

Some Parenting Helps in Using the Rod with Children in a Christocentric Way

Geoffrey R. Kirkland
Christ Fellowship Bible Church

Parenting is hard work. Glorious is the call and wonderful is the blessing, but it still remains a busy duty. The God-given gift of children drives Godly parents to the cross frequently. And rightly so. For this is where God's people find grace to persevere and hope to remain faithful in God's wonderful and clear instruction to bring up the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6.4).

Now the Bible makes clear that parents must use the "rod" with children to teach the young ones and warn them of sin (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). Thus, spanking children must occur in a Christian home. For this is what God has instructed parents to do to instruct their children, to teach them the ways of God, to warn them of sinful ways, and to drive foolishness from them.

But, how? What does it look like in the discipline room? Picture it: there a mom or a dad is with the small child in that room, rod in hand, child on the lap, and discipline must occur because the child has sinned against God. What should the parent do, then? What is to be said?

This essay provides a handful of helpful tips for parents to consider as a template for the biblical process of discipline.

1. Gather the facts. Ask the child: "what happened?" In this beginning step, you as the parent seek to hear the child portray what happened (if the child is old enough to do so). Seek to hear him describe the situation.

2. Reach the heart. Since the goal of discipline is not merely behavioral management but seeking to get at the heart, parents should ask: "how did you respond?" "When ___ happened, why did you do that?" "When he said that, why did you say what you said?" Or, "Why did you do what you did?" "What were you wanting?" "What would have made you happy in that moment?" You see, the way your child answers reveals his *heart* (motives, purposes, thoughts, intentions, ruling and dominating desires). Don't just say: "stop screaming!" Rather, "why did you react that way?" Reach the heart.

3. Expose the sin. Then, when the heart is revealed and the real purposes are uncovered, you are to expose the sin biblically. The sin isn't merely hitting his sister. Perhaps it's selfishness in the heart that wants to play 'god' by being in control of his life and his possessions. Speak to the root issue. Unveil the sin. Expose it. Clearly, simply, tenderly, but firmly.

4. Prove it biblically. When that sin is exposed, the parent ideally should open a Bible and show the child in the text of God's Word where they sinned against *God*. The goal of this is to show them (time and time again) that the point is *not* that they've sinned against you. Rather, the sin is that they've sinned against *God* and have broken His Law and that's why discipline must occur. Again, prove to the child they sinned ultimately and foremost against *God*!

5. Give the discipline. After the sin is exposed and the Scripture has been read, the parent should firmly and yet tenderly give the discipline. The rod must be used. The goal is for the child to feel the pain as a consequence of this sin. It is to drive out foolishness in his heart and show your child that sin brings pain. For indeed, if they do not repent and trust in Christ alone, their sin will bring everlasting pain under the hand of God in hell. So discipline is seeking to drive your child to make the connection between sin and its consequence of pain. And that is to drive

them to Christ as you verbalize the gospel. The rod should be used firmly, on the rear end so that it's not visible to others. Proper use of the rod should not leave bruising. Parents should not discipline with the hand because a child should never grow up to associate a parent's hand with pain. The hand of the parent should always be a comforting, loving, providing, and protecting hand. The rod, however, should be something the parent uses while calm and *never* angry. So, use the rod firmly, swiftly, carefully, and always in private -- never in public. Always inflict the rod on the child's rear end with firmness, compassion, tenderness, and shrouded with love.

6. Express tender love. Immediately when the corporal punishment is finished, you as the parent should scoop up the child in his arms or on his lap and express how much you love your child. This affirms to the little one that his parents are not just angry, mad, mean, and violent. But it shows them that you have disciplined them *because* you love them so very much. Verbalize this to them with the words: "I love you very much."

7. Give the gospel. Now the greatest opportunities exist for presenting Christ and His gospel. When your child has sinned, you've brought the discipline, and expressed your genuine love for them, you must lead them to Calvary and show them their sin before God, God's anger over sin, and God's solution for man's need in the person of Jesus Christ. You might say: "*Do you know why I've done this? It's because God is perfect and we are not. And sin deserves God's punishment. But God sent Jesus...*" Keep it simple. Don't get too theologically verbose with jargon. Explain how God has given one door to heaven, one way to escape eternal 'discipline' and that is through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Call your children to repent of their sin (turn) and to believe in Jesus Christ alone (trust). Do this often, regularly, daily, diligently, patiently, winsomely, and persuasively. Don't just rehash the same words time and time again. Vary the gospel call! Use different Scriptures! Show them different facets of Christ and His redemptive glories and unspeakable beauties. But parent, whatever you do: give them the gospel! Lead them to Christ. Do it *every time*. Whenever you discipline, lead them to the only One who can deliver their soul from God's eternal punishment: the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemption. Be careful not to give your children assurance too young or too quickly if they merely 'profess faith' in Jesus Christ. Be happy and express excitement over their desire to follow Jesus. But affirm them in their desire and explain to them that over time their faith will show itself to be real or not. But encourage them along the way to pursue Christ!

8. Pray with them. When all is done, while still holding and loving your child, pray with them. Bring God into the event (again)! You want your child to leave the discipline room remembering that mommy or daddy disciplined me (and, yes, it may have hurt) but they also prayed with me and for me. You want to pray that God would do the great soul-work, redemptive work, regenerating work for His glory, for your child's eternal welfare, and for the good of your family. So you pray for your child and then you hug them, move on, and don't keep a record of their sins.

May this serve as a helpful template, or a pattern, or an overview of what parents can do *in the discipline room* with their children as you seek to honor God in the faithful discipling and disciplining of your children. May God use the rod to drive out foolishness from our children and through our faithful evangelization may God redeem them from His eternal punishment in hell and may He bring them safely and gloriously into His heavenly Kingdom! May God use parents and their faithful and diligent proclamation of the gospel as the means to convert the children!