

God's Plan For Parenting

Spanking: A Biblical Perspective

When you hear the word "spanking", what **images** come to mind? What **emotions** do you experience? For you, is spanking a negative concept or a positive one? How we answer those questions is greatly influenced by how our parents disciplined us. Some of you have horrible memories. **It would be more accurate to say that you were beaten rather than spanked.**

But as I hope to make clear, corporal discipline, properly applied, does not fall into the category of child abuse. So what does the Bible have to say about corporal discipline? Let's find out.

Introduction

In our modern Western culture, spanking, as a disciplinary tool, has fallen into disrepute. An overview of parenting books published in the past 20 years reveals that corporal discipline is considered to be politically incorrect. To advocate its use is to invite ridicule and scorn. One popular pediatrician, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, my generation's Dr. Spock, reflects today's negative attitude toward spanking. Let me share some quotes from Dr. Brazelton which he insists reflect the posture of a parent who spansks their child.

I. A Contemporary View Of Corporal Discipline

Quote: "I could have talked with you, but I chose to settle this with violence and aggression."

Quote: "I don't value you as a person or I wouldn't treat you with so little respect."

Quote: "I am still bigger than you and can get away with it."

(Dr. T. Berry Brazelton)

Here are the assumptions Dr. Brazelton is making:

- Spanking is a form of violence and aggression against children.
- Spanking is demeaning to a child and damages their self-esteem.
- Spanking is a form of bullying.
- Spanking teaches children to settle differences with violence.

I would like to take a few minutes to deal with each of these common objections to spanking.

A. Spanking is a form of violence and aggression against children.

Let me say, right up front that I am not for child abuse. Abusing children should not be tolerated by anyone, for any reason. Our society has lumped together all degrees of physical discipline, both the appropriate and the inappropriate, and labeled it all child abuse. **Just because spanking can be abused, is no reason to eliminate the proper use of spanking as a form of discipline.** We've got to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water, so to speak. (Maybe I shouldn't use that analogy in this context. 😊)

Any form of discipline can be abused. For example, last week we talked about three forms of discipline.

1. Direct assertive Communication
2. Natural Consequences
3. Logical consequences

Can these forms of discipline, each recognized and approved by contemporary child behavioral theorist, be abused? You bet they can. Take **direct assertive communication** as an example. Can children be verbally abused for their misbehavior? Of course, it happens all the

time. **How about the use of natural consequences?** Last week we gave the example of Cheryl who didn't want to wear a sweater to school despite her mother's encouragement. Her mother wisely decides to let nature be the corrector of her daughter's foolish choice. Cheryl gets cold on the way to school. All day long she wishes she had a sweater. The next cool morning she wears a sweater. No problem.

But let's say Cheryl wants to attend a football game with a projected wind chill of 20 below. Does her mother allow her to go to the game without proper clothing? Of course not! To do so would be negligent and cruel. Has a parent ever been so negligent? You bet. Read the newspaper. Does that mean that we label all uses of "natural consequences" as child abuse and forbid its practice? Of course not!

My point is this: Just because a given form of discipline can be abused, is not just cause to forbid the proper and judicious use of that method.

Spanking, properly administered, is not abusive, neither is it characterized by violence. That is the premise of contemporary objections to spanking...that it is a form of violence. No, spanking, properly administered, is a symbol of my love and concern for my child's welfare. **It says "I love you enough not to allow you to flaunt my authority, and God's authority."**

Let me give you my definition of spanking...

Spanking: A measured amount of pain, delivered by a loving parent and appropriate to a child's age, administered for the purpose of correction and training.

Note that last phrase, "administered for the purpose of correction and training". Biblical spanking is not about punishment. It is not about venting anger. It is not about vengefulness. **It is about love, and**

caring, and correction and training and parental authority. In fact, rather than using the term "corporal punishment, I prefer to use the term "corporal discipline."

Last week we looked at a chart which contrasted discipline and punishment.

PUNISHMENT AND DISCIPLINE

	Punishment	Discipline
Purpose	To inflict penalty for an offense	To train for correction and maturity
Focus	Past misdeeds	Future correct deeds
Attitude	Hostility and frustration on the part of the parent	Love and concern on the part of the parent
Resulting Emotion in the Child	Fear and guilt	Security

Spanking, properly executed, gives a child a sense of security. They know where the boundaries are. They know who is in charge. They learn that there are consequences to their actions.

It is better to learn the **principle of cause and effect** (that **there are consequences for our actions**) as a young child, than to grow up to be rebellious and reap the negative consequences of poor adult decisions. It is better for a young child to experience a measured amount of pain-- carefully controlled by a loving parent-- than to reap the consequences of teenage and adult rebellion administered by those who care nothing about you.

Let me comment on another part of Dr. Brazelton's quote: He said,

"I could have talked with you, but I chose to settle this with violence and aggression."

Not only does he make the mistake of equating all spanking with violence, but he also makes the **naïve assumption that logic and reasoning are always sufficient to correct sinful, disrespectful behavior in a young child.** Sometimes it is, depending on the age of your child and their relative cognitive maturity, but oftentimes it is not. You can not always reason with a two or three year old, can you moms? Sometimes a measured amount of pain is the best way to establish your authority and to correct sinful behavior.

