

SPANKING

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INTRODUCTION

Prov. 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

Prov. 23:13-14 Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.

Prov. 13:24 He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

God commands parents to obey Him in the training and disciplining of young children. The Scriptures provide the reliable and understandable guide for parents to deal with the sin of little boys and girls. Contrary to the thinking of secularists today, and even many in the church, spanking does not hurt, harm, or abuse a child, when the parents execute it biblically, humbly, consistently, and lovingly.

Spanking does not harm or destroy children. It does not set them up for a life of abuse or self-harm. Rather, God declares in His Word that spanking with “the rod” is necessary for all young children who sin and expose the folly that exists in their hearts.

Why must parents spank their children?

First, spanking obeys God. God clearly spells out how parents must deal with the sin of their children. When children expose the foolishness that resides in their hearts (their rebellion against God and their love for themselves and their self-perceived autonomy), God commands parents to utilize the rod in the childrearing. Quite simply, spanking children begins with the act of obedience on the part of the *parents to God*. Will the parent honor and fear and choose to obey God in the discipline of their children even when it seems undesirable, unpleasant, and even when the child seems to respond negatively to the spanking? Parents must fear the Lord and obey Him even in this area of the raising of children.

Second, spanking teaches children. Spanking associates sin with pain. And it should be this way. If a person sins, there is a consequence. Eternally and ultimately, if a person continues in

the state of unbelief and rebellion, he will experience eternal and ultimate pain from God Himself in the eternal torment of hell. Spanking is a ‘school of instruction’ to reinforce the reality that sin always hurts, it always harms, it always has adverse affects. Spanking proves to allow parents (led by fathers) to instruct the children regularly by exposing the folly of their hearts, the horrors of sin, the loveliness of Christ, the need and availability of grace, and the call to trust Christ!

Third, spanking warns children. Spanking is a rescue mission. Proverbs 23:14 says that spanking is a rescue mission to deliver a child’s soul from Sheol. What greater reason could God give for the need and importance of implementing the rod? Believing parents who obey God spank their children to warn them of the disastrous effects of sin, a tragic life that goes on indulging sin, and the eternal consequences of those who die in the condition of unbelief. Spanking brings pain when the act is executed but it pales in comparison with the pains of hell. Spanking gives the parent a wide-open door to evangelize the child, even from the youngest of ages, and lovingly warn the child of the wages of sin and the need to humbly receive God’s grace in Christ.

Fourth, spanking preaches grace. Spanking does proclaim the wonder of grace. The soul that sins will die. And yet when a child sins and does *not* die, he has received grace (immeasurable grace!). The parent spanks the child and gathers that child in his arms and prays with him and faithfully and passionately declares the sweet love and mercy of God that is available in Christ who came as the substitute to take the eternal “discipline” from the Father because of the sins of His people. Think of the wonder of grace! Think of the gospel opportunity this provides.

We will turn to some specific areas of spanking to provide much-needed clarity. We will observe

1. The IMPORTANCE of spanking
2. The WHEN of spanking
3. The WHY of spanking
4. The WHAT and HOW of spanking
5. The PARENT in spanking

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF SPANKING

One clearly understands even in a cursory survey of Proverbs that utilizing the rod to reprove and discipline children is necessary. No one can deny that spanking is biblical. It is the ordained method that God has given for the discipline and instruction of wayward children. Proverbs 22:15 says that the rod of discipline removes folly from the child’s heart. Parents must strike

their children with the rod and must understand that it will not kill the child, but it will help them (Proverbs 23:13). Implementing the rod when children disobey is a “rescue” mission to save their souls from death (Proverbs 23:14). Both the rod and reproof give wisdom to sinning children (Proverbs 29:15). One who does not use the rod but insists that the child will “figure it out” or the parent who allows the child to get his or her own way is a shameful way of parenting (Proverbs 29:15b). Thus, the Book of Proverbs clearly shows that parents must incorporate the rod in the disciplining of wayward children.

Furthermore, parents must spank because it instructs the child. There is a two-fold method of instruction when parents spank the children. First, there is the instruction from physical pain when the rod is used. It teaches and associates sin with painful consequences. Second, there is the instruction from verbal reproof. Just as Proverbs 29:15 combine them together: the rod *and reproof* give wisdom. Why would God call parents to employ the rod? For a few reasons. Children are depraved, wicked, self-loving rebels. And, remember, they receive their fallen human nature from *you* as the parent. All humans have rebelled against God and must be regenerated to enter heaven. Discipline is a God-given, and God-graced form of discipline to teach the children. It must be used because it inflicts pain when the sin has happened. It is directive because it closely identifies the wayward transgression with the immediate affliction and pain that it produced. It is loving because utilizing the rod is always, always an act of grace because the sinner should get justice — eternal hell. But the rod is grace. Utilizing the rod is also purposeful so that the parents can firmly expose the sin, open the Scriptures and show the child where they have sinned against God, explain their fallen condition and how their sin deserves hell eternally, affirm genuine love for the child and express their need to repent and trust Christ and receive His saving and plenteous grace!

