

DISCIPLINING YOUR CHILDREN

Even the most secular person would probably agree that a caring atmosphere and excellent instruction are necessary for a child to mature. Where we as Bible-believing Christian most widely diverge from the world is in this area of discipline or how to help our children accept/do what is right. This is a crucial element of parenting, without which we will most likely find ourselves failing in the other two areas of practical parenting (care and instruction) and failing in our overall goal of parenting, which is to prepare our children to glorify and enjoy God as disciples of Jesus.

I. THE WHYS OF DISCIPLINE

A. Defining Discipline

The two main New Testament words that express this concept are discipline and chastisement.

Discipline (Vines Dictionary) - an admonishing or calling to soundness of mind, or to self-control.

Chastise (Vines Dictionary) - primarily denotes to train children (instruction), chastening by the infliction of evils and calamities, to chastise with blows.

Our working definition will be: To train and control by inflicting punishment for the purpose of perfecting moral character.

B. Why Discipline?

1. Your children are commanded to honor and obey you.

BRYAN CHAPPELL (Ephesians, 3:12) – “We will parent well only if we know what God expects us to nurture in our children.”

Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

To obey means to follow the commands of those in authority. This is not a tricky or nuanced concept. There are not subtle meanings in the Greek word. Someone in authority tells me to do something and I do it. Someone in authority tells me not to do something and I don't do it. That is obedience. Biblical obedience starts in the heart (a right heart attitude toward those in authority, thus the connection between honor and obey) and ends in appropriate behavior - to do what God (either directly or through delegates) commands me to do.

Obedience is not occasional or situational but rather “in everything.” Obedience is to be comprehensive (assuming that a Christian parent would never ask his child to do anything that was contrary to Christian character), ongoing and habitual.

The primary focus of a child's obedience to his parents is the Lord. Children are to obey not primarily to please their parents but to please the Lord. Parents are to be honored and obeyed because to do so is to honor and obey the Lord, not because they are older, wiser, bigger, stronger, or perfect. It is vital for children to see their parents as the Lord's representative/agent in their lives. Obeying parents is one way a child can express Jesus' lordship in his or her life. Parents are to teach their children this truth.

2. It is commanded by God

Proverbs 23:13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

Proverbs 29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.

Teach your children that you discipline them because you want to obey God. They need to know that this isn't simply something you have decided to do but something God has commanded you to do. This allows them to see that you trust and obey God as a disciple.

3. It is modeled by God

Hebrews 12:3-11 explains God's discipline of His children.

- Discipline is motivated by love (vs.6, 10)
- Discipline is painful (vs.11)
- Discipline (when responded to) is fruitful (vs.11)

4. It is necessary because of the predisposition of the child

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child's Heart*, 127) – “What is the nature of the child's most basic need? If children are born ethically and morally neutral, then they do not need correction, they need direction. They do not need discipline, they need instruction.”

We don't need to teach our children to disobey or rebel; it comes naturally to them. Every child seeks to rule his or her own life. Your child, if left to himself, will not develop godly character.

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

J.C. RYLE (*The Duties of Parents*, 32) – “You must not expect to find your children’s minds a sheet of pure white paper, and to have no trouble if you only use right means. I warn you plainly you will find no such thing. It is painful to see how much corruption and evil there is in a young child’s heart, and how soon it begins to bear fruit. Violent tempers, self-will, pride, envy, sullenness, passion, idleness, selfishness, deceit, cunning, falsehood, hypocrisy, a terrible aptness to learn what is bad, a painful slowness to learn what is good, a readiness to pretend anything in order to gain their own ends, all these things, or some of them, you must be prepared to see, even in your own flesh and blood. In little ways they will creep out at a very early age; it is almost startling to observe how naturally they seem to spring up. Children require no schooling to learn to sin.”

5. It is necessary to establish parental authority

We have authority in our child’s life. I have a concern that we have lost the notion of authority and are afraid to use it. Our primary role isn’t to be our children’s friend or peer or partner.

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child’s Heart*, 13) – “God calls His creatures to live under authority. He is our authority and has vested authority in people within the institutions he has established. You must not be embarrassed to be authorities for your children. You exercise authority as God’s agent. You may not direct your children for your own agenda or convenience. You must direct your children in God’s behalf for their good.”

ED MOLL and TIM CHESTER (*Gospel-Centered Family*, 13) – “Parents are God’s gift to children to teach us how to live under authority. We learn to submit to authority instead of living for ourselves by learning to submit to our parents.”

