



when they were children. In her book entitled *Farmer Boy* she gives an account of her husband, Almanzo at church one Sunday. She wrote, "...there was nothing to do but sit still till the sermon was over. It was two hours long. Almanzo's legs ached and his jaw wanted to yawn, but he dared not yawn or fidget. He must sit perfectly still and never take his eyes from the preacher's solemn face and wagging beard. Almanzo couldn't understand how Father knew that he wasn't looking at the preacher, if Father was looking at the preacher himself. But Father always did know" (pg. 90).

Another argument is that if we insist that children behave and pay attention we may cause them to resent coming to worship. This is

possible, but there are some things in life that are important enough that we must insist upon them. *Do we take our children out of school because it is difficult for them to sit through classes?* And yet, who among us does not look back and appreciate the benefits of our schooling? With such practices having been in place for some year, there is now evidence that these "Children's Church" programs don't always have the desired effects. I know of one church that has had such a program for years. What they now face is the problem that they have teenagers, no longer young enough to go to "Children's Church," but who have not learned to behave and engage in worship themselves. We must ask ourselves, when is it easier to shape behavior, when someone is a child, or a teenager? Have we so permitted children to dictate their own behavior that we have deprived them of what they need to be sound adults? Thomas Szasz has said, "Permissiveness is the principle of treating children as if they were adults and the tactic of making sure they never reach that stage."

Conclusion. Our effort is not to criticize the sincere desire of good men and women to try and help children. Rather, it is to call upon us to consider what is really at stake in these matters. In the decisions my wife and I made regarding how we raised our children I am sure that we were often viewed as a "too hard" on our children. We did not allow them to bring toys to services, and as small children did not allow them to sit with others during services so that we could teach them how to worship. Those years are behind us now, and we are sympathetic to parents who now must decide for themselves how to raise their children. Given the serious nature of this responsibility, I challenge all Christian parents to earnestly teach your young ones (even as children) how to worship God for themselves. Don't rely on others to teach your children what only you can teach them.



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4700 Andrews Ave.
Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
www.olsenpark.com

ISSUE

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BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

February 5
2012

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
Bill Davis
Steve Dixon
Pat Goguen
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Jason Garcia



"Children's Church"

By Kyle Pope

In recent years our brethren have begun to toy with a practice borrowed from the denominations that is sometimes referred to as "Children's Church." This practice involves offering a special session, set aside for children during the time the congregation usually assembles for preaching. Children are dismissed from the assembly and escorted to a separate area where classes are offered to children that range anywhere from puppet shows, (offered by some churches), to more traditional Bible classes. As with all practices involving the church it is the duty of New Testament Christians to analyze the scriptural soundness of any practice.

Ephesians chapter six verse four teaches us who has the primary responsibility for the spiritual training of children. Paul declares, through the Holy Spirit, "...fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (NKJV). The example of Timothy shows that mothers are not excluded from this duty. When Paul wrote his second epistle to this young man, he spoke of the faith which first dwelt in Timothy's mother Eunice (1:5) and later says of Timothy, "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures..." (3:15). So, clearly those who bear the foremost responsibility in this matter are the parents.

With this established we must ask the question, - "Do other Christians bear any responsibility in the spiritual training of children?" We must answer, yes! From two standpoints: 1.) Christians have a responsibility to one another to encourage one another to do right. Hebrews 10:24 teaches us,

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” Christians have a duty to encourage other Christians who are parents to raise their children in accordance with God’s word. 2.) Christians also have the duty to try and influence others towards obedience to the gospel. 1 Peter 3:15 teaches us, **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”** Small children, though not yet accountable, are potential converts whom we have a duty to seek to influence. The local church and its leadership



Olsen Park church of Christ

share these same responsibilities. They are spoken of as those who **“watch out for”** souls (Hebrews 13:17).

Even so it must be acknowledged, that the responsibility of others is quite limited. No other Christian is ever charged with the duty of chastening (i.e. spanking, grounding, etc.) a child. The elders especially, are never charged with making certain that the children of members behave themselves, except to the degree that it is their duty to teach, rebuke, and discipline unruly saints. (See Titus 1:9; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). Parents on the other hand, are commanded to chasten, in order to train. (See Heb. 12:5-11; Prov. 19:18).

In an effort to try and fulfill this limited responsibility we have towards the children of others, many congregations set aside times in which Bible classes are offered for all ages taught by members of the congregation. In general, a Christian is authorized to teach anywhere they have the opportunity. We see this from Acts 8:4 which tells us that those scattered by persecution **“went everywhere preaching the gospel.”** Even so, we know from 1 Timothy 1:12 a woman is prohibited from teaching over a man, but women are commanded to be **“teachers of good things.”** (Titus 2:3), thus they may teach children and other women. The church is authorized to support teaching. Ephesians 4:12 shows this in describing the objective towards which church leaders work—**“...the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”** Whether such teaching is conducted in homes, street corners, barnyards, or rooms in a meeting house the principle remains the same.

With these principles set forth, let’s consider a few problems associated with the practice called “Children’s Church.”

1. Terminology. The first problem is the name associated with this practice. “The church” as described in Scripture is the “body” of Christ. (Ephesians 1:22,23). It is composed of those who are in fellowship with God, having been obedient to the gospel of Christ. Acts 2:47 says of the church in Jerusalem, **“...the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”** Scripture will speak of the church: In a Universal sense (i.e. all in heaven and on earth who are saved – Heb. 12:23), in a local sense (i.e. those who have obeyed the gospel and identified themselves with one another in work and worship – 1 Cor. 1:2), and in reference to a local church assembled (1 Cor.

11:18, 14:34; Matt. 18:17). While it could be argued that children, as those who are innocent and not yet accountable for sin are a part of the universal church, it could never be suggested that a group of children forms either a local congregation or an assembly of a local congregation. Thus to speak of this as “Children’s Church” is using the word church in a way it is not used in Scripture. *Wouldn’t it be best to use “Bible names for Bible things”?*

2. Missing an Opportunity to Worship. While there are many times we can (and should) offer ourselves to children in order to teach them spiritual truth on their own level, there are some serious problems with doing this at the time the church has come together to study God’s word. The adults who conduct these “Children’s Church” sessions are missing an opportunity to worship God as they ought. When a congregation assembles to worship, the elders attempt to offer to the congregation the spiritual nutrition which they need to live in Christ (see Acts 20: 28). They do this by their appointment and oversight of those who lead the worship, and their specific direction regarding the order and content of worship. No matter how well intentioned, when a system is set up which routinely deprives the adults who lead these “Children’s Churches” of the spiritual nutrition the elders offer to them, it is bound to have an effect upon their spiritual life.

3. The Effect on Children Themselves. As a father of three children, one of the most serious and yet powerful duties I had was the task of trying to nurture faith in my children. My wife and I had the task of raising children who would delight in hearing God’s word taught, who would love to sing songs of praise to the Almighty, and feel that prayer to God was a normal, regular part of life. While most of this teaching was to occur in the home, the time it was the most clearly demonstrated was when the church assembled for worship. Ours was the task of teaching our children, it is not boring to hear God’s word taught! We had the task of teaching respect for God in times of worship. This was not easy, but it was a serious responsibility.

What do we teach children when they are dismissed from the assembly and “spoon-fed” an entertaining “Sesame Street-like” presentation? Are we saying to them – *“I know that worship is boring, so we’ll give you entertainment!”*? Is it possible that the reason we feel that children must view worship as boring is because that’s what we feel about worship?

Someone might suggest, *“But you can’t expect children to sit still for an entire service!”* My youngest son, at the age of one sat motionless through a two hour theater presentation of the movie *Toy Story*. We, as other parents did, insisted that our children behaved in the theater so as not to disturb others. If children can be taught to behave themselves and pay attention for something as unimportant as a cartoon why on earth can’t we do the same when it concerns spiritual matters? Somewhere along the way in our generation of pop-psychology and permissiveness we have come to think that children can’t do what used to be expected of them. Laura Ingalls Wilder, who lived in the late 1800’s in frontier America, wrote a series of books about her life and the life of her husband