2. THE WHEN OF SPANKING

Parents should spank the children when sin has occurred. Biblical discipline must come at the right time. When a parent spanks his child out of anger or because the parent views his rights violated, the child will be exasperated, become hardened, and he will be unsure in the future as to whether or not he’ll be disciplined for this or that action.

Proverbs 22:15 speaks of foolishness that is bound up in the heart of the child. This Hebrew word for “foolishness” carries the idea of ‘moral perversion’ and ‘lack of fear of God.’ Parents

must understand the importance of spanking and undertake the diligence in using the rod when the child has sinned.

It is wise for parents to refrain from spanking the child for childishness. If a child acts in a childish way that is not sinful, that action does not deserve a spanking (e.g., spilling the milk, performing a chore in a wrong manner). If, however, the child is given a command and the child refuses to obey, or chooses to do something else, then that child should be spanked. Quite simply: when parents spank the children, the parent should be able to open the Bible and point to chapter and verse where the child has erred in his ways *against God*. Ultimately, this is key. Parents must teach and show the children that they must be spanked because they have transgressed God's Word and have disobeyed God. You do not want to teach a child that he is getting a discipline because he made dad and mom mad. Parents are not the ultimate authority (parents have derived authority from God). God is. In the discipline, the child should understand very clearly that he will receive the spanking because he acted foolishly and sinned against God.

This means that parents must **KNOW THEIR BIBLES**. To biblically discipline and love the children in this God-ordained grace-act of reproving children for sin and pointing them to Christ requires parents to read, study, know, and memorize God's Word. Parents must know when sin has occurred. Parents must realize that disobedience, a complaining heart, an unsubmitive attitude, a slanderous word against others, a quarreling spirit are sins against God. And parents should know where to go in their Bibles to show what God says about such actions.

This means that parents must **PRIORITIZE THE TIME TO DISCIPLINE WHEN IT SEEMS INCONVENIENT**. It can seem that children disobey at the most inconvenient times and that discipline should be given when parents are least ready or willing to give it. But this is a precious gift of God to wean parents off of themselves and it provides an occasion for the parent to die to self, love the child, obey God, and take advantage of the occasion to discipline. Parents may feel tired, or busy, or frantic, or rushed, or late to a meeting, but discipline when done faithfully will honor God, teach the child, and result in joy in the parent's heart.

This means that parents must **SHOW THE CHILD THEIR SIN AGAINST GOD BY POINTING THEM TO THE SCRIPTURES**. When the child has sinned and you're in the discipline "room" (in a private location/room, not in a public, visible area), parents should be able to open their Bibles and read the Bible with the children, and even showing the child what chapter and verse they are reading (even if the child is too young to read himself) so that the child will understand (over the course of time) that the discipline must be received because of disobedience to the pure and perfect Word of God. Parents must study their Bibles and know where to go, where to turn, and show the child where the sin is in the Bible and what God says about it and the danger of committing such transgressions.

This means that parents must **USE THE OCCASION AS A GOSPEL-PROCLAIMING MOMENT TO EXPOSE SIN AND THE GRACE OF CHRIST**. When parents choose to obey God in this way when the child has sinned, it throws open the door for a gospel conversation (or

presentation). If the child is very young, it provides a sweet opportunity for parents to expose the sin, show the error in the text of the Bible, and proclaim the demand to turn from sin and trust in Christ and receive His grace. For those who are older and who can reason and respond to the parent, the parents should all the more take the occasion to proclaim the gospel and warn the child of the danger of his ways and of the plenteous mercy available in Christ and in His cross-work and resurrection! When the children sin, God provides wonderful occasions for parents to be the resident evangelists in the home to lovingly compel and urge the children to see their sin, the danger that will result if they live in unbelief and rebellion, and to rest fully and confidently in Jesus Christ who is mighty to save.

3. THE WHY OF SPANKING

The question inevitably comes up from parents who love their children and wonder how spanking can be helpful and beneficial for the children. Why would a loving parent inflict pain to the children? Won't this hurt and harm them? Won't they become abusive when they grow older or view spanking as abuse that they have received? What if someone had a very bad experience growing up with spanking from angry parents who angrily disciplined? Many questions such as these often arise.

At this point, I must clearly affirm the reality that God's Word must remain the authority for Godly fathers and mothers. Past experiences, however good or bad they may have been, cannot sway how we view or interpret God's Word or whether we choose to obey what God calls us to. Our own feelings in the moment of what we think is or is not best for our children should be subservient to the clear and authoritative Word of God on every issue — including spanking.

So, why does God command parents who love their children to spank them?

