

# The Christian Family

## Chapter 6: Applying Biblical Discipline

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The biblical training of children involves much more than a mere transmission of knowledge from a parent to a child. There must also be correction which involves chastisement and admonition. Earlier we noted that biblical correction, which often involves the pain inflicted by spanking, is absolutely necessary for the proper spiritual development and well-being of covenant children. The rod, biblically applied, drives out foolishness (Pr. 22:15), delivers from hell (Pr. 23:13-14), saves from destruction (Pr. 19:18), gives wisdom (Pr. 29:15) and is an act of love (Pr. 13:24; Heb: 12:6-8).

In our modern permissive culture where the so-called experts on child-rearing are constantly condemning spanking as a form of child abuse, many Christian parents have abandoned this practice in favor of time outs, grounding, toy-bribery, yelling and other sanctions. Other Christian parents have greatly curtailed spanking by restricting its use to only the most severe infractions. The modern tendency is toward leniency and substitutions for the infliction of physical pain. This tendency is unfortunate for it reveals a negative cultural influence on the church and a lack of faith in the principles of discipline set forth in God's word. Christians must trust the Bible in matters of discipline, for biblical discipline works and secular methods do not. One reason that the Bible contains so many warnings regarding the necessity of applying the rod to children is the fact that fathers and mothers often are lax in this area. Because parents are often reluctant to use the rod, the Bible encourages parents to inflict the pain of spanking. Proverbs 23:13-14 says, "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell." God says that one's child will not only survive discipline, he will survive because of it. What should a Christian parent prefer for his child, the pain of discipline now or the lake of fire in the future? Christian parents must inflict the pain of spanking upon their disobedient children if they want to please God, love their children and achieve results. They must not be fooled by modern, antinomian concepts of tenderness. "[D]on't let the rule-discipline-spare not-be a hard saying. Isn't there a false tenderness for the child which is a cover for our indulgence of weak and foolish affections? There is much more mercy in what seems to be harshness, then in false tenderness. Let the child see, that we are firmly determined; that we are not to be diverted from our duty by the cry of weakness or passion. Isn't it far better that the child should cry under healthful correction, now, than that parents should afterward cry under the bitter fruit to themselves and their children of neglected discipline?"<sup>1</sup>

Once parents understand the necessity of discipline, that God requires spanking for the proper training of covenant children, they often start asking questions such as: "What do we do?" or "How do we apply biblical discipline in our home?" This brings us to a discussion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Bridges, 383.

mechanics or procedures of biblical discipline. There are many principles of biblical discipline that need to be considered.<sup>2</sup>

First, biblical discipline must occur in a context of love. It must occur in a consistently Christian home atmosphere. Thugs, drunks, and cruel and neglectful fathers sometimes spank their children. Such discipline, however, is not Christian discipline. When we speak of a context of love we do not merely mean a context of caring, compassion, tender emotions and so forth, but also an atmosphere where God's law-word is paramount. It is a home, where Christ is Lord and God's word reigns, where the parents are providing for their children physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is a home where the principles of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 are practiced. Such a home is a Christian culture, a society of biblical love. When covenant children are disciplined within a context of love, they will understand that discipline is not insincere, arbitrary or dictatorial but is an act of love and obedience toward God on the part of the parents. They will also understand that discipline is an act of love toward them, that it is a good thing, done for their own welfare and spiritual well-being. Children who are raised in homes without biblical love who are neglected by their parents will often misbehave in order to receive attention. Such children are so starved for affection that they would rather receive angry attention than no attention at all. In order to avoid all such problems parents must make the home a pleasant, loving, secure place for their children. Discipline will be much more effective in such an environment. When the home is an unpleasant place to be with fighting, neglect, constant nagging, bitterness and so forth the pain and unpleasantness of discipline loses its edge. In a loving, pleasant atmosphere the pain of discipline is more of a contrast to the overall environment. Pain in such a situation is more memorable. There will also be a stronger desire on the part of the children to repent and restore fellowship.

