

CHILDREN AT COMMUNION?

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The way most Baptist churches celebrate the Lord's Supper children never get a real 'look-in'. True, they see the Table laid with bread and wine, but then they go to their Sunday School classes, with the result that the Lord's Supper remains a mystery.

In my own church we have sought to 'de-mystify' the Lord's Supper by twice a year bringing the children back into the service to see what goes on. Although their Sunday School teachers have already prepared them for the service, I also try to explain to the children what is going on. But, even so, it is difficult for them to feel involved in the service.

At one stage, while plates of bread were being passed around the congregation, we passed around the children a plate with attractive text-cards. These texts have always had some relevance to the Lord's Supper: e.g. John 3.16 or Galatians 2.20. However, the children were never enthusiastic about these cards – they have continued to feel excluded rather than included.

In the light of all this, recently we tried another tack by following the Anglican custom of inviting children to come forward and receive a blessing during communion. The following words will give a flavour of what we sought to do:

“Boys and girls, this meal which we call the Lord's Supper is for those who love Jesus and have invited Jesus to be Lord of their lives. I know that many of you love Jesus too and want to be his disciples – and we look forward to the day when you too are baptised and there tell everybody that Jesus is Lord. Until that moment comes the bread and wine are not for you. BUT we don't want you to feel left out. We want you to know that we are delighted that you come to church Sunday by Sunday, and that in a very real sense you are part of our church family. So what we are going to do is this. After I have read the story of how Jesus told his disciples to remember him, and we have said thank you to God in a prayer, while the bread and wine are passed around, we will invite you to come forward so that we can pray for you. As we pray for you, we shall put a hand on your head, just as Jesus no doubt put his hands on children of long ago, and blessed them. God loves you. Indeed, God loves us all”.

Four of us took part in blessing the children. As each child came forward, the child was addressed by name and then prayed for in the form of a short blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you in eternal life”. Interestingly, although over one hundred children were present, the blessing of these children was over before the deacons had finished serving the bread.

To our great delight the children approved of what we did – even some of the more cynical boys. All of them said they would like us to do this again.

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