



The Good News

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Is it wrong to discipline our children?

By Michael McCleary

Our society has changed quite a bit in the last several decades. When once a parent could punish their child in the grocery store for acting up, the same parent now could be reported to authorities that would take the child away due to “abuse”. There is a difference, however, between abuse and punishment. Punishment, or chastening, is to be performed out of love. Many people define abuse by the degree of pain or hurt that is put on the child, but I believe abuse occurs when we punish and correct our child out of uncontrolled emotion, regardless of how hard that correction may be. When we punish out of uncontrolled emotion it becomes about us being angry, frustrated, or embarrassed, not about correcting the child.

Many years ago, it was brought to my attention that the term “discipline” and “punishment” are not always interchangeable. I am grateful for this being pointed out to me as it caused me to look a little deeper into the term “discipline” to understand what it means. “Discipline” means (as a noun) *“a set or system of rules and regulations; training to act in accordance with rules”* and (as a verb) *“to bring to a state of order and obedience by training and control; to train by instruction and exercise”*. I began to realize that punishment is simply one aspect of discipline, as one definition of discipline is *“to punish or penalize in order to train and control; correct; chastise; punishment inflicted by way of correction and training”*. There are numerous ways to discipline children, such as spanking, timeouts, grounding, etc.

Is it wrong to punish our children? Is it wrong for God to punish His children? In **Heb. 12:5-9** we learn that God chastens those that He loves. “Chasten” is used synonymously with “punish”. We learn in **Prov. 23:13**, “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.” The term “rod” here is

“*shebet*” in Hebrew, which means “*a stick*”. When interpreted “rod”, it is always used to describe a means of punishment, as in **Psm. 23:4** in which David is comforted by God’s staff (guidance) and His rod (protection). Therefore, not only is it not wrong to punish our children, but we also learn that it is commanded by God and something that we must do as parents if we wish to “*train up a child in the way he should go*” (**Prov. 22:6**).

What means of punishment are acceptable? The answer to this question is as complex as it is simple...whatever means of punishment that works. There are some children who need very little punishment and simply accept the discipline (rules, training) that you give them. There are some children who, when they do not obey as they are instructed, respond well to “a rod” of correction such as spanking. However, there are some children that respond better to “timeouts” or some other form of discipline. It’s very much trial and error when determining the best application of punishment. There is nothing wrong with spanking, or with timeouts and grounding, but finding some means of discipline is essential if we are to teach our children proper conduct.

We must be aware not to punish out of anger, as even timeouts can be abusive. However, discipline and punishment must exist in the life of a child. Without it, they have no structure and without structure there is no guidance. We are not here to be our children’s friend...we are here to be their parent. Most of the time, we cannot be both. Let us be aware of our children today and make sure we discipline (teach, establish rules for) our children while they are here at worship services. They must learn as they grow older that we gather here to worship God, not to play. As the child grows and we consistently establish and enforce rules of behavior for them, the easier our children will be to correct.