

CHILDREN ARE IMPORTANT

Baptist Times 23 June 2005

Over the years Baptists have produced several reports on the child and the church. But none of them seemed to scratch where churches itched. Recently our children's ministry team drafted a statement about children in our church. I thought it was so good, that it would be worth while sharing them with you.

“The mission of our church is to ‘Go Christ’s way and make disciples’. As with all the activities of the church, learning to follow Jesus and helping each other to follow him is at the heart of all the activities with the children.

Everyone needs to be valued and accepted for who they are.

Children’s activities need to be fun and help everyone to learn about the love of God and experience it for themselves.

We need to encourage and support each other in whatever God asks us to do in the church and in sharing what we know about God and the church with others.

Children are an important part of the church family.

Every adult and child in our church family needs to be polite, listening to and showing respect for each other.

Adults need to make sure that the church is a safe place for children”.

Yes, I freely admit that the above statement is not very theological. Nothing is said, for instance, about the place of conversion and baptism. And yet the statement does refer to helping children follow Jesus and learn about the love of God. And this is surely the key. Given opportunity, most, if not all, children will happily respond to the love of Jesus. Its only natural for them to want to follow Jesus when they hear of how he gave his life for them. Jesus himself suggested as much, when he said “Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it” (Lk 18.17). To receive the Kingdom of God like a child is to exercise child-like trust. This is what distinguishes a child from an adult. A child will always believe the best about a person. A child naturally trusts others. Sadly, part of growing up is having our illusions shattered and discovering that we can’t trust everybody. The task of every church and of its children’s work in particular is to nurture, stimulate and protect the children in its care, that they eventually become mature followers of Jesus.

It seems to me that along with our annual re-affirmation of our child protection policy, we should re-affirm our commitment to protect our children from spiritual abuse too! My mind goes to the words of Jesus about tying millstones round the necks of those who caused ‘little ones’ to lose their faith (Matt 18.6-7 = Lk 17.1-2). Nothing makes God more angry than such a form of child abuse. For children are important to him! Woe betide if through our conservatism or through our selfishness or through our loveless-ness we cause children to stumble and fall in the faith.

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