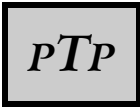


*The Discipline
of Children*



Present Truth Publishers

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The Discipline of Children

PROJECTS

Christian knowledge teaches a husband that his wife and children are more important than the various projects that men like to have in their lives. Hiel the Bethelite had such a project, but it was under a curse:

In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundation in Abiram his first-born, and set up its gates in Segub his youngest (1 Kings 16:34).

If we turned to the book of Joshua, we would see that Joshua pronounced a curse on whoever would rebuild Jericho, on his firstborn, on the last, and (by implication) on all in between. Many projects in this world are similarly under a curse. This man did not care about what Joshua had said concerning what would happen to his children. When his firstborn died, he kept building. He was more interested in his project than he was in his family. And they all died. But he did finish his project. How proud he must have been to have accomplished what he had set out to do! He was a man of success! It cost him his entire family and he did not seem to care. Fathers, let us beware. It is possible to undertake some kind of a project that so absorbs us that we can lose all our children to the world. Fathers, our children need to

learn what love is by watching us. We need to love their mother and we need to love them.

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

What can be done so as not to have our children be mere worldlings? Manoh was concerned even before their baby was born. So he asked the angel, What shall be the child's manner and his doing? (Judg. 13:12). The amazing thing is that the angel of the Lord never answered that question with a list of rules on child rearing. Instead, Manoh's wife was to refrain from wine and strong drink -- i.e., to be a Nazarite. What does that mean? She was to be completely separated unto the Lord. That ought to have been enough. Sadly, they did not act in accordance with the truth of separation. They reared Samson as a Nazarite outwardly only. Let us beware of a mere external conformity to the Word of God when the heart is not in it. She asked the right question and received the right answer: there has to be Nazarite separation unto the Lord in the home. There has to be that devotion to the Lord, that submission of will to Him. To be taken up with the pleasures of this world will prevent the kind of submission to the Lord that was shown in the long hair of the Nazarite. And he was not to touch those seven parts of the grape, from the pits to the skin, to water that grapes were in; namely, to leave this world and its pleasures to other people (they are ephemeral). Therefore, we indeed need to ask the Lord what the manner should be for our children. And the answer is that **you parents have to be for the Lord!** That

is how the children are going to be for the Lord! Don't ask for a magic formula for the children while you disobey God's prescribed way of submission and love.

Self-discipline on the part of the parents the entire life through is absolutely necessary. How can parents bring up a disciplined child if they themselves are not self-disciplined? The reason there are so many undisciplined children is because the parents are undisciplined. Do we understand that? Discipline embraces a godly, orderly life that has the Lord as the motive for all things that are done. Our children are watching the 'role model' set by the parents in the home. When they look into the Word of God, they should recognize the same pattern that they have seen in their home.

It requires much self-discipline to make a child obey the first time it is told to do something or stop something. This is training, too, in obeying God. On the other hand, obeying the second, third or fourth time after being told, when the voice is raised or 'threats' become loud, is hardly the prompt, loving obedience that ought to characterize children. And how often the tendency is to just let them have their own way. That is training also; training in how to get away with as much self-will as possible. Where does this tendency ultimately lead? Yes, it requires work and self-discipline to train a child in the kind of obedience that Scripture indicates.

Children will say that they did not hear you. When you know they did, and you properly, consistently correct them for what is not only disobedience but lying

also, it is truly wonderful how the hearing improves! It helps much to start from the beginning of their lives and be consistent.

How quickly children spot inconsistencies! When they find that we have allowed something that we know is not really pleasing to the Lord, they remember it for later use: “But on such an occasion you allowed such a thing.” What is the proper answer to such memories? I was wrong when I said it then, and I have confessed it so to the Lord. And that is the end of the discussion right there. When you honestly own up to it, what can they say? We must not be afraid to say, I’m sorry -- I was wrong, even to our children. Sometimes even we may punish them when we should not have done so. Or, perhaps we did it when we were really angry. Oh, they did something wrong, but we were exercising vengeance on them and God does not deal that way with us.

Train up the child according to the tenor of his way, and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

A distraught mother once told me that she had brought up all her children in the same way. Now, I am sure that it was not so. However, in her mind, she thought that she had brought up all her children in the same way. Yet, that is still a wrong notion because each child is an individual and has its own peculiar need of attention and training. Part of a parent’s responsibility is to be adaptable, to go into God’s presence to obtain the needed flexibility to train each child up according to the

tenor of each child's way. They are not all the same. We ought not to have in our homes a mere set of rules that we think will take care of this matter. Of, course there will be some rules, but we must not trust in them.