Second, discipline must be done in a loving manner. As parents discipline their children for disobedience they must do so in a manner that is itself obedient to God. This means that parents must not discipline in anger. There are many reasons why parents must never discipline in anger. (1) Anger does not produce righteousness. "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20). Why use a method of discipline that is ineffective, that does not lead to the desired result? (2) When one is teaching a child to control himself, he must not set a bad example by losing control himself. Angry discipline is hypocritical discipline. When a parent disciplines in an angry, uncontrolled manner he, by example, is saying to his child: "Do as I say, but not as I do." One does not want to teach his child to become a hypocrite. (3) When a parent does not discipline in anger the possibility of abuse or "over-doing it" is removed. Discipline must be done in a calm, rational manner. The pain that is inflicted must be appropriate to the offense committed. If a parent is extremely angry he needs to pull himself together, calm down and act rationally before he does something stupid. Correction must occur with a spirit of gentleness. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). (4) Paul orders Christian fathers not to provoke their children to wrath (Eph. 6:4). When a parent loses control, he is tempting his children to become angry, or to harbor resentment, or to lose respect for parental authority. Although covenant children never have any excuse for disobeying their parents (except when they are told to violate Scripture), parents should never act in a manner which may cause their children to stumble.

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of the principles enumerated in this chapter, see Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978). See also Douglas Wilson, *Standing on the Promises: A Handbook of Biblical Childrearing* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997).

Loving discipline is never tyrannical. A covenant child is under a Christian parent who is under God. The Christian parent is not a dictator who barks out orders as if his children were slaves. In discipline a parent's attitude should reflect God's love (Heb. 12:6-8; Rev. 3:19). A father who acts as an autocrat to his wife and children can cause anger and discouragement (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Parents "are not to excite the bad passions of their children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority. A parent had better sow tares in a field from which he expects to derive food for himself and family, than by his own ill conduct nurture evil in the heart of his child."<sup>3</sup> There are many pagan fathers who after a hard days work of taking orders from an unreasonable boss, like to come home and throw their weight around. They use their superior strength to terrorize their children with severe scoldings and physical beatings. Such should never be the behavior of a Christian father. Jesus instructed His disciples that Christian leadership involved humble, loving, service and thus was not to mirror the prideful, arrogant, cruel leadership of the heathen (Mt. 20:25-28).

Loving discipline is never cruel. When parents chasten a child they want that child to admit fault, repent, reconcile and learn from that experience how properly to act in the future. Parents who are cruel in discipline, who publicly humiliate their child in front of others take the child's mind off the biblical admonitions they need and focus it on their embarrassment. Christian parents should never tease, mock, make fun of, denigrate or insult their children in the disciplinary process. How many children have heard comments such as "John you are an idiot. You will never amount to anything" or "Mike you're really stupid!" or "Billy, why did you do that? Are you a moron?" Christian parents should never act sarcastic, flippant or vengeful during discipline.

In the Bible there is a great difference between chastisement and wrath or vengeance. When God punishes the wicked, He pours out His wrath upon them (2 Th. 1:6-9). When God metes out vengeance upon unbelievers He is not doing so out of love in order to make them more holy but is simply meting out justice. They receive the destructive blows of hatred (e.g., Ps. 37:2, 9, 13, 15, 17, 20, 38) and not the loving chastisement of correction that the elect receive. God as a loving father chastises His children for their own good, for their growth in sanctification. Christian parents should reflect God's method of loving chastisement when they discipline their own children. Biblical chastisement is medicine not poison.

Third, discipline must be for real infractions and not for accidents, normal rambunctiousness and immaturity. Little children are clumsy. They often do things such a spill their milk, knock over things, trip and fall and so forth. All such things, however, are not ethical violations but are merely a result of a lack of coordination from a young, underdeveloped brain. God does not discipline His people for accidents but for violations of His holy law. Earthly fathers can instruct their children to be more careful, but they should not spank a child for an accident. One also should not discipline a child for being a child. Young children (in particular boys) are full of energy and like to play aggressively. Parents do not need to allow their child to play wild games in the living room. However, they should allow their children to have fun as long as sin is not involved. It is not wise to expect a five-year-old boy to act like an adult and sit around reading books all day.

