm and stress” to explain that adolescence is a turbulent time charged with conflict and mood swings. Hall was so enamored with Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution that he tried to depict adolescence as a transitional period between the savagery of childhood and civilized adulthood.

³ Among those who do family ministry, some argue that the concept of adolescence is a secular idea, so student ministry should be abolished. Timothy Paul Jones and Bryan Nelson distinguish modern and contemporary approaches to family ministry into 4 models: Programmatic Ministry Model, Family-Based Ministry Model, Family-Equipping Ministry Model, and Family-Integrated Ministry Model. Among them, Family-Integrated Ministry Model “represents a complete break from the ‘neo-traditional’ segmented-programmatic church. Proponents of family integration contend that the modern American practice of age segregation goes beyond the biblical mandate—and may even obstruct parents’ obedience in disciplining their children. As a result, in a family-integrated church, all or nearly all age-organized classes and events are eliminated, including youth group.” See Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 23 and Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 191-95.

from silence sufficient for proving that student ministry is not biblical and that churches should abolish not only student ministry but all other age-group-specific pastoral positions? Third, is it possible to build a sound, biblical justification for the existence of student ministers and student ministries from a proper interpretation of Scripture?

Thesis and the Purpose of the Paper

It is the thesis of this paper that *the proper interpretation of Scripture supports the church employing age-group-specific pastors, including student ministers, as part of the church's mission and design*. The purpose of this paper is to verify the thesis presented above by examining historical, theological, and biblical research about student ministers. The following process will be used in order to prove the thesis of this paper. First, the paper will examine historical research about the concept of adolescence and the concept of professional student minister. Secondly, the paper will present the theological and biblical basis for the pastoral position of student minister. Finally, the paper will present sound biblical principles for student ministry.

The Presentation of a Problem: The Concept of Adolescence and Student Ministers

As explained in the introduction, what is known today as the field of student ministry is not mentioned in the Bible. In fact, there is not even a specific term for teenagers in Scripture. It is clear that the modern concept of adolescence is the product of modern times. As a consequence of the modern concept of adolescence, student ministry started in the twentieth century “as an extension of the popularity of parachurch ministries.”⁴ This section will examine

⁴ “Does the Bible say anything about the role of youth pastor/minister?,” accessed October 3, 2016, <https://compellingtruth.org/youth-pastor-minister.html/>.

historical facts about the concept of adolescence and student ministers in order to find where the exact point of disputation occurs.

The Concept of Adolescence Prior to the Industrial Revolution

Prior to the Industrial Era, teenagers were positively seen as small adults in most cultures, contrary to Hall's negative concept of adolescence.⁵ Throughout most of human history, teenagers worked as adults, married, and even produced children shortly after puberty.⁶ They were absolutely treated as adults by their parents, the other adults, and society. Teenagers of the day were quickly integrated into adult society either partially or fully.⁷ They actually took on the responsibilities and duties of adults, worked like adults, and even at times reached higher achievements than adults.

Although the Bible describes some characteristics of people who are young, it does not distinguish teenagers from adults. Throughout both the Old Testament and the New Testament, teenagers were already recognized as adults. Teenagers in the Bible usually assumed the responsibilities and duties of adults before God and within society. Elsewhere in the ancient world, teenagers were also considered apprentice adults. They were "mentored and groomed as apprentice adults for political offices, business leadership, and more as early as childhood and early puberty."⁸

⁵ Robert Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen* (Sanger, CA: Word Dancer Press, 2007), 25.

⁶ Richard Ross et al., *Accelerate: Parenting Teenagers Toward Adulthood: How Not to Find Your 25-Year-Old Still Living in Your Basement* (Bloomington, IN: Cross Books, 2013) 12.

⁷ Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence*, 25.

⁸ Ross, *Accelerate*, 14.

In the Medieval society, “adult apprenticeships began as young as seven.”⁹ Both children and teenagers were treated as adults and “were subjected to harsh discipline.”¹⁰ In fact, the idea of adolescence was associated with childhood until the 18th century and was assumed to be of very short duration.¹¹

Even today, the concepts, images, conditions, and roles of adolescents vary from culture to culture.¹² Adolescents in some cultures were largely carefree and stress-free, contrary to Hall’s concept of adolescence.¹³ Of the 186 pre-industrial societies, 60 percent of such societies do not have a word for adolescence, “and antisocial behavior by young males is completely absent in more than half of them.”¹⁴

The Modern Concept of Adolescence

The Industrial Revolution changed everything. It created both a new age group—adolescents—and a new developmental concept—adolescence. The concept of adolescence is a cultural product that has been revised throughout history.¹⁵ Johnny L. Derouen suggests that “Adolescence, as a stage of life, was the creation of modern industrialization, child labor laws,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thomas Gullotta et al., *The Adolescent Experience*, 4th ed. (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2000), 5.