Instead, parents should recognize that "the way he should go" may vary from child to child because the tenor of each of their ways is different. It is when a child is young and tender that it is the wise time for the pruning that is needed. A growing child may be shaped. If the desired basic shape is not given to a sapling before it becomes large and mighty, then even with a chain saw you will have an terrible task on your hands. Similarly, a young child may be gently led whereas a great ordeal may be involved later -- if indeed it is not too late for any change at all. Even gentle reproofs may have more impact when the child is tender than when it has been long set in its self-willed ways, into which you have trained it by indulging its self-will-- when a severe hand has to be taken to it and may never be successful.

An important part of the training of children is found in the life of Timothy:

from a child thou hast known the sacred letters (2 Timothy 3:15).

It takes much labor to teach your children the holy Scriptures. For years and years, they need to be taught as they are able to take it in. They take it in by precept and by practice -- your practice first, and then leading them into it through your example of obedience to the Lord. The parent must adapt and get down on the level

that the children can understand in presenting to them the Scriptures. This is not easy to do and can be a learning experience for the parents' hearts also. God's plan for parents includes that they should learn from their children: when we see the flesh coming out in our children, we can recognize how the flesh operates in ourselves. If we are alert to it, we can see ourselves thus in our children and can humble ourselves before Him in order to be before God about those things in our own lives. In any case, how good it is to teach our children the stories in the Bible, and to go beyond the telling of stories to instruct them in the precepts and principles of morality that we learn in the Word of God. We need to be learning the Word of God for ourselves so that we can practice it and pass it on to our children and when they are old, they will not depart from it.

Also necessary is the rod, mentioned many times in the book of Proverbs.

Wounding stripes purge away evil (Prov. 20:30).

He that spareth his rod hateth his son (Prov. 13:24).

I once met a person who said, I love my child too much to spank it. No, he didn't. He loved himself. He was indulging self. Solomon wrote by inspiration that such a person *hates* his own son. But the rod **and reproof** (Prov. 29:15) are joined together. To give the rod and nothing but the rod (and bad temper) is not proper discipline. Discipline includes disciplining them, training them, correcting and chastening (as in Prov. 29:17).

But let us consider the rod: sometimes God brings the

rod down upon His people. Micah said,

Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it (Micah 6:9).

To feel it is not the same as to **hear** it. Children can be beaten so much that after a while they feel it but do not hear it. The reason is that their parents never said anything. They just beat them in temper over and over again. So the children learn to just live with it. But the rod *and reproof* give wisdom. Both are needed. Reproof means that we have to talk to the child. Not in temper. God does not chasten us in temper. Is it an angry Father that so deals with us? No, He has a firm hand attached to a loving heart and chastens us for our good (Heb. 12:10).

So the mother and the father should share in this discipline or the child may conclude: the one who spanks me is the one who does not love me. No doubt the father will take in hand the lead in this since he is the head and held answerable to God; and certainly deal with the more weighty matters; although disobedience in howsoever small a matter it may be is not to be tolerated. On the other hand, it is a grave mistake to allow a child to learn that only one of its parents loves it enough to give it the rod and reproof that God expects of parents.

To give them the reproof, we have to bring them into the presence of God so that they may know that what they have done is *wrong*, a sin. It was not merely a sin against man but an offense against the Lord as well (Psa. 51:4). We need to pray with them. If we require

the obedience spoken of above, talk with them about the Word of God and pray with them in joys and sorrows as well as disciplinary matters -- the number of required chastisements will doubtless decrease. But we have to take the time to do it, even though the family is large. And it will have a softening effect upon the child's heart. The rod strikes on the body but we want it to have an effect upon the soul. How can it change the soul unless that soul is brought into the presence of God? And the child has to be given to understand that the reason we are using the rod is because we have to do it because God says so: God's will is expressed in such chastening. Thus, the child is taught another practical example of obedience to God in the life of the parents. And *that* is just what the child needs to see; for children learn by objective demonstrations of principles.

