

## Don't bring your children to church

Rev. John Belden

If you're still reading, chances are the title above caught your attention. Maybe you're shocked that a pastor would say this. But I'm simply saying what many people believe and practice.

For example, look around at church next Sunday and notice how few little children you see. If you do see them, how many are being trained to sit still and listen? How many are permitted to wander around and do their own thing? Or how many are shuffled out for "children's church"?

The typical excuse is, "But you can't expect children to sit through church." My response is, Why? We do. It takes work. But it can be done. The problem is not what your children can or can't do. The problem is your expectations and what you're willing to work for. For this reason, many parents don't even try.

Of course this is not the only excuse. Others say, "They will interrupt the worship." I imagine this is what the disciples thought when they turned the little children away from Jesus. "They will interrupt Jesus."

"But what will they get out of the service?" says another, "they're too young to understand the sermon." Can't you just hear the disciples saying these very things? After all, Luke says they "brought infants" (18:15). How could infants possibly benefit from Jesus? They couldn't understand His teaching.

Jesus had one response to all these excuses, "He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them'" (Mark 10:14).

Jesus wants little children in church. Even if they don't get anything out of the sermon, they're learning to worship. They're learning to listen to God's chosen means of converting and growing His people, the preaching of the word (1 Cor. 1:21). In a world of short attention spans and immediate gratification, this will go a long way in training your children to understand God's Word.

If you're a pastor and you discourage families with small children from worshipping together, shame on you. Godly leaders have always included young children in worship.

Moses commanded families to worship together: "All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives" (Deut. 29:10-11). He gave the purpose for this, "that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God" (v. 12). This was a covenant with the whole family, including the "little ones."

He commanded families to "appear before the Lord" with their "little ones. . . that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God" (Deut. 31:11-12). The little children came in order to learn to fear their parents' God (v. 13).

Later when Joshua renewed this covenant, he read "before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them" (Josh. 8:35).

In the days of Jehoshaphat "all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord" (II Chron. 20:13). The mention of "children" suggests that these "little ones" were infants.

And this is not just an Old Testament idea. Peter said "the promise is to you and to your children" (Acts 2:39). Paul addressed children in his letters to the churches (Eph. 6:1-3; Col.3:20).

I know it's not easy to bring your children to church and train them to participate in worship. But it's what God wants.

Besides, aren't you tired of the failure of Christians to pass on the faith to their children? Aren't you tired of how common it is for Christian parents to watch their teenagers sink into the bondage of drug addiction? Are you concerned about your own efforts to reach your children with the gospel?

The answer to all this is not complex. Let the little children come and do not forbid them. Start young. Fulfill your responsibilities as a Christian parent.

If you don't bring your children to worship, aren't you neglecting the most important time in their lives? But more importantly, aren't you are doing just what Jesus rebuked His disciples for?

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