¹¹ Lambert, *Adolescence*, 20.

¹² James Frederick Adams, *Understanding Adolescence: Current Developments in Adolescent Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1973), 54.

¹³ Ingersoll, *Adolescents*, 5.

¹⁴ Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence*, 75.

¹⁵ Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2012), 8.

school systems, and other factors that moved into high gear between 1880 and 1920.”¹⁶ At that time many changes occurred in society, such as industrialization, urbanization, and mechanization. These changes had an impact on altering the perception of teenagers and forming the modern concept of adolescence.

The first and most important change was industrialization. In the era of rapidly growing industries, children and adolescents could not go to work, since most factory jobs demanded special skills as well as physical strength. Thus, the entrance of young workers into the workplace needed to be delayed until they acquired skills necessary for the work.¹⁷

During this period, a large number of people moved to urban areas from rural areas. This shift in population known as urbanization solved the labor shortage for many factories. Factories no longer needed children and adolescent workers who lacked the requisite skills and sufficient physical strength. Moreover, many factory workers had already been displaced by machines, so that jobs were increasingly scarce. Consequently, young workers were in far less demand.¹⁸

Finally, the government enacted two laws in response: compulsory education laws and child labor laws. The industrial society did not want adolescents to work, even though they wanted to work. Instead, society forced them into the public school system, even if they did not want to attend school.¹⁹ As a result, the forced schooling that came out of industrialization and urbanization gathered a great number of adolescents in one place.

¹⁶ Ross, *Accelerate*, 10.

¹⁷ Nancy J. Cobb, *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*, 6th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence*, 38.

When all the teenagers gathered with their peers in isolation from other adults, they began to cause many problems in society, including juvenile delinquency. Thus, the industrial society created a separate system of juvenile justice for dealing with juvenile delinquency. These laws were intended to free the courts from “punishing children and adolescents and allow the courts to offer corrective measures instead.”²⁰ However, they actually “suspended important legal rights guaranteed to adults.”²¹

All these conditions in the Industrial Revolution caused a period of active and vibrant research regarding the new age group that was causing several problems in society. A front-runner in this effort was G. Stanley Hall. He noted adolescents’ inner turmoil. Most adolescents of those days were rebellious, vulnerable, mischievous, and irresponsible. Hall was the first researcher to describe adolescence negatively, as a period of “storm and stress.”²²

The Beginning of Student Ministry and the Student Minister

The concept of adolescence as a distinct and specific stage of life “would have been foreign to church members until post-industrial times.”²³ Pre-industrial churches did not have special meetings for teenagers. Student ministers as age-group-specific ministers did not exist until after the Industrial Revolution.²⁴ Before then, American churches viewed the ages of twelve

²⁰ Judith Stevens-Long and Nancy J. Cobb, *Adolescence and Early Adulthood*, 1st ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1983), 26.

²¹ Cobb, *Adolescence*, 11.

²² Ingersoll, *Adolescents*, 4.

²³ Richard Ross, “The Minister to Youth in Southern Baptist Life,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 26, no. 4 (1991): 13.

²⁴ Mark H. Senter, *When God Shows up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2010), 7.

to eighteen “as belonging to one of two distinct groups—children or adults.”²⁵ Teenagers usually worked with adults in nineteenth century America.

However, during the Industrial Revolution, the church started to pay attention to the threat of unemployed, unsupervised young people.²⁶ And as public education recognized that adolescents needed formal education rather than employment, churches began to follow suit. Richard Ross explained such a response of local churches as follows: Student ministers “emerged as a response to a social change. . . . youth culture has created the need for a specific ministry to and with a segment of the population with unique needs.”²⁷

Many scholars have divided American student ministry into several eras: Early Foundations (1824-1875), Youth Society (1881-1925), Youth Fellowship (1935-1967), Youth Ministry (1960-2000), and Parent Discipleship (2000-present).²⁸ In the early foundations era, student ministry consisted of getting children off the streets and teaching them to read. The early emphasis was on children, since most teenagers were in the work force. After the birth of the public high school in 1875, however, many youth groups known as leagues or societies sprang up all over the country. The members of these leagues and societies “devoted themselves to a variety of causes such as missions, temperance work, and music.”²⁹

In the 1930’s, new movements started to shape American student ministry. Refocusing “youth ministry on *koinonia* (fellowship) and *evangelium* (outreach evangelization),” student

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, 20.

²⁷ Ross, “The Minister to Youth in Southern Baptist Life,” 13.

²⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

ministries in America “reshaped themselves into youth fellowships that made room for adolescent ownership and leadership.”³⁰ Most youth societies and leagues were replaced by Sunday evening fellowships in local churches and parachurch clubs.³¹ Local churches and parachurch clubs started Sunday evening fellowships that were organized and operated by student leaders. In this era, paid local church ministers and volunteers became age-group-specific ministers. Even though they did not yet have the “Minister to Youth” title, “the role of that staff position was beginning to emerge.”³²

After Third Baptist Church in St. Louis employed the first full-time youth director in 1927, numerous local churches began to hire paid student ministers.³³ The concept of youth director had mushroomed from the 1940’s to 1970’s. The focus of professionalized student ministry activities by student ministers made student ministry “tip back toward local churches as the 1980’s began.”³⁴ The title, youth director, indicated that he worked exclusively with teenagers and primarily directed activities for them.³⁵ However, student ministers were often “poorly trained and supported” in the early years of that era. They faced several struggles and limitations in directing activities for youth.³⁶

³⁰ Senter, *When God Shows up*, 63.

³¹ Ross, “The Minister to Youth in Southern Baptist Life,” 14.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Philip H. Briggs, “Patterns in Southern Baptist youth ministry,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 26, no. 4 (1991): 5.

³⁴ Senter, *When God Shows up*, 65.

³⁵ Ross, “The Minister to Youth in Southern Baptist Life,” 14.

³⁶ Thomas E. Bergler, “The place of history in youth ministry education,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2002): 61.

In response to this problem, Bible institutes, evangelical seminaries, and Christian colleges started to provide for the “academic formation of youth workers.”³⁷ Moreover, a change in cultural conditions—such as advanced student ministry models in local churches, the advent of academic credentials, professional associations, and significant training events—led to a huge growth in the professionalization of student ministry. At present, numerous churches have an expert full-time or part-time student minister to coordinate the church’s ministry with youth.”³⁸

The Theological and Biblical Basis for the Pastoral Position of Student Minister

The historical fact of student ministry is that student ministers are the products of the church’s response to the drastic social change that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. Opponents of student ministry argue that local churches should abolish student ministry and return to family-based ministry, since student ministry and student ministers are not in the Bible. However, a ministry is not unbiblical or inappropriate just because it is not particularly found or commanded in Scripture. This section will examine the argument from the opponents of student ministry carefully.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

God created everything in the universe. God existed independently before man or creation ever came into being.³⁹ God is thus “the supreme source of all being and reality.”⁴⁰ God

³⁷ Senter, *When God Shows up*, 53.

³⁸ Ross, “The Minister to Youth in Southern Baptist Life,” 15.

³⁹ Ronald Arthur Horton, *Christian Education: Its Mandate and Mission* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1992), 1.

decided to reveal Himself to people, “speaking through His Word (the inerrant, divinely inspired and preserved sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments).”⁴¹ Thus, God’s revelation should be the only substance for Christian faith and conduct. The acknowledgement of God’s revelation, the central prime source of authority, places the Word of God at the center.⁴²

Many passages in Scripture teach that the Bible is completely sufficient. Peter wrote in Second Peter 1:3 that “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him.” Second Corinthians 9:8 is perfectly filled with “superlatives regarding the all-sufficient resources God provides.”⁴³ From these passages, John MacArthur boldly confessed that “When believers read, study, obey, and apply Scripture, they will realize it has sufficient power to deal with any situation in life.”⁴⁴

The well-known passage Second Timothy 3:16-17 is perhaps the most proper passage for demonstrating and supporting the sufficiency of Scripture. The passage clearly declares that “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” In verse 16, “All Scripture” includes not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament,

⁴⁰ David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 165.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 183.

⁴³ Grant Horner, *Think Biblically!*, 24; “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Cor 9:8)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

“since Second Peter 3:16 cites the writings of Paul among the Scriptures.”⁴⁵ Additionally, the phrase “is breathed” means that God has breathed his character into Scripture so that “it is inherently inspired.”⁴⁶ Thus, the Bible has the authority of God. Although the Bible was written by men, it came from God who inspired the authors of Scripture.

The affirmation of the inspiration of the Bible leads to its usefulness and sufficiency.⁴⁷ The four prepositional phrases, “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training,” form two groups, “the first dealing with doctrine and the second with behavior.”⁴⁸ These phrases affirm that the Word of God should be the basis of the Christian’s mind and behavior. As recorded in verse 17, Christians are “able to meet all duties and challenges” through the Bible.⁴⁹ Thus, the Bible not only provides explanations and directions about salvation; it should also be the foundation of the Christian’s mind and behavior—the standard for Christian faith and life.