B. Spanking is demeaning and damages self-esteem.

Let me restate this in a way that we can all agree. "**Child abuse is demeaning and damages self-esteem.**" It is child abuse, not properly administered corporal discipline that we need to oppose. Now it needs to be done **privately**. You don't spank a child in front of his friends or other adults. You don't belittle the child for their misbehavior. You don't attack their worth as a human being.

Spanking should be combined with a lot of talking and clarifying, hugging and reaffirming. Spanking actually gives a child a sense of security. Listen to the psalmist...

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; **your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

Psalm 24:4

David found comfort under God's discipline and protection, and so do we. Corporal discipline affirms a child. It tells him or her that Mom and Dad love them too much to allow them to go their own way. It says, 'You can do better, I expect better from you. Your standards are too low. I want to help you raise them.'

Transition: How about the accusation that spanking is a form of parental bullying? What do we say to that?

C. Spanking is a form of parental bullying.

It can be. It all depends upon the posture of the parent who does the spanking. Is it done in an intimidating, frightening, forceful manner? Or is it carried out in love, in such a way as to reaffirm the parent's rightful, God-given, God ordained, position of authority in the family. My posture when spanking my kids was to have them sitting on my lap, loving them before administering the physical pain which will cause them to respect me and all rightful authority. It is certainly not bullying.

The argument I hear most often marshaled against corporal discipline is this...

D. Spanking teaches children to settle disputes with violence.

What is the recurring false assumption in this argument? The assumption again, is that spanking is a form of violence. As we have seen, biblical spanking has nothing to do with violence. It has everything to do with love, with standards, with consequences and with the proper recognition of parental authority. Spanking teaches children to respect authority, to obey the rules, and that there are painful consequences for disobedience.

Several years ago, we outlawed corporal discipline in the public school system. Let me ask you a question. Are our schools less violent today than they were when disrespectful, disruptive students were certain to meet the painful consequences of their actions??? It is self-evident. Teachers today are bailing out in record numbers. There is little discipline in the classroom. Not only are teachers unable to teach, many fear for their personal safety.

I believe that if parents were discharging their God-given responsibility to discipline their children, not just spanking, but all of the methods we have looked at, we wouldn't be facing this crisis in our schools. I'm not saying that they would be perfect environments, but you wouldn't need metal detectors, and security guards to patrol the halls. **I think a case could be made that our failure to exercise properly administered corporal discipline has contributed to the increased violence in our society. We are raising a generation of spoiled, rebellious kids.**

Transition: Well those are the objections commonly raised against spanking. Let's see what the Bible has to say about this controversial subject.

II. A Biblical View of Corporal Discipline

A. The Bible clearly teaches the concept of corporal discipline.

24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

Proverbs 13:24

18 Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.

Proverbs 19:18

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

Proverbs 22:15

¹³ Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. ¹⁴ Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

Proverbs 23:13-14

¹⁵ The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother.

Proverbs 29:15

¹⁷ Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.

Proverbs 29:17

Ok, we have established that spanking is a scriptural concept. And you can be sure that whatever the Bible advocates is designed to protect us, and to provide for us. What are some of the benefits derived from a properly administered spanking?

B. Spanking has several benefits

- 1. It reestablishes who is in charge.**
- 2. It restores the relationship. (Spanking as advocated here is a relational process, not just a swatting. More about that under Roman numeral III.)**
- 3. It reminds our children of what is right.**
- 4. It can be used to reprove and to correct.**

III. Guidelines for Corporal Discipline

A. General principles governing spanking

1. Don't spank in anger
2. Spanking is used more with toddlers and preschoolers, but it may also be used with elementary aged kids. (It should be completed by age 8-11) James Dobson (age 8); Dennis and Barbara Rainey (10-11)
3. Use spanking when a young child openly defies your authority.
4. Spanking should not be used indiscriminately. Parents should be in agreement about those attitudes and actions that are deserving of physical discipline.
5. Spanking is a procedure.

B. Spanking as a procedure

1. Always discipline in private.
2. Ask, "What is our rule?" or "What did Mommy or Daddy say?"
3. Ask, "What did you do?"
4. Explain that you love him and equate love with correction. Say, "I love you and want to help you learn to obey me next time."
5. Spank the child using a wooden spoon or object that will not harm.

Give him a few swift, but painful swats on the buttocks or legs. The child's angry mad cry should change to a softer, giving in cry. Here are some guidelines for spanking.

Age	# of Swats
1 year old.....	1 swat
2 year old.....	2 swats
3 year old.....	3 swats
4 year old.....	4 swats
5 year old.....	5 swats
6 year old.....	5 swats
7-11 year old.....	5 swats

- 6. Comfort the child immediately after spanking.
- 7. If necessary have the child make restitution.

IV. Concluding thoughts on parental discipline

A. Your character will do more to shape your child's character than anything you can do.

⁴⁰ A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.

John

6:40

B. You're not always going to get it right.

Ask God for forgiveness, ask your children for forgiveness, forgive yourself.

C. There will be times when you will not know what to do. In such cases pray. God delights in the prayers of helpless parents.

D. Parenting doesn't end when your children leave home.

Application/Challenge

1. Study the Biblical data on corporal discipline

2. Make a list of 6-8 offenses which automatically earn a spanking for your younger children.

3. Communicate the consequences of these offenses to your children.

4. Follow the listed guidelines for spanking.