There are two types of rules that can be violated by children. Children can violate the express teaching of God's law by lying, stealing, hitting, disrespect to parents, coveting and so forth. They also can violate the various house rules that have been set up by their parents for a well-ordered household. House rules receive their authority from the fact that children are

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge, *Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1964 [1856]), 264.

commanded to obey their parents. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). Since discipline occurs for these two types of infractions, covenant children should be taught from the earliest possible age the Ten Commandments. It is a good idea for parents to have their children memorize the Ten Commandments and the questions dealing with the moral law in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Covenant children need to know the difference between right and wrong and why there is a right and wrong. They need to understand that all violations of the law are against Jehovah and that God requires Christian parents to chastise their children for all such infractions. Covenant children also need to be taught that all challenges to parental authority are serious offenses that will lead to swift, certain and stern chastisement. When parents determine house rules they should use biblical wisdom and sanctified common sense. If a father makes unreasonable demands upon his children he is tempting them to sin. For example, if a father asks his eight-year-old son to get up at 5:00 am and mow the lawn, rake the leaves, wash the car, etc. he is asking too much from an eight-year-old. The boy will easily become frustrated and discouraged. Although house rules should be designed in a manner that reflects the maturity and ability of children, God’s moral law is absolute and non-negotiable. Children must never be allowed to violate God’s law.

Fourth, discipline must be proportional to the offense committed. Just as there are different levels of bad behavior, there must be a proportional level of chastisement to fit each situation. There are relatively minor infractions that often result from ignorance. Such matters can be dealt with by means of a verbal reproof. In a covenant home that has a pleasant loving atmosphere, the displeasure and seriousness of a parental rebuke is often sufficient to achieve a biblical change in a child. Many infractions merit a normal spanking and admonition while serious violations merit a more severe spanking. There are four reasons why discipline should be proportional to the offense. First, parental discipline is patterned after God’s discipline of the church. Throughout Scripture God deals with His people according to the offense committed (e.g., not every crime is a capital offense in the Law). The Old and New Testaments, for example, make a clear distinction between sins of ignorance and high-handed sins (e.g., Nu. 15:30, 31). There is a major difference regarding the gravity of an offense between two boys who during a football game call each other names and a son who tells his father that he is a stupid idiot. There also is a difference between a child who forgets to do a chore and a child who says to his parent “I will not do that!” Obviously such a child needs a strong spanking. Second, if a child receives the identical chastisement every time then he will not learn to distinguish between serious and minor infractions. Every infraction is wrong and must be dealt with. However, the chastisement for throwing rocks off the overpass should be far more memorable than forgetting to take out the garbage. Third, if the chastisement is identical every time then discipline becomes robotic. Fourth, if a child receives a severe paddling for every single infraction then a strong spanking will lose its effectiveness. A child who is seriously paddled for everything will become desensitized to severe discipline. Strong discipline is much more effective if it is reserved for more serious offenses. Children should fear the rod and not their own fathers. When severe chastisement is meted out upon children for every offense, children can become angry, frustrated or discouraged.

It is also important that parents consider the different dispositions of their children when administering discipline. Some children are very sensitive and respond immediately to a simple verbal reproof. If a stern look coupled with an admonition causes a child to break out in tears, admit guilt, confess, repent and reconcile then a spanking may not even be necessary. (One of course is assuming the child is not putting on an act to get out of being spanked.) Other children

(usually tough little boys) do not even flinch during a spanking. Therefore, the pain level of administering the rod should be increased or decreased according to the nature of a child. However, this point does not mean that one must inflict pain until a child bursts into tears. Some children are much better at controlling their emotions and do not like to cry or get emotional in front of others. This is often the case with boys as they get older. The goal of discipline is repentance and a change in behavior. If that goal is effectively achieved with a relatively small amount of physical pain then there is no need to inflict severe spankings. Every child is different. Parents usually have a good understanding of the different dispositions of their children.

