

“CHILDREN’S CHURCH”

Matthew Johnson

One of the newer practices that has emerged over the last several years in the church today is that of “Children’s Church.” Some congregations may call it “worship training” or by names with similar themes but it refers to the same practice. The basic practice is that younger children leave the assembly to go into another area of the building where they participate in worship training led by one or more adults. I have never sat in on any of these worship training activities nor have I talked to anyone who leads them so admittedly I have no firsthand knowledge of what transpires during these sessions. Regardless of what is practiced in these sessions, I’m left wondering whether Children’s Church can be biblically supported.

When Paul was preaching, Eutychus went to sleep and fell out of the window. It’s clear Eutychus was with the entire assembly (of which there was only one) and he is described as a young man (Acts 20:7-9). Perhaps he was older than a child. When Jesus was on earth and teaching there were those that were trying to bring their children to him and his disciples were trying to prevent them. Not only did Jesus not mind the children in his audience, he was displeased they were being kept from his audience. *“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God”* (Mar 10:13-14). Certainly the context and setting is different but I’m wondering what Christ thinks when the children are removed from his midst during worship.

One of the foundational scriptures for authority is, *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Col 3:17). There is no direct command in scripture to have Children’s Church. There is nothing that implies that children should meet separately to worship or separated for worship training. There are no examples of the early NT Church having a children’s church or worship training. While parents from time to time need to discipline or tend to their children without causing distraction from others’ worship, there doesn’t seem to be any real necessity to organize a wholesale removal of young children from the “adult” worship.

If the purpose is to train the children to worship, then why remove them from the example and solemnity of the very environment we wish them

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to actively participate in one day? While the OT worship was far different, Hannah brought young Samuel to the environment of worship shortly after she had weaned him (1Sam 1:22-24). At less than two years, my daughter began to learn enough to bow her head for prayer and quiet herself—at least most of the time and she’s still learning. She knows the difference between a church service, a trip to the zoo and watching a cartoon, and conducts herself differently in each instance. Many other children are similar.

Which brings me to another question: Is it the children that need segregated worship training, or is it the parents that should be training and preparing their children to worship by instilling discipline and reverence for God? Fathers are commanded to “*bring them [children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph 6:4). The best worship training parents can do is to train and discipline their children throughout the week in the home and bring their children to all the services. If the only example of prayer is in Children’s Church the children will not learn to pray. If worship is the only time during the week they are required to listen to authority and control their actions, they will not learn to be quiet. If the only time they open a Bible, sing, or pray is in Children’s Church, they will not learn how to worship...any more than children would be literate if they went to school one hour a week. In the words of Moses, “*And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up*” (Deut 11:19). Certainly there are times when children need to be removed by the parent and not all children are the same. Some parents might even like to have assistance in caring for their children from time to time but Children’s Church doesn’t seem to be a biblically revealed answer.

There aren’t many scriptures in this article but such is the nature of a topic that is either without scriptural support or for which my ignorance of the scriptures fails to discuss the relevant supporting passages. So don’t take my word or lack thereof for it, but as Paul told Timothy, “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (1Thes 5:21). Whether or not the practice is considered unscriptural may be cause for speculation—but scriptural authority could put it to rest. My prayer is that not only will parents train their children to worship faithfully, but that we, like Christ, will desire them to be in our midst.