

Parenting Discipline—To Spank or not to Spank?

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INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLINE

Discipline is the subject I'm addressing here. I deal with spanking which is only appropriate for **younger children** (maybe up to ten years old at most). Then, I share some strategies for **disciplining teenagers** which can be a difficult task. Disciplining our kids is important for two reasons: one, it maintains respect and peace in the home; second, it instills self control and respect for authority, something our children will face in life. It is far better for them to receive the consequences of their rebellion from loving parents while they are small, than from a cruel world when they are grown. It is wholly neglectful for parents to avoid, ignore, or discount the need to be involved with our child's discipline. As parents we are to love our kids and that means helping to shape their character, instill spiritual values, and giving them the tools to succeed in life. Self control and respect for authority are two major tools we must give them.

Subject: To Spank or not to Spank.

This has become a controversial subject in our generation. There are those who feel that any and all physical punishment is wrong. They categorize it as child abuse. There are horror stories of parents who have whipped or beaten, bruised, even broken bones of children in the name of disciplining them. There are even accounts of religious groups whose practice of discipline was so extreme that children have died from the beating given in the name of God.

Corporal punishment has been removed from public schools by law. Corporal punishment legislation is being presented to outlaw its practice everywhere in society. There are child rearing experts, psychologists, pediatricians, social science professors, and family therapists, etc. who have condemned its practice. Some of the reasons are as follows:

- 1) It trains our children to hit when angry.
- 2) It teaches violence as an answer.
- 3) It is dehumanizing, inhibits emotion, mental growth.
- 4) It destroys self esteem.
- 5) It alienates children from the parents.
- 6) It causes children to lose heart, become complacent, submissive and passive.
- 7) It teaches children that they can and should hit others,
- 8) Parents who hit/beat their children usually were beat themselves.
- 9) It passes from one generation onto the next a horrible practice.
- 10) There are better alternatives and reasonable means of discipline.

One of the alternatives given to replace spanking has been to just reason with your child. Children need to be given time to understand and respond to clear rules and restrictions. Second, if defiance continues then set them aside in the quiet corner; Isolate them from their privileges. Parents should take away something of value from them to convince them to stop the unwanted behavior.

Some definitions are in order to help clarify the issue (Webster's Dictionary):

- 1) Discipline: to train; to correct; a system at rules for conduct.
- 2) Beating: to thrash; to strike repeatedly; to hit indiscriminately.
- 3) Abuse: mistreatment, misuses of anything, revilement.
- 4) Corporal Punishment: physical chastisement for fault; to cause pain physically to punish for a wrong.

Certainly no act of love would discipline in order to dominate, or beat in order to strike repeatedly, indiscriminately, so as to abuse, mistreat, and revile another person.

If spanking is defined as such then the answer of whether or not to spank is no. If spanking is done in condemnation, ridicule, hot anger, vengeance, to take out frustrations, to belittle, to dehumanize, then spanking is wrong! Especially if that other person is a child who doesn't understand, can't comprehend, and is helpless to defend him or herself. Many would have us believe that is exactly what spanking is all about.

There is however another side to this subject. First there is the Biblical instruction to do it. Not as defined above but something far more beneficial. The Bible talks about the nature of children: **SIN.**

Proverbs 22:15 *"Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of discipline shall remove it far from him/her."*

In other words children are born with a sinful nature that unless it is addressed, corrected, and disciplined, it will cause great foolishness.

Proverbs 29:15 *"The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame."*

It is in using the rod and reproof that instills wisdom. Children left to rule themselves only bring shame to their parents.

Proverbs 29:17 *"Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest; yea he shall give delight unto thy soul."*

The parent's responsibility in God's view is to correct our children. Our love for them will motivate us to want the best for them despite the unpleasantness of discipline.

Proverbs 19:19 *"Chasten thy son while there is hope and let not thy soul spare for his crying."*

Sometimes love must be tough in order to be love. Showing mercy indiscriminately will only cause a point of no return—a point beyond hope. How many children grow up in a very loose and undisciplined manner only to become unruly teenagers and adults? At some point the foolishness is beyond removal.

Proverbs 23:13-14, *"Do not withhold correction from the child: for if thou punish him with the rod he shall not die. You shall punish him with the rod, and shall deliver his soul from hell"*

We are affecting the outcome of our children's eternal destiny as parents. We can be instruments that deliver him from destruction.

Basic to our Christian understanding of truth is the realization that we are all sinners. King David said in Psalm 51 that in sin did his mother conceive him. Sin nature is passed onto all generations through the father's seed. Modern teachings about disciplining children have as their basis an opposing belief. Many believe that children are born good and learn bad behavior. **The Word of God teaches otherwise.** Thus the admonition to deal with a child's sinful nature is to spare not the rod, for in "beatings" we

will purge them of foolishness.

There are other passages that deal with parental instruction to discipline our children, probably none more famous than Proverbs 22:6 *“Train up children in the way they should go; and when they are old they will not depart from it.”*

For God discipline has a goal: for self control, self restriction, to remove the foolishness of pride, rebellion and selfishness, and then to point in the direction to go!