A father, perhaps more than a mother, could be arbitrary. A mother might be inclined to be overindulgent. So we read,

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger (Col. 3:21)

You can just cut your children off, saying, No, no, you can't, (I have a project in hand I am enjoying), no, no. What does the child learn? It gets angry. And only the rod, only anger, only loss of temper, never any *winning* of that little heart, never cultivating understanding in that little heart that discipline comes in love and for its good -- and the little heart learns that Dad is just arbitrary. When it says in Hebrews that God chastens

us, it says that our fathers chastened us according to their pleasure, a statement of fact, not necessarily of approval. It is a shame if they did not chasten us for the pleasure of God. (Are we not to do all for the pleasure of God?) Then it adds, but He for our profit. When the rod and reproof go together, they are meant for the profit of the children. The parent is occupied with the child's good, not just in anger because the child interrupted a conversation or embarrassed the parent in public (Wait till I get my hands on you!). How could such an angry parent bring his child into the presence of God during the chastening?

Similarly, favoritism can ruin a family. It is said that someone once asked Mr. Darby if he loved all his brethren alike. Oh, yes, he said, but I take more pleasure in some than in others. God takes pleasure in obedient children but He loves them all equally. Beware that we love and value all our children equally and not play favorites! Of course, an obedient child may give us pleasure. But favoritism leads to resentment in all the siblings, often breaking out years later; and even after the parents have died. (Of course, there are siblings who merely imagine that their parents show favoritism.) Favoritism is indulging the parents' own pleasure instead of being here for the Lord. By not disciplining oneself, the parent chooses one of the children to be a favorite.

The natural tendency to favor a particularly good-looking child or grandchild is a very sad kind of favoritism. Could you imagine a professed Christian woman

entering her child in a beauty contest? I have known it done. And what is that but pride at the root? What hast thou but what thou hast received? (1 Cor. 4:7). A good mind comes from the Lord. Or, if “born with a silver spoon in your mouth,” who put it there? If you have ability, where did you get it from? If according to the particular standards of the U.S.A., you are good-looking (it is different among some South American Indians, who put increasingly larger disks in their lips to greatly make them protrude), where did you get it from? So human beauty is a thing to beware of. Worship God in the beauty of holiness (see Psa. 90:17; 96:6; 149:4). What is beautiful in God’s sight is holiness. He is holy and He dwells in holiness and that is beautiful. Several of David’s sons were handsome. But the sad root of their bad ends lay in David’s never putting a check on them.

NEGLECTING OUR CHILDREN

A child left to itself is such a common thing today! Dear king David did that: he was not a good father though he was an amazing king and a man after God’s own heart. If he had lived in our age, he could never have been an elder because his house was not in order (see 1 Tim. 3). David was told that he would have to give up four lambs for the one that he took from Urijah: the baby of Bathsheba (or perhaps Chileab the firstborn), then Amnon (slain by Absalom), then Absalom (slain by Joab), then Adonijah. In these sons of David, we parents may learn the folly of neglecting and/or indulging

our children when the rod and reproof are needed.

Amnon was David's second son and he sinned against his half-sister (a full sister to Absalom). When David heard all these things he was very angry. And what did he do about it? Exactly zero, as they say. The fact that he had compromised himself with Bathsheba may have had something to do with it. In 2 Sam.13, we read how the third son killed the second one and fled to the home of his mother who was from another kingdom. And while he was there, David mourned for his son every day. The soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom. Now it is all right to have a godly longing for a son that goes into sin. But was David's longing a right one, a right kind? Look at the sequel. I have the thought that Absalom was favorite number one.

Now, Joab was a foxy man, not a man of God at all. Amazingly, he did not fall away with Absalom although he had virtually set him up. (But he did fall away with Adonijah.) And here he discerned that David had a weak heart towards his children. He could tell that David did not really want to do anything against Absalom. So in order to ingratiate himself with David, he prompted the woman of Tekoa to say a parable in order to play upon David's disposition. On Absalom's return David confined him to his house, until finally the king kissed Absalom (2 Sam.14:33). Was there anything righteous in that? Had anything changed? Does the mere passage of time change the character of a moral action? Was Absalom repentant? Not at all. But this is the result of

favoritism and unrighteousness in the family. The moral consequence was seen in Absalom's rebellion. The moral order is this: David was angry, then he showed favoritism, then he kissed unrighteously, then he fled from him, then he was put to shame by his son sinning in the sight of all Israel. This progression illustrates the truth that whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. Mercy *can* come in, but there is such a thing as really falling down before God in repentance, pleading with Him on the basis of His mercies. David knew how to do that: see Psa.51. But he did not do so in the case of Absalom (cp. Psa. 3 with Psa. 51). The end of Absalom came in ch. 18. Then David had to weep again (2 Sam. 18:33; 19:4). Where was Absalom? He was dead, **on his way to the pit**. How solemn! And David knew it. Absalom was in Sheol, waiting for the great white throne judgment -- not in paradise. It was too late, too late, too late. This is the end of favoritism. This is the end of never displeasing your child, of never saying, why do you do this?-- though even that is insufficient.