The biblical view of epistemology is “the foundation of the very existence” of all kinds of ministry in local churches.⁵⁰ The Bible is an absolutely prescriptive source containing ultimate answers to all kinds of ministries in the local church. As with individual Christians, the Word of God should also be the ultimate foundation and appraisal standard for all elements in a ministry.

⁴⁵ Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy/Titus*, The Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 279.

⁴⁶ Terence J. Keegan, *First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary, vol. 9 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 236.

⁴⁷ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 236.

⁴⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 570.

⁴⁹ Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993), 219.

⁵⁰ Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 183.

In other words, the Bible provides the scaffolding for constructing a biblical ministry and the grid for analyzing secular worldviews within a ministry.⁵¹ The Bible therefore gives all principles that pastors and ministers need to know for doing ministry.

However, the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that the Bible is an exhaustive source of knowledge like a “divine encyclopedia.”⁵² The Word of God is not a comprehensive textbook for all elements of ministry. While the Bible does not answer many questions about many subjects, “it provides a perspective and a metaphysical framework that furnish a context in which to explore unanswered questions, and to arrive at unified answers.”⁵³ So, although the Word of God does not include all specific actions that the church should perform like a robot, it does provide authoritative core principles according to which the church can build biblical ministries. Because God created everything, God created the objects, patterns, and methods of all ministries that are built on biblical principles. In conclusion, the Word of God presents sufficient principles that pastors and ministers should follow, and they can perform a ministry founded on the biblical worldview and philosophical framework of Christianity.

The Biblical Rationale for the Offices of the Church

As presented in the thesis statement of this paper, the proper interpretation of Scripture supports the church employing age-group-specific pastors such as student ministers. The Bible provides for two specific offices in local churches: elders and deacons. The word “deacon”

⁵¹ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 127.

⁵² Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 179.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 179-80.

referred to “service in general, to rulers in particular, and to caring for physical needs.”⁵⁴ In addition to the office of deacon, Scripture provides for the office of elder, pastor, or bishop. Pastors were designated for a specific ministry in the church. They were charged mainly with the oversight, government, and guidance of the church, and especially the ministry of the Word.⁵⁵

Paul presented the qualifications of pastors in First Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. These qualifications can be classified under three main categories. The first category is character. Pastors should be “blameless and above reproach, not overbearing, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, well reputed (particularly among outsiders), upright, holy, and disciplined.”⁵⁶ In other words, pastors should be “above reproach and live as a godly man in the church and community.”⁵⁷

The second category is family. Pastors should be the husband of one wife and a good manager of his family (his children obey him). Although a pastor is not required to be married and have children, as seen in Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy, “a pastor who is married must be faithful to his spouse and lead his children well.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 343.

⁵⁶ Dever, *The Church*, 55.

⁵⁷ “Does the Bible say anything about the role of youth associate/assistant pastor?,” accessed October 17, 2016, <https://compellingtruth.org/associate-assistant-pastor.html>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The third category is “the ability to teach and defend God’s Word.”⁵⁹ The essence of the pastor’s role is found in teaching. All of the qualifications of the first and second categories are repeated elsewhere in the Bible as applicable for all Christians, “except for not being able to teach.”⁶⁰ In Titus 1:9, Paul clearly provided the core role of pastors as follows: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Paul also stated in First Timothy 3:2 that a pastor should be “able to teach.” As seen in these passages, a pastor must have a complete understanding of “the basics of the gospel as well as the great truths of Scripture, especially those that are under assault in one’s own day.”⁶¹

Not only should pastors be qualified by their biblical teaching, but they should be qualified by their biblical life. A pastor should be an example in his daily life for others to follow. It is a requirement for pastors to be the model of biblical life including “their own personal relationship with God in Bible reading, prayer, and worship.”⁶²

The most common discussion about pastors in the New Testament is “whether each local congregation was governed by only one elder or multiple elders.”⁶³ Mark Dever argued that the Israelites were governed by multiple elders long before Jesus established the church. Dever provided the following example.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Dever, *The Church*, 56.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Wayne A. Grudem, *Making Sense of the Church: One of Seven Parts from Grudem’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

⁶³ Dever, *The Church*, 56.

