

CHURCH SERVICE ETIQUETTE

CHILDREN

Above the chorus of crinkling candy wrappers, cell phones, and other distractions, the sounds of children ring loudest throughout an entire congregation. The largest distraction in the worship services is children. We want children there so that not only at home, but also at Church they are brought *"...up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (Eph 6:4). Biblical education should be done primarily at home as Ephesians 6:4 tells us. Still, the more services children attend and the more exposure they get to God's word, the more likely they are to continue in godly ways. Nonetheless, young children are extremely distracting to a congregation. Members often grumble about some loud child in the back who prevented them from hearing the lesson. Entire families become distracted with Kodak moments when young children of different families make contact with each other during services. I've even witnessed people on the front pew turn around to give the "aww, how cute" face to a noisy baby a dozen pews back.

1 Corinthians 14 provides guidance for the conduct of our assemblies. While the conduct of children in the assembly is never addressed here or anywhere else in the Scriptures, we can reason from what Paul says.

"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?" (1 Cor 14:23)

The assembly is to be conducted in such a way that visitors are impressed by the reverence shown during worship. Any type of disorder (including children) and confusion could send the wrong message to outsiders and the unlearned about our intent and our sincerity. We are to have a certain mindset for the worship service.

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." (John 4:23)

"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of

the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." (1 Cor 11:27-30)

It is difficult enough for us to remain in the proper mindset for worship even with minimal distractions, but when children are allowed to continually cry, talk, play with change, beat on the pews, etc., it becomes nearly impossible to maintain this mindset.

"But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." (1 Cor 14:24-25)

What if your child is the one who distracts someone, perhaps an unbelieving or unlearned visitor, to the point that this does not happen? Some people in the audience already have enough trouble hearing as it is; a crying or talking child makes it even more difficult to hear.

"How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." (1 Cor 14:26)

In verse 26 we see the emphasis placed on edifying. Since edification is so important, does this not imply that anything that interferes with edifying, including disruptive children, should immediately be addressed?

"If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Cor 14:27-33)

The context of this passage is clearly not about children, but it is about order and the proceedings of the worship service so that edification is maximized. It is difficult to concentrate, listen, and process what a prayer or a sermon is about when children are constantly making noise.

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." (1 Cor 14:34-35)

We understand this to be a matter of authority. (*"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."* (1 Tim 2:11-14)). In a similar manner, children should exhibit subjection as much as possible. Young infants are one thing, but there is absolutely no reason for children ages 2 and older to be consistently making noise and disrupting the services.

"Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Cor 14:40)

This is not a suggestion; it is a commandment. Allowing toddlers and young children to cry, scream, loudly talk, or make other forms of noise without reprimanding them or taking them out violates this. This passage makes it clear that the worship service is intended to be a dignified and reverent event. Every young child will occasionally make a sound and this is understood. However, allowing chronic noise and misbehavior to persist runs contrary to the nature of the worship service as described by Paul.

Parents should consider how they affect their children's reputation when they allow them to misbehave during services and then run wild afterward. This can give the children a reputation that will affect them later in life. The wise man Solomon said in Proverbs 20:11, *"Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."* We as adults do indeed consider children based on their behavior. Out of politeness, most people never say anything to the child or to the parents, but the thoughts are there nonetheless. As a parent what does the lack of discipline do to the child's reputation now and in the future? The misdeeds of youth can stain a child's reputation forever. It is not fair for a child to have to work

extra hard to overcome a bad reputation they earned due to a lack of discipline on the part of their parents.

Another thing that parents need to consider, particularly fathers, is how the behavior of their children reflects on them. One qualification of an elder involves the behavior of his children. *"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."* (Titus 1:6). The point here is that children provide the most accurate measure of a father's ability to lead and correct others. It is often debated as to what "faithful" children means. Some say this means while they are home, while others believe it means after they leave home. The two lists of qualifications that Paul gave for elders are both complete and must be in agreement. Since Paul told two different individuals what the qualifications are, we should be able to take either list and use it alone. This also means that the two lists should contain the same things and agree with each other. Noting this fact, look at what is said in the other list. *"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity."* (1 Timothy 3:4). This clearly indicates that the children are at home! They are also in subjection to their father with "all gravity." The way a man's children behave speaks volumes about his character and leadership. This is something that cannot be undone or forgotten. A man whose children are wild as young children and teenagers will never be qualified to be an elder.