Fifth, discipline or chastisement must be painful. When the author of Hebrews describes chastisement he writes, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). Chastisement is supposed to produce painful and not pleasurable emotions. “It is the nature of all discipline to seem painful rather than pleasant, otherwise it would fail of its purpose, which is to head one away from what is unprofitable for holiness. But it seems to be so only for the moment, that is, at the time when it is experienced; for he who benefits from discipline invariably finds that the pain of it is followed by joy, and to this consummation of bliss the man of faith looks forward with eager anticipation.”<sup>4</sup> If discipline is going to be effective then it must cause pain. That is why verbal correction often needs to be accompanied by a good spanking. Solomon writes, “Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner depths of the heart” (Pr. 20:30). “The diseased body needs medicine no less than food, both for healing and enablement to receive nourishment from its food; the diseased soul needs chastening no less than consolation, and as the main preparation for consolation.... Miserable beyond measure is the untamed stubbornness of self-will. A gentle stroke is first tried. When this remedy fails, then the stripes are needful.”<sup>5</sup>

How are parents to inflict the pain of discipline upon disobedient children? The Bible repeatedly refers to the use of a rod in discipline. “A rod is for the back of him who is devoid of understanding” (Pr. 10:13). “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Pr. 13:24). “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Pr. 22:15). “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell” (Pr. 23:13-14). “The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Pr. 29:15). The Hebrew word for rod (*shebet*) refers to a thin stick or branch. A spanking rod is not thick but thin like a switch. Most books on discipline emphasize that whatever one uses as a spanking tool, it should cause pain but not damage. If one uses a paddle it should be flat and fairly thin. One wants to sting the skin without causing injury or bruising. If one wants to use a switch like an instrument, one can purchase a thin dowel (1/6 to inches in diameter depending on the age of the child) or craft a switch from a thin, smooth, flexible branch from a tree. One’s hand can be used to administer chastisement, however, a switch or paddle is generally better. Hands are not as effective in bringing a good sting without causing bruises. Further, with a strong spanking one may cause more pain to the hand than to the bottom. When the Bible says to discipline with a rod, there is no reason why these passages should not be taken literally.

Why is the infliction of pain necessary? The rod is indispensable for instilling in children a biblical world view and the wisdom that comes with it. In Christian discipline the rod is always

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *A Commentary On the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 532.

<sup>5</sup> Bridges, 431.

accompanied with biblical reproof or admonition. Spanking takes what is theoretical and makes it very concrete and practical. It teaches covenant children that sin and disobedience always have negative consequences. Rebellion leads directly to pain and displeasure. In the universe that God has created there are ethical absolutes and there is a responsibility of obedience. A spanking reinforces ethical instruction. A child will remember the pain that was inflicted from a certain bad behavior and will remember the why that came with the pain. That child will think twice before committing the offense again because he does not want to receive the pain that was inflicted before. Therefore, it is very important that spankings really hurt. A spanking that does not cause memorable pain is useless. It will not achieve the desired result.

Today, many parents have bought into the idea that inflicting the pain of the rod upon children is barbaric and outmoded and thus have substituted other forms of correction such as standing in the corner, groundings, going to one's room and so forth. Are such forms of correction biblical or useful for discipline? No. They are contrary to Scripture and are not effective forms of discipline.

The biblical pattern of discipline is the pain of the rod coupled with admonition, confession, repentance, reconciliation and restitution if necessary. Grounding does not follow the biblical pattern because: (1) It does not involve physical pain. Sitting in one's room reading a good book, or talking on the phone, or sitting at the computer is not a memorable chastisement. (2) The Bible does not teach a prison system for corporal chastisement but pain, correction and restitution. If a child has stolen a toy he should be required to make restitution. If a child cannot make money then he should be required to do some yard work or house work to pay for the toy (or the broken window, etc.). Biblical discipline teaches responsibility. It teaches that sinful behavior has immediate consequences. Grounding teaches a child to sit around and mope or feel sorry for himself. Physical correction is quick and when completed the child immediately goes back to a productive Christian life. Grounding is very slow and leaves the child out of the day to day tasks of normal Christian dominion living. (3) With grounding the disciplinary process which includes a complete reconciliation with the parents is not finalized for a lengthy period of time. This lengthy process allows disharmony in the relationship between parents and children. It tempts children to form bitter thoughts regarding their parents. With biblical discipline everything is dealt with immediately. There are no emotional loose ends. After chastisement and repentance occurs there is a complete reconciliation. The devil is not given the opportunity to stimulate bitter thoughts.