The Jewish towns of Palestine were accustomed to being governed by multiple elders. Thus, in Luke 7:3, the centurion sent several elders of the local Jewish community in Capernaum to Jesus to plead on his behalf for help. Deuteronomy also refers to multiple elders in the context of their role as town leaders, whether that involves retrieving people from cities of refuge, solving murders, or dealing with disobedient children (Deut 19: 12; 21: 1-9,18-21). Jewish synagogues similarly followed a pattern of plural leadership. Arising during the Babylonian exile, synagogues functioned as the religious and civil gathering for teaching God's law and, consequently, leading the community. Ten adult males were required to establish a synagogue for public worship. Various offices facilitated the work of synagogues, including the office of ruler.⁶⁴

Paul followed this normal procedure of the time and established a group of pastors in each church as seen in Acts 14:23.⁶⁵ In addition, Paul instructed his spiritual son Titus to appoint elders in local churches.⁶⁶ The leader of the Jerusalem church, James, also taught his Christian readers to “call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”⁶⁷ Moreover, Peter wrote that “So I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you . . .”⁶⁸ The book of James and First Peter are a general epistle written to many churches. This indicates that James and Peter naturally thought that there would be elders in every church to which their general epistles went.

That the Israelite people in the Old Testament and churches in the New Testament were generally led by multiple elders or pastors indicates that a team of elders or pastors were

⁶⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁵ Grudem, *Making Sense of the Church*, 90; “And when they had appointed *elders* for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (Acts 14:23)

⁶⁶ “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint *elders* in every town as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5)

⁶⁷ “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” (Jas 5:14)

⁶⁸ “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly.” (1 Pet 5:1-2)

involved in leadership. Among them, some would naturally undertake and lead more in some ministries than others. For example, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-12 that Christ made some to be apostles, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.⁶⁹ This passage indicates that offices in the New Testament churches had different roles for the same purpose of building up the body of Christ. Paul clearly distinguished the last two roles, pastors and teachers. In the earliest period, elders were authorized both to oversee the church and teach the Word of God.⁷⁰ However, specific circumstances as seen in Acts 6 “were instrumental in bringing about a distinction that emerged among the overseers between those who were only charged with governing and others who also had to teach.”⁷¹

Understood in this context, although the term assistant pastor or associate pastor was not used in Scripture, it is probable that some pastors oversaw certain ministries more than others. In modern culture, these areas can involve children ministry, student ministry, adult ministry, and music ministry. Although these ministers should be equally qualified according to the biblical requirements for pastors and lead their ministries according to biblical principles, they can take care of specific areas in a church—including age groups—for the sake of the whole community.

The Biblical Rationale for the Student Minister

The Word of God provides ample principles and examples for the practice of student ministry. To begin to understand the biblical rationale for student ministry and ministers, it is

⁶⁹ “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-12)

⁷⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 345.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

needed to understand the various Hebrew and Greek terms used to describe youth in the Bible.⁷² The concept of youth is expressed as “נָעָר (*nă·‘ār*),” “נַעֲרָה (*nă·‘ārā(h)*),” and “בְּחֹרֵר (*bā·hūr*)” in Hebrew. The word “נָעָר” is used 239 times with various meanings in the Bible and translated as “boy,” “lad,” and “youth” (133 times) or “servant” and “retainer” (105 times).⁷³ The word “נַעֲרָה” is used 63 times in the Bible and is translated as “each young lady,” “girl,” “maidens,” “maids,” “young,” “young lady,” “young woman.”⁷⁴ Lastly, the word “בְּחֹרֵר” is used 44 times in the Bible and translated as “young man,” “soldier,” and “bridegroom.”⁷⁵

In Greek the concept of youth is expressed as “νεανίσκος (*neaniskos*),” “νέος (*néos*),” and “νεανίας (*neanias*)” in the Bible. The word “νεανίσκος” is translated into “young man” 11 times in the Bible and means “a young man” or “a youth.”⁷⁶ The word “νέος” is used 24 times in the Bible and used three times to refer to a young man or young woman and is translated as “young.”⁷⁷ Lastly, the word “νεανίας” is used only 3 times in the Bible and all are translated as “young,” “a youth,” and “a young man.”⁷⁸ These Hebrew and Greek words for the concept of youth are almost always used to indicate young people from childhood to a marriage age. For

⁷² Michael J. Anthony et al., *A Theology for Family Ministries* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 227.

⁷³ Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), s.v. “נָעָר,” Logos.

⁷⁴ R. L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, rev. ed. (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, 1998), s.v. “נַעֲרָה,” Logos.

⁷⁵ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “בְּחֹרֵר,” Logos.

⁷⁶ NASB Dictionaries, s.v. “νεανίσκος,” Logos.

⁷⁷ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “νέος,” Logos.