As mentioned in the previous article, those with young children have very good reasons to sit near the back. Young children will be noisy, and at one point or another, need to be taken outside. If parents take young children outside and give no punishment to the children (i.e. spanking), these children will associate misbehavior with getting an unpunished "field trip" and will not discontinue their bad behavior. Taking a child out and not making it an unpleasant trip will only reinforce their bad behavior. If they figure out that being loud will get them a trip outside for a few minutes then get your walking shoes on! If young children misbehave and become disruptive, take them outside and then make it such that they don't want to be taken out anymore. *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Pro 13:24). Children can and will be quiet in Church IF their parents care to make them mind. One or two trips outside where Proverbs 13:24 is applied will usually solve the problem. It is only when the child understands that the two choices are: sitting still and

being quiet or being taken outside and punished that their behavior will significantly improve.

If a child is accustomed to getting his/her way at home, it will be more difficult to correct behaviors at church. Treating young children is like holding a rope. If you hold the rope too tight, it will snap. If you hold the rope too loose, it will escape your grip completely. It's a lot to ask a young child to remain quiet and still for over an hour. Young children are energetic and will need just a little wiggle room (to fidget, not to run wild up and down the pew), but they must have distinct boundaries. If they cross these boundaries and require punishment, give it to them.

It's disruptive and distracting when children are passed around during the worship service. There's a difference between a cough drop changing hands and a small child being passed across a pew. Some children seem to sit with many different people during every service. When not seated with their parents, children begin to think they can get away with more. The children must know that the parents have certain expectations for how they are to behave during the service, even if they are sitting elsewhere, and if these expectations are not met, punishment will ensue.

If there is more than one family with young children in the congregation, the parents of each must consider each other. Each set of parents may have certain things they don't want their children saying, certain places they don't want their children going, and certain activities they don't want their children doing. These things may differ from another set of parents' rules, but they must be noted so as not to offend another family.

In 1 Corinthians 8:13, Paul writes *"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* Applying this to our topic, this means that if one family believes it is wrong for their children to behave in certain ways, another family should not let their children behave in this way in their presence so as not to offend. It causes obvious problems when a child is not allowed by his or her parents to do one thing, yet sees another child allowed to do that very thing: "Why can't I do it? They're doing it!"

Even though the service may be over and we understand the building is not the Church, there should still be a certain

amount of decorum exhibited by adults and children alike. It often seems as if the final "Amen" is the signal for young children to commence running and screaming inside the building. Often it becomes difficult for adults to carry on conversations with someone right beside them because of the noise. Many of those in the congregations are elderly, and it is very dangerous to have children weaving in and out around individuals who already need some assistance to walk. Often during all of this, the parents can be found on the other end of the building, oblivious to what is happening. How would these parents feel if an ambulance has to be called to the Church building for someone that has fallen and broken a hip or sustained some other injury because of their child? If there is an appropriate place outside the Church building for the children to run and play after services, let them play there instead.

We wouldn't dare let our children act this way at a restaurant or the grocery store, so why then do we allow it in the Church building? We view the Church building as a safe environment, but when services conclude parents can't cease watching their children and expect someone else in the congregation to monitor them. Accidents can happen, and manners shown in other public places by children should be shown here also, during and after services. It is rude to allow children to disrupt the solemnity of the worship service.

Children will meet your expectations as a parent. If you expect them to sit quietly and behave, they will do so. It may take a trip or two outside to drive the point home that you really do mean completely quiet, but once you've shown you're serious, you will see behavior change. Don't give empty threats. If you expect that children will move around and make noise then they will do exactly that. If you are firm, fair, and consistent you can have your children under control in a short amount of time, and everyone in the Church service will be able to worship in a manner that is pleasing to God.

BEN
&
TONY WHIDDON
(Roanoke , AL)

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
June 29 -- July 3, 2009	2009 Camp Meeting Gatlinburg, TN	Various Speakers
July 3 -- 5, 2009	Chapel Hill Congregation Pell City, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
July 9 -- 12, 2009 7:00 p.m.	Goochtown Congregation Eubank, KY	Carley & Scott Conner (Cookeville, TN)
July 12 -- 17, 2009	Temple Hill Congregation Highway 98 East Smithdale, MS 39664	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
July 19 -- 24, 2009	Oak Grove Congregation Woodland, AL	Brad Prince (Wedowee, AL)
July 20 -- 24, 2009	Owens Road Congregation Prattville, AL	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
July 26 -- 31, 2009	Napoleon Congregation Woodland, AL	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
July 27 -- 31, 2009 7:00 nightly	Mt. Zion Congregation Crab Orchard, KY	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)
July 30 -- August 2, 2009	Tarleton Heights Congregation Stephenville, TX	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Under the Old Law, how long was a woman "customarily unclean" after giving birth?
2. Ruth stayed with Naomi and returned with her to Naomi's homeland, which was where?
3. According to First Chronicles, who moved David to number Israel ?

4. What two things did Jesus tell the people to do when they fasted?

5. In Paul's letters to Timothy, who did Paul say was worse than an unbeliever?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .