



# Storming Fortresses

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh,  
but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4

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## Thought Provoker:

As Christians we must reject the pagan outlook. The purpose of a Christian education is to enable the child to grow in the image of God into a mature adult, to equip him to shoulder his responsibilities as God's image bearer, and provide him with tools to fulfil his creation mandate to extend dominion over the earth as God's vice-regent....We are not at liberty, as Christians, to subject our children into the godless image of fallen man.

Stephen C. Perks  
Christian Philosophy  
of Education

## Missing Children: Is Children's Church Biblical?

By

Bruce C. Davis.

### Saved to Worship

Christians are saved from their sins to become worshippers of God. The Father seeks true worshippers (John 4:23). His seeking is saving. He seeks sinners to save them that they might become true worshippers of God Most High, and the Father finds the fulfillment of His seeking lost sinners to make them worshippers in the Son of Man's coming to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Christian worship is an issue of salvation in Jesus Christ. God's elect are redeemed in order to worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

### The Regulative

#### Principle of Worship

Foundational to the proper worship of God is what is commonly known as the regulative principle of worship. This principle, so skillfully described by our Reformed confessions, means that God regulates His own worship by His Word. God prescribes and governs His own worship; He alone appoints what is acceptable to Him; and all else is to be excluded. Only those elements which are derived from Scripture are pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. The Westminster Confession (1:6; 21:1) and the Belgic Confession (Art.

32) are one in setting forth this standard for the worship of God. The Biblical basis for the statements made by the confessions is seen in such verses as Deut. 4:2; 12:30-32 and Ex. 20:4-6. The second commandment historically has been understood by Reformed Christians to be part of the Biblical basis for the regulative principle of worship. The Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 96) and the Westminster Larger (Q&A 109) and Shorter (Q&A 50, 51) Catechisms articulate this.

Everything in the worship of God that is not sanctioned, taught, com-

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manded or prescribed by His Word is, in the words of Leviticus 10:1, “strange fire which the Lord commanded not.” That there is much strange fire being offered to God in so many evangelical and Reformed churches today is beyond dispute. A growing and glaring example of this is the phenomenon of children’s church.

### Missing Children

Children’s church is a major problem today. Children from Christian homes are missing. Where have all the children gone? They certainly are not in the worship services of local churches. They are in children’s church (meaning junior church, children’s worship, children’s activity center, [Sunday school] etc.) which is run at the same time as the worship services.

To have or not have children in the worship services of the church is a big question today, although it should not be a question at all. The practice of children’s church is to be decisively and completely rejected. Historically it has not been a practice

accepted by the Church. There is no Biblical basis for it, and it is not in any way based on Reformed theology or Reformed methodology. It is a new-fangled modern invention not rooted in the historic Christian faith and practice of the Church. While there are many arguments brought forth in favour of children’s church, the arguments represent the voice of pragmatism and not the voice of the Word of God. The advocates of children’s church are actually advocates of “R rated worship”—worship restricted to adults only. The practice of children’s church, while on the surface seeming to be well-intentioned, plausible, sensible, and advisable, has been nothing less than a disaster for the Church of Jesus Christ. It is one of the most, if not the most, damaging and destructive forms of Christian education ever devised by man. It would never have come into vogue if the Church had not abandoned the regulative principle of worship. Our Reformed forefathers would have considered children’s church unthinkable and intolerable.

### Children’s Church—Its Definition and Origin

Children’s church is that practice which has the children and young people of local churches (even through high school in some cases) miss all or part of the worship services, including and especially the preaching of God’s Word, in order to be in their own age-segregated setting for “age appropriate” singing, instruction and other activities. Advocates of children’s church consider traditional Reformed worship services to be hard on children and not “child-friendly”; thus they consider children’s church a creative, proper, and legitimate alternative to keeping children in the worship services. They believe that regular worship services have little or no meaning to children and young people; therefore

a separate service is necessary to meet their needs.

How did children’s church ever start? Where has it come from? It has not come from the Bible, but from the world of modern, secular, and humanistic psychology. It is not the fruit of some fresh insight from Scripture that our forefathers did not have. It has crept into the Church from the world in the guise of pragmatic methodology according to the latest psychological and educational theories of child development. Advocates of children’s church appeal not to Christian theology but to modern psychological and educational theories to state and make their case; and in light of the Word of God, they come up empty every time. One thing that all advocates of children’s church have in common is a lack of respect for and adherence to the regulative principle of worship.

### The Biblical Basis for the Reformed Position

The Bible regulates the public worship of God by calling for the whole covenant community, young and old alike, to be present during worship services. This is the consistent and exclusive teaching of God’s Holy Word:

Exodus 10:8-9: So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, serve the LORD your God! Who are the ones that are going?” And Moses said, “We shall go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD.”<sup>1</sup>

Exodus 12:24-26: “And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. “And it will come about when you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, that you shall ob-

serve this rite. "And it will come about when your children will say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?'"

