

Spank Your Child or Spoil Your Child

The Biblical Issue of Spanking

Probably every adult at one time or another has witnessed a child in a grocery store throw a tantrum in the aisle, knocking cereal boxes off the shelves. That screaming, kicking child captures everyone's attention; yet the child's behavior should be blamed on the parent. Just as no well-behaved child happens by accident, no ill-behaved child happens by accident. The direction society has taken in the last 40-50 years in child training is that of sparing the rod for a more psychological, intellectual, progressive child training method. In fact, parents who spank are often viewed as barbaric, ignorant, angry tyrants. Most parents would admit to the need for corporal punishment, but relatively few practice it according to God's Word. The book of Proverbs explains the reasons for and benefits of spanking, who should spank and be spanked, when and how often to spank, and the manner of spanking.

I. THE COMMAND FOR SPANKING

A. The Responsibility Is Given to Parents.

The Word of God gives at least three imperatives in Proverbs for effective child discipline, stating,

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. Pro. 19:18

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Pro. 23:13

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. Pro. 29:17

The responsibility of training children belongs to the parents of those children (Deut. 6:4-9) and primarily to their fathers (Eph. 6:4). Although the local church has been ordained by God to preserve and propagate truth, and although the members of the church should encourage and exhort each other in good parenting, it is not the local church's role to train someone else's children. It is not the school teacher's responsibility or the grandparent's obligation to discipline corporally, but it is the parent's solemn duty.

B. The Responsibility Is Delegated to Others.

Certainly other trusted adults may be and should be given the authority to spank one's children; but first and foremost, it is the parents' role, responsibility, and duty to spank their own children. If children know that the people temporarily in charge of them (e.g. the school, grandparents, adult sitters) will not spank, they generally attempt more misbehavior due to the lack of an effective restraint. If the spanking is not administered, not only will wrong behavior patterns

develop in the parent's absence, but they will also have less respect for their authority. This disrespect will eventually manifest itself towards the parents and towards God.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SPANKING

A. Purity

In Proverbs 20:30 "cleanseth" has the understanding of scouring like a detergent. The stripes should be hard enough to break the child's will, and consequently, the spanking will sometimes bruise the skin. But one must realize that every time a person sins, he breaks God's law and reaps to himself a natural, inner consequence of that sin-guilt. Guiltiness of sin can only be removed by God at salvation, but God has established a method by which children can have human justice satisfied and thus remove guilt. This method is spanking. A rationale some use against spanking is that the spanked child will be maladjusted and not know how to fit into society. The reality is that those children who are spanked are the best adjusted because they have had their sin and guilt dealt with (cf. Pro. 28:1). Of course, none of these Biblical truths justify the abomination of child abuse in any way—but at the same time, a spanking, Biblically applied, is love, not abuse (cf. Pro. 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11).

In Proverbs 22:15, "foolishness" (perverseness) is tied (like a conspiracy) to every child's heart. The only method God says will drive out that foolishness is the rod. Some say that spanking promotes violence; however, the Bible says that the consistently spanked child will not be remotely associated with wickedness.

Proverbs 23:14 teaches that the constant application of the rod will snatch the child's soul away from hell (Sheol). He will be preserved from an early grave, and the spanking will tend towards his recognition of his sin and his salvation. The Biblical usage of "deliver" is primarily with regards to physical deliverance. When a child is consistently spanked for his disobedience, he in turn gains a respectful fear for authority. Because honor for Mother and Father is enforced, he develops character that highly esteems those who rule over him. God's reward for honoring one's parents is length of days (on average), which is the promise given with the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2,3).

One can also see a salvation application from this verse. Although spanking a child does not guarantee his eventual salvation, corporal punishment does work towards the child's repenting. Gal. 3:24 says, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Spanking holds the child up to the standard of God's Law, showing him how frequently and how thoroughly he falls short of the Lord's righteous requirement of perfection. Consistent discipline turns the youngster in the direction of Christ so that he might be declared righteous by means of placing his faith in the Lord. The reality about Biblical spanking is that it works in a child's life to help bring him to the point of salvation.

B. Prudence

Proverbs 29:15 explains that the rod coupled with reproof is the only way for a child to become wise. Many parents today think that their child will "turn out" without the use of the rod, but God says that both spanking and reasoning are required. If one or both are missing, the child will be a tremendous disappointment to his parents (cf. Pro. 17:25; Pro. 19:13).

C. Pleasure

A benefit of proper training is that children will be a delight/ pleasure to their parents (Proverbs 29:17). Many parents do not want the "turmoil" produced by spanking; but they fail to recognize that without spanking, they will have unending turmoil. A lovingly, consistently spanked child will never grow up to disrespect or hate his parents, but a child left to himself will (Pro. 15:20).

