

Parenting: Disciplining Your Children

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA June 19, 2011

I. Introduction

The purpose of disciplining your children, including physical punishment, is not to inflict needless pain but to instruct, i.e., discourage foolish behavior and encourage godly behavior. Sometimes that discipline will be a spanking, other times it will be something else. But the goal is always to instruct the child in God's wisdom. Therefore, your discipline must never turn into child abuse. God never condones this.

II. How and Why Should You Discipline Your Children?

What's at the heart of all disobedience? It is a complete and utter disregard and disrespect for authority. When God commanded Israel to execute a teen who was a glutton and a drunk, He was not telling them to kill him because he ate and drank too much. They were to execute him for disrespecting his parent's authority, Deuteronomy 21:18–21.

A parent's discipline doesn't guarantee a child's obedience. Parents may do everything right, but the child may still disobey, Proverbs 13:1.

What happens if you don't discipline your child? If you refuse to raise your children in God's wisdom, including disciplining them, you will raise fools and it will be to your own sorrow, Proverbs 17:21 (25). To refuse to discipline your children is to actively plan their demise, Proverbs 19:18. Refusing to correct a child's disrespect can lead to much bigger problems, Proverbs 20:20.

What happens if you do discipline your child? If you discipline your children and they receive it, you'll raise wise children, Proverbs 15:5. Parents who deal with the unruly child (even if it means putting them out of the house) will restore peace to their home, Proverbs 22:10. If you discipline your children, they will be a source of joy not grief, Proverbs 29:17.

Corporal punishment, famous paediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock had a tremendous influence on parenting, particularly through his book *Baby and Child Care*. He was the first expert to publically say that spanking children was wrong. He believed among other things that it wasn't necessary or particularly effective, that it encouraged children to be bullies, and that it taught them the principle of *might makes right*. God in no way condones any of these things and if this is what you're teaching your children when you spank them, then you're doing something wrong and it's borderline (if not outright) child abuse.

What does God actually say about physical punishment? God says that Parents who refuse to spank their children when they deserve it, hate their children, Proverbs 13:24. Why is it necessary to spank? Because children are by nature disobedient and sometimes this is the only thing that will correct their foolishness, Proverbs 22:15.

Some parents cannot bear spanking their children because of the pain. God knows quite well what it's like to inflict pain on your own child (His Son died a horrible death for mankind). Therefore, God reassures parents that spanking will not kill their children. In fact, it will actually protect them from future peril, Proverbs 23:13–14. This also teaches us that spanking must never become child abuse. It is meant to correct behavior not injure.

Spanking is designed for those who will not obey, who are incorrigible, Proverbs 26:3. It's designed to instill wisdom because it discourages foolish behavior and encourages wise behavior, Proverbs 29:15. Parents are to teach their children how to make wise decisions but they're not to let them make decisions without their guidance. Because a child left to his own devices "brings shame to his mother," Proverbs 29:15b.

Is it OK to use timeouts instead of spanking? Physical punishment is not the only punishment God prescribes. Sometimes it will be necessary, but other times the offense will not warrant it or spanking just won't work. If you're dealing with a teenager, then you will have to use another means of punishment (unless you live in a country like Singapore where caning is allowed. But again, this must never become child abuse. God never condones it, ever). The point of spanking is to encourage obedience and wise behavior instead of foolish behavior. Thus, if a timeout will solicit the child's obedience, then use it. However, if your child deserves spanking and you refuse to spank them because you think it's barbaric behavior, then you are contradicting God and failing in your duty as a parent.

III. How Should You Spank Your Children?

How does God "spank" us? When we sin, God lets us know what we've done wrong (through our conscience, Romans 2:15, or His Word which informs us that we've sinned). We also have to confess our disobedience, 1 John 1:9. If it involves others, we must ask for their forgiveness, Matthew 5:23–24. God doesn't always "spank." There are different levels of punishment depending on the offense (the Mosaic Law had various punishments that corresponded to the offense. James 1:15 also reveals this). God "spanks" us because He loves us, Hebrews 12:6. The purpose for God's spanking is so that we will be children who live lives of righteousness instead of foolishness, Hebrews 12:10–12.

How should parents spank their children? As God disciplines us, so parents should discipline their children: (1) make sure your children know why they are getting spanked, (2) make sure your children repent and ask for your forgiveness, (3) if others are involved, make sure they ask for their forgiveness, (4) make sure the punishment fits the crime. Sometimes it will be a timeout, other times a spanking or something else, (5) make sure you're spanking them out of love not anger, malice or anything else and make sure they know it, and (6) make sure that you remember the purpose of your discipline: it is one way you teach them to live godly lives. Remember that ultimately they broke God's commands not yours.

IV. Conclusion

Disciplining a child is part of teaching them how to live a godly life. Although it has been terribly abused by some parents, physical punishment when used properly can be one of the tools parents use to produce children that are a source of joy instead of sorrow. It can also prevent needless suffering for both child and parent in the future. And it should always be done according to God's example, out of love not malice.