Sixth, discipline must be swift and consistent. Slow discipline teaches children that obedience can be stalled, that parents can be manipulated. Slow obedience needs to be seen for what it is: disobedience. A parent says to his child, "Bobby go up to your room and pick up your toys." Bobby ignores his father and continues playing with his toys. Then the father says, "I'm warning you, you better get upstairs and get to work right now or you're in big trouble." Bobby continues to play while slowly moving to a more distant part of the living room. Then Bobby's father raises his voice and says, "I'm going to count to three and if you're not on your way I'm going to spank you." Then as the father counts to three in a progressively slower manner, the child begins to move during the word three. Children must be trained to respond immediately to every command. There should not be a need to raise one's voice, or give warnings. Instant, cheerful obedience should be expected every time a command is given. When parents do not require immediate obedience, they are indirectly training their children to be manipulators of authority, to see what they can get away with before they obey. We certainly do not want our children to be slow and manipulative in their obedience toward God. Therefore, if children do

not obey when asked the first time in a normal tone of voice, they need to be disciplined immediately.

Children also must be disciplined in a consistent manner. Parents need to adhere to and apply biblical standards of discipline every single day. Parents who are very strict on some days and then very permissive and lax on other days are sending a confused, schizophrenic, arbitrary message to their children. Children should not be taught that there are ethical holidays when biblical standards can be ignored. For the effective biblical training of children, parents need to show their children that they are reliable and trustworthy; that they are accurately and consistently applying God's authority in the home. Inconsistent discipline implicitly teaches a form of ethical relativism. It teaches children that sin does not always have negative consequences. Parents are biblically obligated to enforce God's righteous standard in the home. Discipline is not a matter of personal preference. Parents are often lax in discipline because they think that swift and consistent discipline is hard and time consuming. Although strict discipline is hard work, it is not nearly as hard as dealing with the chaos that results when biblical discipline is not applied.

Seventh, discipline must be strictly applied from a very young age. Many Christian parents unwittingly take a very Pelagian approach to child-rearing. Children in such a situation are basically given free reign until they get old enough to shock their parents through blatant rebellion. Then, the parents decide its time to get real strict. After years of transgressing with impunity and developing habitual patterns of intentional evil-doing, such a child will be very difficult to train and restrain. Proverbs instructs parents to get on the ball early before it is too late. "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction" (19:18). Charles Bridges writes,

But the great force of the rule is its timely application-while there is hope. For the case becomes truly hopeless, if the remedy is delayed. The cure of the evil must begin in infancy. Not a moment can be lost. Now is the time, when the good can be accomplished most easily and with the least physical discipline. The lesson of obedience should be learned at the earliest possible moment. One painful struggle and victory in very early life, may, under God, do much toward settling the point, then and there, and for all the years ahead. On the other hand, even harsh chastening later, may fail to accomplish, what an early slight rebuke might have accomplished.<sup>6</sup>

Any gardener knows that the time to shape a tree is when it is young. A young tree is easily bent and pruned. The pruning of a young tree done properly has magnificent results. A professional gardener never waits until a tree is seventy years-old and one hundred feet tall before he tries to shape that tree because such a tree cannot be bent or effectively shaped. Covenant children need the strictest of discipline not when they turn 13 but when they are infants, toddlers, and little boys or girls. Because all babies go forth from the womb as depraved little liars (cf. Ps. 51:5; 58:3) who want to determine their own rules and who have a nature that loves human autonomy, it is foolish to put off stern discipline precisely at the time when children are forming habits.

If children are dealt with strictly from a tender age they will become accustomed to discipline and obedience. They will grow up expecting discipline when they do wrong. They will develop habitual patterns of obedience from the very start. When parents waste those early

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 383-384.

formative years the children become accustomed to laxness and disobedience. Then when the parents finally decide to crack down and get strict they've got a huge battle on their hands. The practice of doing almost nothing, until children get older and rebel, is very common among non-Christian families. In such families the parents discover that their child is getting drunk, smoking pot, taking drugs, fornicating, etc. and are shocked and distressed by such behavior. As a result they crack down with groundings, take various privileges away and yell a lot. By this time, however, their child has already developed a self-centered, hedonistic, "youth culture," satanic world view. The response of the teenager is to argue, yell, complain, lie a lot, sneak out, run away and lead a double life: one in front of their parents and one in front of their so-called friends. Such children disrespect and often hate their own parents. They can't wait to move out of the house so they can party and fornicate without sneaking around. This scenario is very common in America.

Christian families which adhere to the infallible word of God should function far differently and have radically different results. Parents must be strict with discipline and training from the earliest years. "It is easiest plucking up weeds as soon as they spring up, and the bullock that is designed for the yoke should be betimes accustomed to it."<sup>7</sup> Covenant children under such circumstances will develop godly habits. They will learn to obey immediately and cheerfully. Then as such children grow older the parents will not need to attempt to hedge in their children with a bunch of rules. They will not need to engage in pitched battles with their children because their children have already learned to habitually obey God and submit to His rule. Such children are so permeated with Christian ethics and a biblical world and life view that they would never even consider partaking of the sins that are popular in today's "youth culture."

Eighth, discipline (i.e. physical chastisement) must always be accompanied by reproof, correction or admonition. Paul tells fathers to bring up their children "up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). The word admonition (*nouthesia*) means literally a "putting in mind." Physical chastisement is never enough by itself. In fact it is useless if a parent does not also correct or counsel the errant child by applying God's word directly to the situation. Jay Adams tells us the purpose of the verbal admonition:

[T]he word *nouthesis* focuses on both confronter and the one confronted. *Nouthesis* specifically presupposes the need for a change in the person confronted, who may or may not put up some resistance. In either case there is a problem in his life that needs to be solved. Nouthetic confrontation, then, necessarily suggests first of all that there is something wrong with the person who is to be confronted nouthetically. The idea of something wrong, some sin, some obstruction, some problem, some difficulty, some need that has to be acknowledged and dealt with, is central. In short, nouthetic confrontation arises out of a condition in the counselee that God wants changed. The fundamental purpose of nouthetic confrontation, then, is to effect personality and behavioral change.<sup>8</sup>

The parent as God's representative must explain to the child what exactly was done that was wrong. He then must explain from Scripture why the behavior was wrong. Then he must teach the child how to replace the bad behavior with godly-wise behavior by applying God's word to the specific situation. When a child misbehaves he is just not spanked and told that his behavior was wrong. He is told why God says his behavior was wrong and given instruction in righteousness. "The rod and rebuke give wisdom" (Pr. 29:15). "The rod without words fails to

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3:901.

<sup>8</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), 45.

teach our children the difference between right and wrong. Words without the rod become shallow, empty air. We must be certain that our children always understand the exact reason they are being disciplined.”<sup>9</sup> Bridges writes, “Some give the rod without reproof, without trying to get the conscience to respond. This is either tyrannical or whimsical and no matter which, nothing can be expected from it. But the two together not only drive ‘foolishness’ far away, but, as a positive blessing, give wisdom.”<sup>10</sup> The word reproof or rebuke in the original language means to speak to the child in a manner that brings conviction. This can only be done in a biblical manner by applying Scriptures to their specific situation. Parents need to find and use passages of Scripture that condemn the bad behavior and that help the child replace sinful behavior with godly behavior. This process teaches the child biblical discernment.

In order to understand how this aspect of discipline is applied let us examine a Christian father in action. Bob observes his son lose his temper and call his sister a stupid idiot. The first thing Bob must do is help his son to understand what he did that was wrong. Bob asks, “John, do you know what you did wrong?” His son’s answer may be anything from, “I don’t know” to “I called my sister a name.” Once it is clear that Bob’s son understands what he did wrong, then Bob asks his son why it was wrong from a biblical perspective. “John, why does God condemn name calling?” At this point the father is to bring out passages that reveal God’s attitude toward such behavior. “John, God says in Leviticus 19:17, ‘You shall not hate your brother in your heart.’ Jesus said that name calling is a serious sin. ‘But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.’ You see, John, God requires that we love our brother and our neighbor. Is name calling an expression of love or of hate? Do you understand now why your behavior is wrong?” After John understands why God condemns his behavior, the next step is to bring out some passages that will help John replace the bad behavior with godly behavior. Bob points out the following passages. “A soft answer turns away wrath” (Pr. 15:1). “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Col. 4:6). In this whole process John has learned what he has done wrong. He has learned why it is wrong according to Scripture. And he has received biblical counsel regarding the proper response in the future.