The first and most foundational training lesson for every child to learn is that he is an individual under authority. A child learns he is to obey God by obeying you. This is the training goal of the infant and preschool stage. If it is not established early, it will be much more difficult to establish later.

KEN WILSON (*The Obedient Child*, 72) - "To say that a child's will is subject to the parents means that the child will yield to the direction of his parents when the child wants something else. The child will obey, submit, defer. In other words, by two years of age the basic power struggle should be settled.”

You can’t begin really effective instruction until you have gotten your children under control. I’m not saying that there should be no gospel or heart instruction; just that those things should be limited until your authority has been established.

6. It is necessary for your child’s good

Proverbs 23:14 If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life

CHARLES BRIDGES (Proverbs – 429) - “Except he be restrained, he will die in his sin. God has ordained the rod to purge his sins, and so deliver his soul from hell. What parent then, that trembles for the child’s eternal destiny, can withhold correction? Is it not cruel love, that turns away from painful duty? To suffer sin upon a child, no less than upon a brother, is tantamount to “hating him in our heart.”

7. It is preparation for saving grace.

God uses the parent/child relationship to teach/model invaluable lessons about the gospel and our relationship with Him.

C. Why Parent’s Don’t Discipline

KEN WILSON (*The Obedient Child*, 22) - "Indeed the Scripture views withholding physical discipline as a sin against the child; it is a failure of love, something that harms rather than helps him or her."

There are many reasons, but here are some common ones...

1. We don't fully own the authority/wisdom of the Bible

TEDD TRIPP (*Shepherding A Child’s Heart*, 131) - “The use of the rod is an act of faith. God has mandated its use. The parent obeys, not because he perfectly understands how it works, but because God has commanded it. The use of the rod is a profound expression of confidence in God’s wisdom and the excellency of His counsel.”

2. A misunderstanding of true love

Some people have a difficult time associating punishment, especially physical punishment with love. Yet God disciplines those He loves and commands that we do the same. If we fail to discipline, we are leaving our children to their sin and that will cost them later because God will discipline them.

Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

KEN WILSON (The Obedient Child) - "The relationship between father and son (parents and children) is understood as a training relationship of deep love which includes the exercise of authority, including painful punishment."

KEN WILSON (The Obedient Child, 22) – "Indeed the Scripture views withholding physical discipline as a sin against the child; it is a failure of love, something that harms rather than helps him or her."

3. A fear of child abuse

Biblical discipline has nothing to do with child abuse. It does not involve anger, frustration, or impatience. It is not motivated by a desire to dominate or show who is boss or to beat/scare a child into submission or because he or she irritates you. It is never unfair or unexpected.

Biblical discipline must always be careful, gracious and measured. Every parent must develop self-control. If you can't spank with a right attitude, you would be better off not spanking.

TEDD TRIPP (Shepherding A Child's Heart, 52) - "Your focus can be sharpened by the realization that discipline is not you working on your agenda, venting your wrath toward your children; it is you coming as God's representative, bringing the reproofs of life to your son or your daughter. You only muddy the waters when the bottom line in discipline is your displeasure over their behavior, rather than God's displeasure with rebellion against His ordained authority."

TEDD TRIPP (Shepherding A Child's Heart, 53) - "Any change in behavior that is produced by such anger is not going to move your children toward God. It moves them away from God. It moves them in the direction of the idolatry of fearing man."

4. Fear of exasperating your child

Just and faithful discipline is not what exasperates a child. It communicates that a child is loved by his parents. It is harsh or inconsistent discipline that exasperates.

5. Laziness

Proper child discipline takes time, energy and perseverance. Parents must be willing to endure the hard work, perseverance and consistency it takes to discipline properly.

6. Discouragement/Defeat

Sometimes children can be slow to respond to discipline. It doesn't seem to be working, you always seem to be disciplining, you often feel like a policeman/judge/executioner instead of a parent.

You are in a war of wills with your child - he wants his own way and will resist your way. Sometimes the child wins the battle of wills; in those times, his will to disobey/rebel is simply stronger than our will to discipline.

Proverbs 22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

II. THE HOWS OF DISCIPLINE

A. Setting Clear Expectations

1. Start young

Each parent must judge when to start spanking but 9-months to one year old is not too early. At that age a child can usually understand simple commands (“No”, “don't touch”, “lie still” etc.) and associate disobedience with pain. Watch for signs of self-will like squirming during diaper changes or purposely touching forbidden objects. Be careful they cannot only understand the command but are able to carry it out.