⁷⁸ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), s.v. “νεανίας,” Logos.

instance, the word “נָעַר (*nā·‘ār*)” is translated “baby” for Moses in Exodus 2:6, and it is also translated age 20 young adult when it refers to Joseph in Genesis 41:12.⁷⁹

In Ecclesiastes 11:9, using the word “בְּחֹרֵר (*bā·hūr*),” Solomon wrote that “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes.” In this passage, Solomon declared that God wants youth “to enter into a relationship with Him as early as possible and to serve Him throughout the days of their lives . . . [being] mentored by older spiritual leaders for the purpose of training for ongoing service and for passing on the baton of faith to future generations.”⁸⁰

God’s heart for student ministry is illustrated throughout the Old and New Testament. God called teenagers, and youths held by God’s hand did amazing things in the Bible. Many examples in Scripture indicate that teenagers are no longer children, but can be taught to assume their responsibilities and duties as adults. First of all, Jewish people celebrate bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah as a rite of passage for teens:

At age 13 the Jewish male becomes bar mitzvah and the Jewish female at 12 becomes bat mitzvah. Bar/bat mitzvah is Hebrew for “one to whom the commandments apply” or “son/daughter of the law.” Even though celebrations for the bar mitzvah did not become formalized until medieval times—or the bat mitzvah until 1922—the thirteenth birthday for a boy and the twelfth birthday for a girl were established as the recognized ages for becoming a responsible adult in Jewish culture according to [the] Talmud.⁸¹

⁷⁹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 299; “When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the *baby* was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”” (Exod 2:6); “A *young* Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream.” (Gen 41:12)

⁸⁰ Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 228.

⁸¹ William R. Yount, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 326.

Although the Jewish bar and bat mitzvah did not exist during biblical times, both have “spiritual roots in the Old Testament.”⁸² During the period of the Exile, Israelites tried to teach children their native language so they would be able to read the Torah. Thus, they built synagogue schools as “a primary method for the instruction of reading, writing and speaking the Hebraic language.”⁸³ This statement indicates that the ancient Israelites recognized the teenage years as the most important turning point of life. Consequently, teenagers were taught to “control their own desires, accept responsibility for mature religious actions, and assume adult community responsibilities.”⁸⁴

Biblical justification for the position of student minister could be found in the priests’ educational role among the Israelites. Young Levites (the equivalent of youth) were apprenticed by the older priests (the equivalent of student ministers) from an early age.⁸⁵ The company of the prophets led by Elisha in Second Kings 4:38 also demonstrates another type of youth-focused educational group that was present in the Old Testament.⁸⁶ All of these groups or institutions for “communicating values and instilling faith” into the next generation can serve as a model for modern student ministries and ministers.⁸⁷

⁸² Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 226.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Alvin L. Reid, *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 186.

⁸⁵ Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History & Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 28.

⁸⁶ Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 226; “And Elisha came again to Gilgal when there was a famine in the land. And as the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, “Set on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.”” (2 Kgs 4:38)

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Samuel also could be a model for student ministry. God called Samuel to follow, obey, and serve God at an early age. Samuel served God in the Temple and was mentored by the priest Eli. The word “נָעַר (*nă·‘ār*)” is used for Samuel’s age in First Samuel 2:18.⁸⁸ Josephus assumed that Samuel might be 12 years old at that time.⁸⁹ When Samuel grew old and gray, he confessed that it was from his early age that he served God and led the people of Israel (1 Sam 12:2).⁹⁰

Moreover, the relationship between Moses and Joshua is also a model for student ministry and student ministers. When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to worship God, Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, followed him. When Moses listened to God face to face, Joshua would not depart from the Tabernacle (Exod 33:11).⁹¹

According to the book of Luke in the New Testament, Jesus was in the temple and spent time with teachers “teaching and discussing Scripture at age 12.”⁹² Although Jesus was not just an ordinary man but the God-man, it is important that “the only story the Bible tells about Jesus’ youth extols him not for physical ability or appearance or even for his kindness, but for his maturity” and his relationship with a group of adults.⁹³

⁸⁸ “Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.” (1 Sam 2:18)

⁸⁹ D. Guzik, “Study Guide for 1 Samuel 3,” accessed October 18, 2016, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Sa/1Sa_3.cfm.

⁹⁰ “And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and gray; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day.” (1 Sam 12:2)

⁹¹ “Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.” (Exod 33:11)

⁹² Ross, *Accelerate*, 13.

⁹³ Epstein, *The Case against Adolescence*, 295.

According to many scholars, most disciples of Jesus were teenagers when Jesus began his public life and then called them for the ministry. In Matthew 17:24-27, when a tax collector asks Peter why Jesus did not pay taxes, Jesus “asserted his independence . . . but he was willing to pay the tax in order to avoid giving offence.”⁹⁴ Jesus commanded Peter to take a shekel from the caught fish’s mouth and give it to the tax collector for Jesus and himself. At that time, “all Israelite males over the age of twenty paid this tribute annually for the upkeep of the Jerusalem temple.”⁹⁵ Judging from this, only Peter and Jesus were over the age of twenty, and the other disciples were teenagers, since they were apparently excluded from paying the tax.