Deuteronomy 29:9-13: "So keep the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. "You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, *even* all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today, in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Deuteronomy 31:10-13: Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of *every* seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. "Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, in order that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. "And their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

Joshua 8:34-35: Then afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assem-

bly of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers who were living among them.

2 Chronicles 20:5 and 13: Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court...And all Judah was standing before the LORD, with their infants, their wives, and their children.

Ezra 10:1: Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women, and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6: And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

Nehemiah 12:43: and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

Joel 2:15-16: Blow a trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room And the bride out of her *bridal* chamber.

Matthew 21:15-16: But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant, and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus \*said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABES THOU HAST PREPARED PRAISE FOR THYSELF'?"

Ephesians 6:1: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Colossians 3:20: Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

There is nothing in all of God's Word that even remotely resembles children's church. There is express Biblical warrant for the inclusion of children in the public worship services of the Church of Jesus Christ; and because there is Biblical warrant for including children, the Church is prohibited from excluding them. Thus no Reformed confession, when addressing the proper elements of worship according to the Word of God, includes children's church among them.

The objections against the Biblical and Reformed position raised by children's church advocates, like their arguments for their position, are based on expediency and pragmatism, rather than on Biblical authority. All the objections represent man's

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1. *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977. This and the following quotations are all taken from this source.

wisdom protesting against the wisdom of God.

So for the question, "Where should the children be during public worship services?" the answer is clear and unambiguous. They, along with the adults, are to be in the gathered congregation, actively participating according to their abilities in the worship of Jehovah. Why has God, in His perfect and infinite wisdom, ordained this to be so? I will now give two major reasons.

### **The Biblical View of Children From Christian Homes**

The Reformed practice of including children in the worship services is consistent with the Biblical view of children from Christian homes. The Bible teaches that children of believers are included in the covenant of God's grace according to His covenant promise. They are members of the Church and are to be incorporated into the life of the Church (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). That children are included in the covenant of God's grace is articulated by the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 74<sup>2</sup>), the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q&A 62<sup>3</sup>), and the Westminster Confession (25:2<sup>4</sup>); thus children from Christian homes are really and truly expected and welcome in the services, not as spectators or silent observers but as active participants. God requires the presence of the covenant children in

worship services. They not only have the right to be there; they ought to be there. God establishes His covenant with families and perpetuates a believing remnant along the lines of continued generations; thus covenant families are to be present to worship the Lord of the covenant.

The essential unity of the congregation is broken by children's church. It makes a division in the covenant community at the point where it should be one, in the public worship of Jehovah. Children are not second class members of the covenant and of the Church of Jesus Christ; they are to be included in the life of the Church and especially in the high-light of the life of the Church, the public worship of God. That families should worship together has been the historic position of Reformed churches. Children should increasingly enter into the worship of the congregation. The services are for them also, and the Lord of the Church who dwells with the Church blesses His elect members, young and old alike.

In the life of the Church, the chief means by which Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, gathers and builds up His people is by the preaching of His Word. The primary place of preaching in the life of the Church is another major reason why children ought to be present in the worship

services.

### **Preaching and Children From Christian Homes**

Advocates of children's church also show an un-Biblical view of the preaching of God's Word. They show at least by their actions, if not

Our Children have minds like sponges. It is impossible for the sponges to remain dry! Either we fulfil our obligation before God and fill the sponges with Holy Water or the World will do its utmost to fill them with sewer water.

by their words, that they do not believe in the primacy and centrality of preaching in the lives of God's people. Practically speaking, they have the same view of preaching that oth-

2. Are infants also to be baptized? Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the christian church; and be distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant.
3. What is the visible church? The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, (1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 12:13, Rom. 15:9-12, Rev. 7:9, Ps. 2:8, Ps. 22:27-31, Ps. 45:17, Matt. 28:19-20, Isa. 59:21) and of their children. (1 Cor. 7:14, Acts 2:39, Rom. 11:16, Gen. 17:7)
4. The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; (1 Cor. 1:2, 1 Cor. 12:12-13, Ps. 2:8, Rev. 7:9, Rom. 15:9-12) and of their children: (1 Cor. 7:14, Acts 2:39, Ezek. 16:20-21, Rom. 11:16, Gen. 3:15, Gen. 17:7) and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, (Matt. 13:47, Isa. 9:7) the house and family of God, (Eph. 2:19, Eph. 3:15) out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. (Acts 2:47)

ers show they have as they replace preaching with such things as films, concerts, drama, testimonies, missionary presentations and elaborate services that leave little or no time for preaching. Those favouring children's church declare that the instruction of children's church

amounts to the equivalent of the Word of God preached in the power of the Holy Spirit by men called and gifted by God. What a serious and tragic mistake. What a low view of preaching and of the public means of growing in grace.