When the procedure is repeated over and over again for each offense a covenant child will learn to recognize bad behavior on his own. He will learn to apply Scripture himself and will become wise and discerning. Then when he is tempted to sin he will know how to respond. For example, a boy who lives down the street wants to ride his bike to the local fast food hamburger stand. He asks a covenant child to go with him. The child responds by saying that he is not permitted to ride his bike that far away. The boy then counters by saying, “Why don’t you just lie to your parents?” The covenant child says, “I can’t do that. Lying is a sin. And God says that I must obey my parents. I would rather please God and my parents by telling the truth than sin for a hamburger and French fries.”

Parents are not always in situations in which they have the time to quote and apply various passages of Scripture. However, they can still follow the biblical procedure by setting forth the teaching of Scripture from memory (e.g., “John, the Bible says that lying is wrong. That it is a sin. God says that we are to speak the truth to our neighbor, etc.”).

As parents discipline their children it is important that the children understand that: a) Discipline is something they need. It is not simply punishment. It is done for their own good to change their behavior in a biblical direction. b) Parents discipline because it is their biblical duty.

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce A. Ray, *Withhold Not Correction*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Bridges, 675.

God requires it. Biblical discipline does not occur because parents are mean, unloving, and harsh or because they enjoy it, but because they are being obedient to God's word. When children are old enough to understand they should be told that they belong to God and that they are being trained to serve God and expand His kingdom. Children should see discipline in its overall context as necessary training for a life of godly dominion.

Ninth, biblical discipline always leads to a restoration of fellowship. This means that fellowship must be restored with the parent who administered discipline and if the infraction involved a sin against another person such as a brother or sister, then a restoration of fellowship should also be required there. A child should never be permitted to run away from a spanking and wallow in anger or self-pity. The restoration of fellowship involves a confession of wrongdoing on the part of the child, the asking of forgiveness of the offended party, the giving of forgiveness by the offended party and a reassurance of love and acceptance on the part of the parents. Parents should hug their children and give them loving words so that they will understand that the discipline was an act of love and that there is a full restoration of fellowship. There, of course, should also be prayer to God confessing sin (Ps. 32:5), requesting forgiveness (Ps. 51; 1 Jn. 1:9), and asking God for the grace to overcome this sin in the future. The whole process of restoration is very important not only because it restores peace and happiness in the family, and shows the child that biblical discipline is an act of love on the part of the parents, but also because it teaches the child how to resolve conflicts in the future. Many professing Christians sweep conflicts under the rug and hold unbiblical grudges toward each other. A covenant child raised properly will develop a godly habit of seeking immediate biblical restoration when sinful conflicts arise.

## Summary and Conclusion

In our brief consideration of principles that are necessary in the application of biblical discipline, we noted that discipline must:

1. occur in a context of love;
2. be done in a loving manner;
3. be for real infractions;
4. be proportional to the offense;
5. be painful;
6. be swift and consistent;
7. be applied strictly at a very young age;
8. be accompanied by admonition;
9. lead to a restoration of fellowship.

A father must make sure that the household is a loving, pleasant place. Parents must apply discipline from the earliest age and not wait until a child has developed ungodly habits and autonomous thinking. When a child does something that needs discipline the parent should make sure that he does not discipline in anger. When a parent applies discipline he needs to spank in a manner that causes real pain but does not damage. He also needs to instruct or counsel the child. The child must understand what he was disciplined for, why that behavior is unbiblical and how to take biblical steps to put off that behavior and replace it with godly behavior. Finally, there needs to be a full restoration of fellowship. The child needs to know that discipline is an act of

love and that now that it is over and confession has been made, there is forgiveness from both God and the parents. All of these principles have been derived from Scripture and are required by God. They are not optional. Parents must put these principles in practice and must apply them over and over until they are habitual. Biblical discipline works. Covenant children who are raised with these principles applied will be greatly blessed and will praise their parents for their diligence.

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