First, parents must spank their children out of obedience to God. The parental act of spanking disobedient children begins with the heart of the parent that resolves to walk in obedience to God and in submission to His Word. God calls parents to obey even when it is hard. And when a parent knows that the child has sinned against God, must be reprovved by Scripture, must be warned of sinful actions, and summoned to trust in Christ alone and he still chooses to spank the child, he is walking in obedience to God and His Word.

Second, parents must spank their children to rescue their souls from death. Parents must spank the children and “rescue his soul from death” (Proverbs 23:14). Ultimately, spanking is a

“rescue mission.” It is an act of diligent faith in God in prayerful hopes that God will rescue the child from sin, from himself, and from hell.

Third, parents must spank their children out of trust in God. Believers walk by faith, not by sight. Godly parents know that even when culture ridicules such actions and scathes such discipline as being “hurtful” and “harmful,” the Christian knows that true joy and blessing comes in walking obediently to God. Proverbs 29:15 says that the rod and reproof give wisdom. Part of implementing the rod is trusting that with proper instruction, reproof, and gospel warnings and invitations, it will give wisdom to the child.

Fourth, parents must spank their children in order to teach obedience. Young people are automatically hard-wired to be lovers of self. Children are “selfoholics.” It is the rod which God has designed to show the error and folly of self-love, self-autonomy, and self-independence. From the youngest of ages, boys and girls must learn to obey authority. And God Himself is the ultimate authority. Spanking teaches the children the folly of rejecting God’s authority for them in their lives (e.g., a parent, etc.) and instead choosing to follow their own hearts. Parents must seek to also teach their children to be good citizens in society. To do this, children must learn to obey authority and submit under those whom God has placed over them.

These are just a few reasons why it is so important and vital for parents to obey God and discipline sinning, young children with the rod.

4. THE WHAT & WHY OF SPANKING

Picture it: 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? What is to be done? Perhaps the parent thinks: “I’ve never seen this done before” or “no one taught me how to do this.”

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.

Quite simply, in sum, godly parents must aim to do all things in faithful love, they must seek to open the Bible and give truth to show the child where they transgressed God’s Word. The parent must take this as an opportunity to give the gospel message and then summon the child to turn from the wicked ways of self-trust and fly to Christ by a surrendering faith and whole confidence.

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!

5. THE PARENT IN SPANKING

Proverbs 25:15 states that a soft answer breaks the bone. Proverbs 15:1 affirms that a gentle answer turns away wrath. Proverbs 23:26 is the heart of every parent to the child as it says: “Give me your heart my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways.”

These verses provide much-needed guidance for parents who must obey the Lord and discipline wayward children. Knowing that parents *must* spank but also knowing and learning *how* to spank appropriately and with gospel-grace, parents have an important part as well in this discipline process. Parents cannot be given to anger because the one who is quick-tempered exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29). Parents must discipline with a calm demeanor. Parents cannot go into the room to discipline the child while seething with rage or furious because of something that happened. It may behoove the parent to take a few minutes quietly to repent of his own selfish and sinful response, to confess his own anger, to come before the Lord humbly, and then approach the child calmly, lovingly, and caringly in the act of discipline. Yes, parental discipline can be both firm and tender at the same time. It can be compassionate and discipline must be consistent when sin has occurred.

What is the parent to do? What does the Bible say regarding guidelines for parents in the discipline act?

Parents must diligently bring up the children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This means that the primary responsibility of maturing and growing and aiding the child in seeing & forsaking his sin rests upon the parent. With prayerful dependence on God the Spirit while utilizing the all powerful and heart-searching Word of God, the parent knows that he must diligently bring up the children in the ways of God. He cannot be passive nor can he just let things happen. A parent cannot think that the child will just figure it out. Worse, a parent cannot think that the child can just follow his heart and all will be well.

Furthermore, parents must recognize the need to both discipline (the rod) and verbally reprove the child (reproof). Both must occur as the child grows and ages. As the child ages and increases in the capacity to communicate and respond to the parent's heart-probing questions, open ended questions should regularly engage the child's heart.

Proverbs 18:4 says that words of a man's mouth are like deep waters. Furthermore, Proverbs 20:5 states that a plan in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out. Faithful parenting is not about external or *behavioral* change alone. Though parents wish to see behavior change, godly parents recognize that the root of behavior is the heart, the desires, the cravings, the longings. Wise parents will strive to ask questions that probe the heart so as to understand what the child *wants* so he can counsel the child appropriately so that the heart sin can be exposed and the gospel grace can be expounded.

Ultimately, parenting is an act of faith. It is a rescue mission. It is a marvelous opportunity for parents to obey God, love the children, evangelize their hearts, expose the sin biblically, and summon them to Christ through repentance and faith in God's grace. Parents do well to remember the words of Proverbs 14:26 which affirms that in the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge.