III. THE CRITERIA FOR SPANKING

A. Spank the Young Child.

The word "child" in Pro. 22:15; 23:14; and 29:15 refers to a young child. The reference would include children from infancy to adolescence. Children should be disciplined starting shortly after birth (e.g. a feeding schedule or not picking him up at every cry), with spanking beginning at the manifestation of the rebellious will. This is usually around the time of crawling. Parents must start spanking early because the character of little children is fresh and much more easily molded than that of older children. Many parents will not spank an infant or a toddler because they think the child does not understand. Children understand much more than parents give them credit for.

B. Spank the Rebellious Child.

All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). If the parent gives the child a command and he disobeys, the child has sinned (cf. Ephesians 6:1,2). These can be sins of omission or commission. Sins of omission are not doing what the parent said to do, and sins of commission are doing what the parent said not to do. Furthermore, if the child does not obey joyfully, completely, and immediately, he has sinned. If sin is not driven out of the heart, the child will not fear the Lord. If obedience is not enforced, the child will have the wrong idea of God. In the same way that the Lord chastens his children for sin, parents mirror God's love by chastening their children when they sin.

IV. THE COMMITMENT TO SPANKING

A. Spank Persistently.

Proverbs 13:24 says that the loving parent will chasten "betimes." This word has the idea of persistence or continuance, especially when faced with opposition. It is rising up early and

continuing at the task. If parents are going to discipline their children effectively (i.e. Biblically), they must be persistent in overcoming fleshly strongholds: laziness, background, family pressure, or political correctness. Biblical discipline must be a conviction, or it will falter. When anti-spanking pressure arises or the child's behavior does not seemingly change, Mom and Dad must be persistent. Walk by faith and see the big picture.

B. Spank Consistently.

Because the process of "correcting thy son" is continual and lengthy, there is a fleshly tendency to spank wrong behavior today but excuse it tomorrow. Not only does inconsistent spanking reinforce disobedience, but it also provokes children to wrath (cf. Eph. 6:4) because they never know for sure what is acceptable and what is not. The direction one sees in Proverbs regarding discipline is to spank for every disobedience (cf. Pro. 13:24; 23:13). When parents know to spank for a disobedience but withhold the rod, they are sinning (Pro. 23:13; James 4:17). Parents withhold the rod by yelling, using time-out, manipulation (bribery), intimidation, verbal or physical abuse, by feeling sorry for the child, or by succumbing to the child's assurance that he will never disobey again. These methods are man-centered techniques that were not designed by God to solve the problem. The consistently and lovingly spanked child will probably receive the majority of his spankings between the ages of 1 and 4. This degree of discipline can only be practiced by a saved, surrendered person.

V. THE CARRYING-OUT OF SPANKING

A. The Instruction

The only training that God says produces wisdom is that which uses the rod and reproof. The child needs to be spanked for disobedience but also needs to know why what he did was wrong and how to do it right the next time. After the disobedience and before the spanking, keep the talking brief. The child is thinking of little more than the ensuing pain. ASK QUESTIONS. "Did you...(name the sin)? What does God say about...(name the sin)? Because you disobeyed, you are going to get spanked." Asking questions forces the child to respond to his sin rather than reject the reproof. Have a set procedure and keep the spanking private. After the spanking, ASK QUESTIONS. "Are you going to obey?" If the will has not been broken, spank again. Some of the ways the administrator of discipline can tell if the child is still being willful is if he turns around or puts his hands behind him during the spanking, or if he screams or stomps his feet during or after the spanking. If the will has not been broken, spank again. Reassure the child of your love and give him physical affection. Then take a few minutes to use specific Scriptures that deal with that particular sin (cf. II Tim. 3:16,17).

B. The Instrument

The Bible is clear in this; use the rod (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:15). The word "rod" means "to branch off." It is a flexible stick like a switch. Do not use things that are closely related to you (belt, hand) or things that could be used out of haste (hairbrush, chord, 2x4).

In order to honor the Lord in parenting, moms and dads must practice Biblical discipline. To forsake spanking for modern, progressive child training methods is to forsake the God-ordained means by which children are to be brought up. Although the rewards subsequent to spanking are eternal, parents should spank their children simply because God commands it. To use the rod and lovingly spank for every disobedience is the greatest way that a parent can honor God in child discipline.

Pro. 13:24 He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

Pro. 19:18 Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Pro. 20:30 The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly.

Pro. 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Pro. 23:13,14 Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

Pro. 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.

Pro. 29:17 Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.