Reformed confessions, in harmony with the whole counsel of God, teach with one voice the Biblical view of preaching (WLC, Q&A 154<sup>5</sup>, 155<sup>6</sup>; HC, Q&A 54<sup>7</sup>, 65<sup>8</sup>, 83<sup>9</sup>, 84<sup>10</sup>, 98<sup>11</sup>; BC Art., 14, 29, 30; Dordt 2:5<sup>12</sup>; 3; 4:17<sup>13</sup>). Reformed Christianity maintains that preaching is the

5. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation. (Matt. 28:19–20, Acts 2:42,46–47)
6. How is the word made effectual to salvation? The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, (Neh. 8:8, Acts 26:18, Ps. 19:8) convincing, and humbling sinners; (1 Cor. 14:24–25, 2 Chron. 34:18,19,26–28) of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; (Acts 2:37,41, Acts 8:27–30,35–38) of conforming them to his image, (2 Cor. 3:18) and subduing them to his will; (2 Cor. 10:4–6, Rom. 6:17) of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; (Matt. 4:4,7,10, Eph. 6:16–17, Ps. 19:11, 1 Cor. 10:11) of building them up in grace, (Acts 20:32, 2 Tim. 3:15–17) and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation. (Rom. 16:25, 1 Thess. 3:2,10–11,13, Rom. 15:4, Rom. 10:13–17, Rom. 1:16)
7. What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ? That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.
8. Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence does this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments.
9. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? The preaching of the holy gospel, and christian discipline, or excommunication out of the christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.
10. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel? Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God, and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them, both in this, and in the life to come.
11. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity? No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dump images, but by the lively preaching of his word.
12. Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.
13. As the almighty operation of God whereby He brings forth and supports this our natural life does not exclude but require the use of means by which God, of His infinite mercy and goodness, has chosen to exert His influence, so also the aforementioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. Wherefore, as the apostles and the teachers who succeeded them piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory and to the abasement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them, by the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the influence of the Word, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline; so even now it should be far from those who give or receive instruction in the Church to presume to tempt God by separating what He of His good pleasure has most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more clearly this favor of God, working in us, usually manifests itself, and the more directly His work is advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due. Amen

chief means by which God shows Himself gracious to His elect in Christ in establishing and confirming them in everlasting life and glory. The preaching of God's Word is of first and primary importance in the life of the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ is made known in all ages in the preaching of His Word. It is the chief means whereby He, by His Spirit, communicates to us the benefits of His redemption (1 Cor. 1:18, 21, 23-24; Rom. 10:12-17; John 10:4, 14, 16, 27-28). The Bible teaches that preaching is *the* means of grace for the ingathering and upbuilding of God's elect of all ages. All age groups are commanded to respond to the preaching of God's Word by acknowledging Jehovah as the God of their salvation and by living according to the requirements of the covenant in true faith, repentance and obedience.

To suppose that children might be more profitably occupied during the time of the sermon by being given another form of instruction is a serious error. It is taking the children

away from the very place where they ought to learn of the power, importance, authority, necessity, centrality and efficacy of the preached Word of God. It takes them away from the chief means by which Christ is made known to His people.

Children's church practitioners are like the disciples in Mark 10:13-16 who sought to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ from blessing the children who were brought to Him by denying them the presence of their Master. Children's church arouses a holy indignation of the Lord even as the [actions of the] disciples did. Is there anything better for covenant children than the living presence of Jesus Christ mediated by His Spirit through His Word? Is there any legitimate substitute for this? God forbid! Rather, heads of families should lead in such a way that they confess, in the words of Cornelius in Acts 10:33, "Now therefore are we all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

### Conclusion

Families, stay together on Sundays. Worship the Lord together. Seek the grace of God to develop a solid and Biblical view of the Reformed practice of including children in the public worship service despite the great pressure today to compromise the practice. The Church should be the pillar and ground of the truth without compromise (1 Tim. 3:15).

Parents, God's covenant promise is to you and to your children; for together you are embraced in God's covenant and you are members of His Church. The worship is for you and your children as well. May God give you grace to appreciate our Reformed heritage in this area, and may He as well enable you to resist the practice of children's church by a positive cleaving to the regulative principle of worship, based on His holy Word, for His name sake. "Both young men and maidens, old men and children; let them praise the name of the Lord: for His name alone is excellent; His glory is above earth and heaven.

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