In Second Timothy 2:2, Paul wrote to Timothy, “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” This passage could also be a model for student ministry today. Student ministers as mature believers can teach and equip a group of teenagers with sound doctrine in order to help produce in them the outcome of biblical living. As seen in these examples in the New Testament, both Jesus and Paul selected young believers—especially teenagers—“to invest in with the purpose of expanding God’s kingdom through them.”⁹⁶ All of these examples throughout the Bible provide a biblical rationale for student ministry and prove the validity of a student minister.

⁹⁴ D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 927. Logos.

⁹⁵ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: B& H Publishers, 1992), 269. Logos.

⁹⁶ Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 233.

The Biblical Model for the Student Minister

So far, the researcher has examined the appropriateness of student ministers as age-group-specific pastors through historical, theological, and biblical research in previous sections. From these studies, the researcher tried to build a biblical model for student ministry and presented biblical principles for student ministers. In this section, the researcher will conclude the paper by amplifying these principles for student ministers.

The Biblical Qualifications and Functions of Student Minister

First of all, student ministers should meet the biblical requirements for pastors and conduct their ministries according to biblical principles. Unfortunately, many churches and student ministries are influenced by unbiblical philosophies today. The consumerism and pragmatism of American culture especially changed the object of student ministry to attendance growth. Steve Wright pointed out the current student ministry value system: “Bigger is always better.”⁹⁷ In most churches and youth groups, attendance numbers became the only measure of spiritual vitality of a church and the sole standard for evaluating a ministry.⁹⁸ David F. Wells warned that when the purpose of a ministry is “get more people” rather than “glorify God,” churches begin to entertain all imaginable possibilities, biblical or not, for attracting people.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Steve Wright and Chirs Graves, *Rethink: Decide for Yourself, Is Student Ministry Working?* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest, 2007), 52-53.

⁹⁸ Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, 211.

⁹⁹ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 263.

Today many youth groups glorify entertainment to reach, entice, and gather teenagers in a church building, while they downplay calls to spiritual maturity.¹⁰⁰ MacArthur appropriately identified such a serious problem by saying, “Today churches often use gimmicks and entertainment to try to get people into the church. . . . It quite often functions like a business rather than a body, a factory rather than a family, and a corporation rather than a community.”¹⁰¹ As a result, most churches employ and evaluate student ministers according to secular standards rather than the biblical qualifications for pastors. It is not uncommon for all of the programs, events, and even worship services in student ministry to place “a greater value on being culturally trendy than on faithfully presenting the Word.”¹⁰²

Student ministers are the equivalent of an associate or assistant pastor, so they should be qualified according to the biblical requirements for pastors as seen in First Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. Student ministers have to be qualified and evaluated according to biblical characteristics as well as the ability to teach and defend the Word of God, rather than according to the way their personalities attract teenagers.

Student ministers should also conduct ministries according to biblical principles. They should recover the sovereignty of God as the sole purpose and object of ministry. In fact, the methods, content, structure, and settings of ministry should be thoroughly rooted in the Word of God. As Paul argued in Romans 12:2, ministers should not be conformed to secular philosophies, but should be transformed by the renewal of their minds according to the will of God. Thus,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰¹ John MacArthur, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 83.

¹⁰² Wright and Graves, *Rethink*, 61.

student ministers should have the ability to discern secular ideas in ministries, exclude all influences from them, and then rearrange their ministries according to the Word of God.

The Connection Between Student Ministers and Parents

Although proper interpretation of the Bible proves the biblical validity of student ministry and provides enough evidences for churches to employ student ministers, God nonetheless also plainly instructed parents to teach and nurture their own children. The Bible clearly declared that parents have the primary responsibility for teaching and caring for the next generation. In light of this commandment, what are the roles of student ministers in local churches?

The church and the family “each have distinct roles and serve distinct purposes” in accomplishing God’s plan.¹⁰³ Throughout the Bible, God not only has established His mission toward the world He created, but has also called each institution—family and church—to this mission. In a word, God has planned not only what He wants done, but how He wants it done, and with whom He wants to do it.¹⁰⁴ God created and assigned specific roles to each institution. Theologians call this assignment of responsibilities “the biblical doctrine of jurisdiction,” which is also referred to as “sphere sovereignty.”¹⁰⁵

If student ministers exceed the scope, authority, and roles God assigned, they usurp the responsibilities of parents, and a vicious cycle initiates. In fact, the more student minister assume all the responsibilities God has reserved for parents and therefore become a functional substitute

¹⁰³ Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *Marriage and the Family* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 151.