As parents we are not the final owners of our children God is. They are on loan for faithful training until they come of age to decide for themselves whom they will follow. Our responsibility is to train them, discipline them in love and show them the way.

INTEGRITY!

Proverbs 20:7 *“The righteous man who walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him.”*

We don't just point, we lead. We don't just tell them, we show them. As one put it, *“Values are caught more than taught.”* As parents we need to walk in integrity which I define as, “treating our children the way we would want to be treated, if we were in their shoes.” Integrity means honesty, openness, truthfulness, consistency, and stability as well.

Spanking then from a Biblical point of view means physical discipline to correct conduct that is bent on foolishness. Foolishness is behavior that is rebellious in nature. Spankings are only appropriate when our children are acting out of rebellion towards our God given authority. Spankings should not be used to punish children's irresponsibility or immaturity. When they do something irresponsible because they are children other forms of discipline or correction should be used. This is where parents are to get inside their children's head, attitudes, and heart. We must try to understand the intent of our children. Was the behavior intended to be an act of rebellion? Or was it childish irresponsibility? Was our child's intention to challenge our authority? Or was he/she just being childish?

Spanking our children focuses then on one area that is answering the question of “Who's in charge?” Children need limits, restrictions, etc., for their benefit, security and well being. Sometimes however they will challenge us to see just how far those limits go. When a child's behavior challenges a parent's authority we are obligated to answer; love will answer; security will answer. A parent who loves their child will quickly answer the foolishness of a child trying to control his/her parent. Proverbs 3:12 *“For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.”*

Within the heart of children rests this foolishness. Foolishness is something that is driving them to challenge authority and it is really beyond their ability to control it. Sin nature drives us all, but only discipline allows us to control it. **The purpose of discipline is to create in ourselves and in our children, self control.** Discipline does control conduct, but a parent's discipline's goal is for the child to control his/her self. How can anyone without self control live a fulfilled life? Proverbs 6:23. *“...reproofs of instruction are the way of life...”*

Spanking when properly administered creates within our children an issue of control WITHIN THEM. He/she who receives correction also gains their own soul; but the child that refuses to be corrected is on a path of destruction. Physical pain chastens

our spirit. Physical pain challenges our minds. Physical pain interrupts the thought processes within the heart of a child to the point of driving out the foolishness from within. A child will reason within that they had better comply, submit, or receive the consequences of their actions. A child will reason within themselves that their current directions in thinking and decision making better change or face the consequences. Their little “behind” is telling their big head to stop the nonsense at all costs! We do not want to receive the pain on our bottom, it is not worth it. The result is a child who is able to control himself. If the child persists and receives the spanking, the pain will drive the foolishness from them. When administered in righteousness and in tough love, most if not all children, will by their actions, attitudes, and changed behavior, be saying, “Thank you.”

I advocate from personal experience knowing that as a child and receiving spankings it purged me and made me feel clean. I felt better about myself because my rebellion was wrong. My attitudes were bad and they had been punished. My mother loved me, but not my behavior; ultimately she delivered my person hood from being controlled by that foolishness. She forgave me and after the event of being spanked we were both able to move on. It really is the most merciful thing we can do in spanking our child when they are controlled by rebellion. Children are unable to deliver themselves, they need our intervention, and indeed when done right, it does free them. I look back upon those attitude adjustment periods with gratefulness. I am glad she spanked me, I asked for it and I got it. I loved my mother only more because of it. I know she loved me enough to take action to purge me of uncontrollable behavior.

I also relate one story of how I came to appreciate what spanking will do for our children. Ryan was three years old, it was nap time. Nap time wasn't his idea it was mommy's and it came about the same time every day. He was tired and becoming grumpier as nap time approached. He however decided that he was going to stay up! He was put upstairs to bed, he refused to stay and began to cry and throw a temper tantrum! He came back down stairs (I still remember the bold look in his face). I told him to go upstairs. He wouldn't and cried all the more, I picked him up. He didn't like that and squirmed to get free. I held him and then looked him straight in the eyes—he tried to look the other way. I held his face firmly but gently and told him in no uncertain terms, it's nap time, you are going to bed, and you are going to stay there. He got madder! Then I looked at him again and said, “Ryan, I am going to count to five. If you haven't stopped crying by then I am going to spank you.” He knew I meant it because he's experienced those spankings before; But he kept on. I started counting, “*One, two, three...*” he kept on crying. I said, “*four...*” and was about to say five when all of a sudden an inner transformation took place. Ryan suddenly began to put the brakes on as he realized that number five was next. I could see in his eyes the efforts to pull it all together and stop! He went from crying and anger, to whimpering and sniffing, in about 1.5 seconds! He stopped the flow, he stopped the outbursts—he did it! I looked at him and said, “*Very good then, I am taking you up to bed and you will go to sleep.*” He went up, went to sleep and we forgot the whole thing. Except I'll never forget the sense of awe of seeing my son exercise self control in the face of impending disaster—the spanking! He knew them well, and they were to be avoided at all costs. I will never

forget this incident and it has fixed my conviction that spanking is for my children's good. It is needless to say our delight in their improved behavior is good too!

