

Spanking and the Inspiration of Scripture

Some time back I watched a program on television that focused on the question of how parents should raise their children. The program began by looking at the fact that throughout history parents have held corporal punishment (spanking, whipping, etc.) to be an acceptable form of discipline for children.

The program then pointed out that the Bible itself teaches physical punishment of children as a part of training children. The question was then asked—“*Can the Bible, history and tradition all be wrong?*” The remainder of the program featured the claims of “experts” that answered in no uncertain terms—“*Yes, spanking children is wrong!*”

This may seem like a rather tame statement at first, but I’m afraid that as Christians we may not realize what we are conceding if we: 1) Accept this view to be true, or, 2) Allow it to go unchallenged. What we say is that ...

- ◆ **God is wrong!**
- ◆ **He does not understand human nature and childhood development! Thus...**
- ◆ **His instructions must not be heeded on this subject!**

This may sound rather strong but I believe it is the logical consequence of accepting the view that corporal punishment is wrong.

We must first understand what Scripture claims about itself. It is not man’s commentary

on God’s will, but the mind of God revealed directly to man. 2 Peter 1:20-21 declares, “...No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (NKJV). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 asserts, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV). This makes it clear that Scripture is God’s word. One can either accept this or not, but we must acknowledge what the Bible claims about itself!

What are the claims of Scripture on the subject of corporal punishment?

1.) It is commanded by God—“Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die” (Proverbs 23:13).

2.) It is constructive to a child—“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15).

3.) It can be a demonstration of love—“He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24).

4.) It can lead to wisdom, and

5.) It is shameful to neglect it—“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child



left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15).

6.) It must not be destructive to the child—“Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction” (Prov. 19:18).

7.) It can benefit a child spiritually—“You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul; from hell [i.e. *sheol*]” (Proverbs 23:14).

8.) It can increase the joy of being a parent—“Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:17).

9.) It is a characteristic of God’s dealings with man—“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives” (Hebrews 12:6).

10.) Those without it are treated as illegitimate children—“But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8).

11.) Children who have received it owe their parents respect—“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect...” (Hebrews 12:9).

12.) Although intended to be unpleasant it can produce righteous behavior—“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).



All of this makes it abundantly clear that the Scripture teaches there is a place for the physical discipline of children in proper parenting. That is not to sanction all that is done in the name of discipline. Nor does it teach that abuse is to be treated lightly. But simply that

if we claim to accept the Bible as God's word we must accept with it what it teaches us about how to raise our children. This calls on us to place great confidence in the authority of Scripture, and sometimes to reject the notions of the so-called "experts."

But what about abuse?

Our generation has seen examples of some of the most horrifying treatment of children imaginable. Sometimes in the name of discipline and sometimes out of some perverse pleasure in inflicting pain, children have been brutalized. As Christians we must stand against this!

There is a difference between the moderate application of discomfort by loving parents and the enduring scars of brutality inflicted by disturbed and ungodly souls!

To keep this distinction clear, the following questions would be beneficial for us to ask ourselves the next time we discipline our children:

- ◆ **Why are we spanking them?** (Is it simply out of anger or in an attempt to shape their behavior?)

- ◆ **What do we want them to learn from this?** (Do we have a conscious objective?)
- ◆ **Have we given them plenty of positive reinforcement to balance things?** (Do they see our love for them?)
- ◆ **Do they understand our expectations of them?** (Have we talked with them enough?)
- ◆ **Are we dealing with them in a Christ-like manner?** (Are we helping them go to heaven?)

I pray that godly mothers and fathers who love the Lord will boldly and courageously stand up for the unfailing truth of God's word. At stake is not simply our belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, but our children themselves.

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