

Spanking Is Biblical

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Spanking is not child abuse. This must be stated right up front; for some parents, in their self-delusion, think that striking a child out of anger is proper discipline. Not in the least. Too often, a parent has been lazy in dealing with a misbehaving child, occasionally yelling and threatening the little one, until the misbehavior can no longer be ignored, and in heated anger, the parent strikes the child. That is selfish and evil, and an indication that the parent himself needs to grow up. True spanking smarts, but does not injure.

Moreover, spanking is a form of teaching—of disciplining and correcting a child—not a form of punishment, let alone a pressure valve for an angry parent to cork disturbing noise. Please note: Judges punish; parents correct. As parents, it is our God-given responsibility to train a child in the way of righteousness. What a weighty responsibility! We call this duty “discipline” or “training,” for it involves both positive development and negative correction, depending on the situation at hand. This two-fold aspect is easily seen in sports, where coaches develop their player’s skills and correct their bad habits. Once we see the two-fold nature of our task, spanking begins to take its proper place. Let me explain what this looks like for older pre-school and grade-school children.

First, it is our responsibility to develop our children’s character through both teaching and guided experiences. God did this with His children in the Wilderness, when He both taught them through Moses and forced them to rely on Him for bread (see Deuteronomy 8:1-5). When our children disobey, it is our responsibility to correct them through both teaching and experience. The teaching is called “reproof” (Proverbs 29:15). We correct our children’s thinking, telling them where they are deceived and then giving them the facts. Reproof is very important, for it addresses the possibility that the child simply misunderstood us, and it also enables a child to make an informed decision, either to obey or disobey. If the child disobeys, he is rebelling against our word and must be corrected by the experience of the “rod” (Proverbs 29:15); therefore, we must spank him. Normally, it is best to follow this two-step process of reproof and rod. The only exceptions may be when the child has lied, which cannot be tolerated, or when he has physically harmed another child, which also cannot be tolerated and must be stopped.

At this point, you may be thinking that a “time-out” would work fine. Granted, compared to child abuse, a time-out is wonderful. In fact, for children recently adopted out of abusive environments, a time-out may be the only way to go until he is convinced that you love him. Moreover, for parents who grew up with true child abuse, spanking will be very difficult to do; and if that is you, I hope to help you by giving you some guidelines. Given these qualifications, let me assert plainly, however, that correction without physical smarting is not loving your child. The Bible is clear: “He that spares the rod *hates* his son; but he that loves him dawns to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24). There is something about a little physical pain that typically does wonders on rebellion. In another place, God says, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). This is the way God disciplines His children. When I do wrong, He does not just put me in my room for a week; He often makes me feel some pain in my health, my home, or my finances (see Proverbs 3:11-12). So should we.

So how do we go about spanking? Real brief, let me explain how I was taught by two excellent little books. First, the book *Withhold Not Correction*, by pastor Bruce Ray, taught me to ask my child questions before spanking him. Instead of reacting in anger, I need to take my child aside privately, get down on his level, and look him eye-to-eye and ask him, “What did you do?” This gives him opportunity to confess. Once he does, I then ask him, “Was that right or wrong?” This helps to eliminate later resentment, as if I somehow wronged him by spanking him. Finally, once he has admitted to wrongdoing, I ask him, “What does God say that Daddy must do?” Please note, the question is not what I prefer to do, but what I must do due to God’s command. Since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, our children must see God’s authority behind our word and deed (Proverbs 9:10). At this point, the child knows that his wrongdoing demands a spanking and he acknowledges it verbally. If there is any resistance, that is further rebellion and calls for added spankings.

All of this occurs before the spanking, but it is so important, for the goal is not simply to get the child to stop misbehaving, but to teach him, to *train* him. In fact, one parenting message I listened to years ago made the excellent point, that much correction would be eliminated if we better filled our lives with more verbal instruction and (I would add) our own consistent behavior. Therefore, we should take the time to *teach* before we spank.

Once we have asked the questions, we spank the child—not through jeans and a diaper, as I have seen some do (how can that smart?), but on bare enough conditions to make the child feel a smarting pain, but with no injury. In his book *Spanking*, Roy Lessin cautions against two extremes. On the one hand, we must spank the child enough to drive the rebellion away, as something not worth its price tag. On the other hand, we must not spank too much, or we truly do hurt the child and fail to communicate love. Great wisdom from the Lord is needed here, for extremes on either end will produce resentment. Once finished, I like to take my little one onto my knee, hold him close, and pray for him, speaking of the suffering love of Jesus for sinners. Moreover, I also tell him to stop crying, for everything is over. I forgive him and I love him. This sense of finality, incidentally, is one huge advantage that spanking has over a time-out, which often lets the child brood without removing the attitude of resentment or restoring the good feelings between child and parent.

Again, how important is spanking? The Proverbs say that it may make the difference between life and death, perhaps even between heaven and hell (cf. Proverbs 23:13-14). Consider: “How will my children receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, if they do not understand either authority or sin?” God bless you, therefore, in your pursuit of responsible, loving discipline.