TEDD TRIPP (Shepherding A Child's Heart, 155) – “The most important lesson for the child to learn in this period is that He is an individual under authority. He has been made by God and has a responsibility to obey God in all things.”

Children can't start learning if they aren't under your control. Self-control begins with parental control. Win this battle young and it will help you to reduce spanking in the future because they are more amenable to your instruction especially when they are regenerate.

2. Clearly instruct your children

Your children should know the rules and consequences for breaking them, and you should know (not merely assume) that they know them.

Teach them what obedience means – it includes an inward attitude of honor and respect as well as outward compliance.

Teach your children to respectfully acknowledge your commands (“yes sir/yes dad” or “yes ma'am/yes mom”).

Whenever possible instruct from scripture (vs. “because I said so”). This teaches the children to value scripture, connects them to God’s commands and helps them to understand the why behind your instructions. Remember, children are commanded to obey “in the Lord.” One caution: they don’t always need to know why. “Why?” can become an excuse for delaying obedience.

3. Graciously train your children to obey promptly, respectfully and fully.

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

KEN WILSON (The Obedient Child, 55) - "Children should do whatever they are told to do, when they are told to do it, without fuss or resistance."

KEN WILSON (The Obedient Child, 55) - "What is the difference between outright refusal (“No! I won’t!”) and a response characterized by whining, complaining, ignoring the direction given? Not much. They're essentially the same response."

Parents need to be careful with issuing warnings as a precondition for obedience. Your child will quickly learn that you don’t mean business until you raise your voice or start counting to ten before you discipline. This practice will tempt you to frustration and anger, which are not the right motivates for discipline. Establish with children that you expect them to obey your directions.

4. Be reasonable in your demands

If you are teaching a new rule or your child violates a rule for the first time in some time, give them a warning or reminder to reinforce the rules. You might also want to consider extenuating circumstances before deciding whether to spank or not. Consistency needs to be tempered with grace but never with inconsistency, laziness, or surrender. Your children will greatly benefit from your consistency.

B. Spankable Offenses

Parents need to develop prayerfully their own criteria for when to spank or discipline. It is important that spouses be of one mind when it comes to discipline. Discuss the issues that are to receive discipline, agree, and stick to it. You do not serve your children by having mom spank for one set of things and dad for another, by parents arguing in front of a child about how to discipline them, or by constantly changing the rules.

1. Willful disobedience - When your child chooses to disobey a clear command.

2. Improper attitudes - When your child displays an attitude that they have been instructed is sinful or inappropriate.

3. Disrespect - Refusing to treat others (adults or children) with kindness, humility, and responsiveness.

4. Lying - Telling falsehoods or withholding truth about their words, attitudes, or actions. Trust between a parent and child is so crucial, especially as they get older.

5. Hurting others - Using physical or emotional means to hurt others.

C. Principles for Spanking

After we have developed biblical conviction about spanking and determined what the spankable offenses will be, we can begin to institute discipline.

1. Spanking

Spanking is not a quick smack on the bottom. To be effective it must be an event that the child can remember and learn from as well as a means to provide forgiveness and restoration for the offense committed.

- Spank immediately whenever possible.
- Spank privately.
- Let the child know why he is being spanked - what he did, what God has commanded you to do, your love for him, his need to learn to obey.
- Spank the child - Spanking should be done on the bottom with a rod and hard enough to hurt. The exception may be when a child is very young, then a quick slap on the hand or thigh may suffice.
- The child must submit to the spanking. No kicking, writhing, placing hands over bottom etc. can be allowed. If they won't cooperate that is another spankable offense. However, if your child gets hysterical stop - you are not accomplishing anything. Let them calm down and try again later, but do not let a child escape a spanking because of these behaviors.

2. Bringing restoration

- Hold your child until they stop crying: he needs your gentle presence. Affirm your love for him. Never apologize for spanking your child.
- Have the child ask for forgiveness from both you and God. Clearly declare your forgiveness to them. If a third party was involved like a sibling or friend they should ask for forgiveness from them as well. If they are unrepentant or defiant, it may be appropriate to spank them again. Pray with the child for God's help in doing better.
- Declare that the incident is over. Don't hold a grudge or be aloof.

Always remember that discipline is one of the prime opportunities to reinforce the truths of the gospel in your child's life. Seize chances to affirm the goodness – blessing and forgiveness – that flow from repentance. It also provides an opportunity to talk about what they could have done differently, how they can respond in the future, and to rehearse good behavior.

D. Other Ways To Discipline

As your child gets older you may use other means to discipline. For younger children, additional measures may be taken, but they should not replace spanking as the primary means of discipline.