¹⁰⁴ Rob Rienow, *Limited Church: Unlimited Kingdom: Uniting Church and Family in the Great Commission* (Nashville: Randall House, 2013), 61.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

for parents, the more parents are tempted to give up all the responsibilities and roles God ordained to them.¹⁰⁶ John Calvin warned church leaders that “Ecclesiastical power, therefore, is not to be mischievously adorned, but it is to be confined within certain limits, so as not to be drawn hither and thither at the caprice of men.”¹⁰⁷ Although there is surely some degree of overlap between the roles of student ministers and parents, they should not be substituted and collapsed into one.¹⁰⁸

However, local churches and Christian parents should not exclude student ministers from God’s mission to help parents reclaim their biblical roles. Parents’ roles in spiritually training the next generation should not necessarily be “the priority,” but “a priority.”¹⁰⁹ Timothy Paul Jones cautions against this mistake by explaining that if “family becomes the center of any church’s ministry, family has become an idol—and that false god is no less odious in God’s sight than the golden calves and fertility poles that Israel served in ancient times.”¹¹⁰ Although the Bible highlights the parents’ role to disciple their own children, it does not exclude the role of the church and student ministers. Church leaders and parents should understand the biblical principles for each institution, church and family, and try to adjust the balance between the role of student ministers and parents.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1149.

¹⁰⁸ Köstenberger and Jones, *Marriage and the Family*, 151.

¹⁰⁹ Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 222.

¹¹⁰ Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries*, 50.

The Recovery of the Biblical Concept of Adolescence

Lastly, student ministers should discern the false concept of adolescence from secular scholars and follow instead the biblical concept of teenagers. In observing teenagers in the Bible, it is undeniable that God can use them to do amazing things. “Those same spiritual, mental, emotional, and social potentials exist within teenagers today.”¹¹¹ When student ministers change their perception on youth and, through sound biblical anthropology, adopt the biblical concept of youth, teenagers can “fulfill the possibilities they carry within them.”¹¹²

Secular scientists following Hall’s theory argue that children and adolescents are less-evolved beings. They also maintain that adolescents are inherently and naturally immature, irresponsible, rebellious, vulnerable, and mischievous. On the other hand, the Bible clearly shows that they are created in the image of God. “They have the great dignity of being creatures with a capacity for love, morality, rationality, artistic creation, and all the other uniquely human capabilities.”¹¹³

However, God’s image in humans is totally disfigured because of sin. Thus, teenagers are also “in need of moral and intellectual direction.”¹¹⁴ The Bible plainly describes teenagers as beings who can easily succumb to temptation. Thus, God clearly commands that parents and adults should instruct the next generation according to the Word of God.

When teenagers are saved from sin, they can understand and know that “God has given him or her special gifts to make a unique contribution to humanity’s task of reversing the effects

¹¹¹ Ross, *Accelerate*, 21.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 128.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 129.

of the Fall and extending the Lordship of Christ in the world.”¹¹⁵ They are thus no longer children. Adults should not infantilize them, but instead should transform their negative perspective on teenagers into a positive perspective.

Conclusion

Throughout the paper, the researcher attempted to prove that *the proper interpretation of Scripture supports the church employing age-group-specific pastors, including student ministers, as part of the church’s mission and design*. The historical research for the concept of adolescence and student ministry verified where the issue came from and what the exact point is in the dispute. Then, the researcher further demonstrated the validity of student ministry and the appropriateness of the position of student minister through theological and biblical studies. In the final section, the researcher tried to present biblical principles for sound roles and functions of student ministers.

Unfortunately, too many student ministries in local churches are not based on the biblical principles as examined in this paper, but stand on shallow fads and transient youth culture. Many student ministers try to seek gimmicks for attracting teenagers, so they can increase the number of members in the youth group. In this situation, it is no wonder that opponents of student ministry assert that the church should abolish age-group ministry and refocus their efforts on family ministry.

However, student ministry and student ministers are not a new idea that society and culture created. In the Bible, there are many examples for student ministry and student ministers as seen in this paper. God already has provided all the principles necessary for the biblical

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

ministry. And, God has provided the qualifications, roles, and functions of a pastor as presented in this paper. student ministers should fully understand these biblical principles for a ministry and a pastor and follow them. They should remember Paul's advice to his spiritual son Timothy in First Timothy 4:6-8.¹¹⁶ As they do, they will not only biblically legitimize their ministry in the eyes of skeptics, they will also experience the true blessing of building their ministries on biblical principles.

¹¹⁶ "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Tim 4:6-8)

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