The words of Adonijah, **I will** be king, had their moral origin in the words his father never said to him.

And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, why hast thou done so? (1 Kings 1:6).

His father did not question anything about him, he just left him to himself. So Adonijah brought his mother to shame. Why does it say so of the mother especially? Does not the father feel the shame, too? Yes, but a devoted mother lavishes much care upon her child and

has a profound effect upon it to rear it for God, forming its character. Yet the father is ultimately responsible as David was in the case of Adonijah. David was in this case something like Eli, whose sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. Eli said, Why do you do that? and that was some reproof. But the *rod and reproof* were not in the house of Eli. Just reproof is not enough. You ought not just apply the rod to children, and on the other hand, you ought not merely talk to them either. We must do both; and we **must lovingly pray and read** with them, bring them into the presence of God so that they may learn what sins and sin are in His presence. They must be brought to repentance.

Now, a practical point. In administering the rod, with patience, prayer, and for the child's good, be aware that the Creator has provided a suitable place, somewhat low and to the rear on the body, where this can be administered. Be aware also that marks elsewhere may be seen and that then you may find yourself being investigated by a Department of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) for possible child abuse. Exercise godly concern and care. But before we conclude, consider the following case.

Mr. J. D., who drove to work with several others and myself, had bought a new automobile, his wife having *dictated* the make and model. One rider begged him to let us ride to work in that new car just one time so we could see how it performed. She won't let me have it, he invariably replied. One morning Mrs. D. dropped him

off for the car pool and that rider called out the window, Mrs. D., please let J. use the car for a day. J. D.'s 16 year old daughter, who was in the car with her mother, put her head out of the window, thrust her lower lip forward, and sneeringly shouted, He can't have it. I saw and heard it all. In our car, J. D. said to that rider, I *told* you. Shortly after, I lost track of J. D. for several years when, behold, one of my fellow workers had a New York newspaper open to the center and there was a full page picture of J. D. sitting down and his wife standing on his right, with her hand on his left shoulder. That daughter had a test performed on a lump on her neck several weeks previously and before a report came back saying she had cancer, she ran off -- to the an unsavory element in New York, they thought. Hence, an appeal was made in the newspaper for her to return. And, oh, how pathetic -- under the parents' picture was a quotation, a question they asked: **where did we go wrong?** I wonder how often that daughter shot out that lip when she was small -- how cute they say -- how many tantrums she threw (one is too many) -- how many times she back-talked, etc. Imagine! People laugh at pouting and tantrums.

Yes, these people were not the Lord's; but God will require much more of His own, as in David's case. To presume upon His grace to keep your children from being mere worldlings who know not God, while ignoring those moral ways through which He works, as He has directed us in His word, is presumption and superstition.

CONCLUSION

We parents have to be before the Lord to know how to live in our family relationships because we are not sufficient for them. But we have the Lord, we have His Word, we have the Holy Spirit within us, and He is for us. He wants us to listen to His Word. God is our Father and we dwell in His family and He has a firm hand attached to a loving heart. And He wants us to know that He loves us. He may pass us through a chastening but we know that what was in His heart was our good that we might come into a deeper fellowship with Him. He is seeking that we might be more like the Lord Jesus. That is an example for us as parents. Do we desire that for our children? It means denying self. We have to be exercised before the Lord that we should be disciplined mothers, fathers, husbands, and wives ourselves in the family of God in order that we may be able to exercise this same discipline towards those whom He has put in our trust.

Lastly we may note that many people do not want children at all because children would spoil their pleasures and the doing of “their own thing.” But:

Lo, children are an inheritance from Jehovah (Psalm 127:3).

There is an inheritance that the Lord gives us, and it is our children. The Lord looks at them as a blessing that He gives us. They are not to be despised. Their little souls are to be brought up for Him. It may be that no one around us in the world is ever saved through our

testimony, but the Lord wants to save every one of the souls of our children in our households. “Come thou and all thy house into the ark.” Has your soul, by faith, laid hold of that? God delights to bless in households. If someone else does not have the faith for it, I can’t help it, though I sorrow for them. But I am convinced from God’s Word that He delights to bless households. However, there are moral ways by which God brings His purposes to pass. He wants us to so love our children and to so let go of the world and all its projects, cleaving to Him with purpose of heart, that our families should be brought to the Lord. Let us have faith, then, to appropriate God’s blessings in accordance with His moral ways with us.

-- R. A. Huebner



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