SPANKINGS PROPERLY ADMINISTERED: In my opinion, they are to the "bottom" and possibly to the upper thigh with our hand. Others recommend a rod, a stick, a switch, or paddle, I don't. I can tell how hard I'm spanking with my hand. I usually spanked four or five times and waited to see if that is enough. I knew it's enough when I saw the rebellion gone out of their eyes. Spankings are not properly administered if they don't hurt. There should be genuine tears. Physically they may be red on the surface of the skin—it should sting: Bruises, whelps, etc. indicate too much, too hard, and/or too long. Spankings don't scar them physically, emotionally, or spiritually--Abuse does. **After a proper spanking it is appropriate to love** on, hold, hug, kiss, and nurture our children with all our hearts. At these times genuine communication takes place. I reminded them of what it was that created the need for the spanking in the first place and how to avoid them in the future. It is diligent Consistent discipline that produces the most success. Spankings generally come early and in groups then as they get older less frequent. In fact, proper spanking uses more energy at first, but far less effort in discipline in the long run.

WHAT ABOUT OLDER CHILDREN? What if my understanding of discipline has changed later in the game? My children are older, I have teenagers, spanking really isn't appropriate for children after a certain age.

I think the bottom line now becomes learning to **speak our kid's language**. What I mean by that is we must be able to communicate in a way that gets their attention. Parental authority extends until they are eighteen years old by law and longer if a child is still under financial support. Adolescence is a transition period which hopefully ends by the time they are twenty. It is the time where they are changing from a child into an adult. That change however, doesn't take place steadily, consistently, and clearly. It seems our son or daughter can be a child in one moment and act maturely in the next or vice versa. They still need stability, emotional support, someone to listen, and boundaries appropriate to their age or understanding. In talking their language it has something to do with interests, their desires, and the world they live in. What has their attention? Is it Xbox? Is it a car? Is it going to a best friend's house? Is it clothes? Is it TV? Whatever it is that becomes the tool for discipline.

It will take conviction and vision to discipline an older child. They can squeal, squawk, and complain a lot louder and more intelligently. They know how to pull guilt strings, especially if you are a single parent. They know how to play one parent against another. The conviction is however that parental authority must win. A child or teenager, left to his/her self is disaster waiting to happen. **Set up clearly defined positive and negative expectations for behavior.** You may want to include your teenager in what the consequences will be but don't depend on them being completely reasonable. When a son or daughter accomplishes the positives there should be rewards and positive reinforcements. When a son or daughter violates a clearly defined boundary there must be immediate disciplines that matter. The disciplines should be attention grabbing and consequential.

Foremost in all of our parental authority is the foundation for it. We must

connect our authority with God's word. They must understand that our boundaries are not just ours. They must see that we too are under authority and obey God's boundaries too. Our rights and wrongs should line up with God's rights and wrongs and know the scripture behind them. For example: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.'" (Eph. 6:1-3)

I think periodic meeting times are in order as well. These times are check points in the relationship. There should be some giving and taking or adjustments that are appropriate as our son or daughter is getting older. There should be some time to discuss grievances, venting, listening, and reestablishing the boundaries. There should be a meeting of minds and hearts. This could be the time when you discuss with your son or daughter how you have felt he/she has been growing distant. Or it could be a time to discuss the subtleties of changed behavior such as a growing arrogance or rebellious attitude. In a way it is like getting your son or daughter back inside the corral or fence. I can remember several blowout arguments with my son and daughter during the teenage years that lasted for hours until we were back on the same page. It was difficult yet at the same time aren't they worth battling for? This meeting time might be a great time to appreciate their maturity, how you think they have grown spiritually, responsibly, and becoming quite the young man or woman—praise is just good stuff.

Highly Recommended! It is during these teenage years that I think a Christian Camp with real spiritual life is in order. They may or may not connect spiritually as you hope, but they will see other teenagers who are in the same "boat." If they make a Christian friend or two who are good influences for each other in their faith—awesome! If they have a spirit filled experience at the altar and it changes some of their struggle in life---awesome! These are allies in our attempt to raise them godly. **It is a mistake to let their spiritual journey be dependent upon their own efforts.** One of the major sources for a lack of spiritual life in teenagers is when parents decide to let them choose whether or not to go to church or youth group or both. They are not given the choice to attend regular school, it is the law of the land, it is an expectation they must learn to live with. Likewise, parents should be attending church, small groups, and passing on that similar expectation to their teenagers. Parental authority includes spiritual responsibility for their teenagers. Yes, help them find a group they like, but if it comes down to going or not, they go. Spiritual life is not the first choice of anyone's flesh; let's not let it become a bad habit in our kids of living to sin nature. This means letting them make all their decisions based on what the "flesh" wants, sinful desires, selfish attitudes, etc. If this is an issue of resistance, your son or daughter doesn't want to attend church, youth group, Sunday school etc., then apply rewards and disciplines for approved or disapproved behavior or attitudes. You are the bosses under God's authority it is a simple question: Does God want them to go?