

## **Faithfulness Is Not Leaving a Child to Himself**

Galatians 5:22; Proverbs 29:15

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What happens when parents leave a child to himself to speak and to behave as the child wants at home? You have what has become a common incident of a child throwing a temper tantrum in public, bringing great shame not only the child, but especially on the parents who act as though there is nothing that they can do. Such behavior is the expression of the sinful depravity of a child, but it is also the expression of sinful neglect on the part of parents who do not take seriously their duty to train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord within the context of the family. For the home is the primary training ground for children. If faithfulness in training our children is neglected at home, we ought to expect that we will be embarrassed in public. At such times, it is the child that is being consistent, and it is we, the parents, that are being inconsistent. The child is simply behaving in public as he/she behaves at home. On the other hand, the parent is expecting the child to behave differently in public than he/she behaves at home.

Dear Christian parents, to the degree that we are bearing the fruit of faithfulness in our parenting, we can (by God's grace) experience great joy and honor by the kind, respectful, and godly behavior displayed in the lives of their children. The Spirit of God teaches from our text today that you play an important role in training your children to either bring you joy or shame.

If we would have children that are wise and bring us joy rather than shame, how are our children to be trained? According to our text, (1) The Fruit of Faithfulness Disciplines in both Deed and in Word ("The rod and reproof give wisdom" Proverbs 29:15); (2) The Fruit of Faithfulness Leaves Not a Child to Himself ("But a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" Proverbs 29:15).

### **I. The Fruit of Faithfulness Trains in Deed and in Word ("The rod and reproof give wisdom" Proverbs 29:15).**

A. The very first thing I would note is that training our children to be wise and not foolish is not like a mathematical formula: the rod + reproof = wisdom.

1. The rod and reproof are means that God has given to us (as parents) in order to train our children, but the outcome of godly wisdom in our children is ultimately the result of God's grace and power working in their lives and applying the loving use of the rod and reproof in such a way as to bring forth the fruit of wisdom. In other words, it our responsibility to be faithful in the means God has ordained in training our children, but it is God that brings forth the increase of godly wisdom in our children (1 Corinthians 3:6).

2. You see, dear ones, God receives all of the glory for the outcome in the lives of our children. We are only tools that God uses, and the rod and reproof are means that God uses, but it is God (and only God) that brings forth faith in Christ, love for God, and wisdom in the lives of our children. Apart from the grace of God, no amount of effort in faithfully training our children would bring forth wisdom in them (due to their natural sinful hearts). The use of the rod and reproof (the use of baptism, the use of family worship, the use of a Christian education) without prayer, without crying out to God for the effectual work of His Spirit in the lives of our children, will not issue in wisdom.

B. Let us consider the use of these two means of training our children that God gives to us as Christian parents in order that our children might become wise.

1. **The rod gives wisdom.**

a. Wisdom in our children is the goal herein stated by the Holy Spirit through Solomon. Wisdom includes knowledge of God's Word (knowledge of the gospel, knowledge of God's commandments), but wisdom goes beyond mere intellectual knowledge; godly wisdom faithfully applies that knowledge to every area of our lives as Christians. This is the goal of parenting: namely, that our children would be wise (not simply be smart, not simply be able to memorize Scripture and the Shorter Catechism, but that they might be wise in applying what they learn to their own lives and their relationship to Christ and in applying what they learn in the many and varied situations of life they will face).

b. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 9:10). That is to say that heavenly wisdom begins in our lives by fearing God (not with a slavish, cowering fear), but a holy fear that takes God seriously, takes His warnings seriously, takes His promises seriously, and holds the Lord in great awe and wonder for who He is and what He has done in creation, providence, and redemption. A heavenly wisdom begins with a holy and loving awe of God (that He is not simply **awesome** and worthy of some awe; but that he is **awful** and is worthy of full awe).

c. Whereas many psychologists, teachers, civil, and ecclesiastical leaders tell us that spanking will destroy our children's joy and security, stifle their creativity and expression, and cause them to be violent and abusive; the Lord God speaking through Solomon tells us that the rod (when lovingly, faithfully, and reasonably administered) is a means of giving wisdom to our children. Dear parents, who will you believe in this matter? The all-knowing and all-wise God who cannot lie or some so-called expert whose antichristian views of child training are leading millions of children down the paths to destruction? The all-wise God says in Proverbs 22:15: "Foolishness is bound (i.e. chained) in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

d. The rod stands here in Proverbs 29:15 as representative of all physical discipline that we as parents may take to train our children (as opposed to verbal discipline and correction). The rod speaks of the full extent of physical discipline that a parent may use in the training of a child (the full extent of the civil magistrate in punishing criminals is the sword—death, Romans 13:4).

(1) And yet, just because the rod is available as the full extent of physical discipline does not mean that the rod is the only means of physical discipline available to parents (other means of physical discipline may include, separation from others, restriction of privileges, doing certain chores, etc.), any more than the sword (capital punishment is the only way that a civil magistrate may punish a criminal). The rod of correction in the hands of a father or mother does not require them to use the rod for every act of disobedience, but permits degrees of discipline with spanking being the full extent to which discipline may go.

(2) The goal of discipline is that the child may learn wisdom, and we must apply that form of physical discipline that is most effective with our children and most needed in a particular situation. For example, if a child is forgetful or distracted but not obstinately rebellious or violently angry, the rod is most likely not the means of discipline that is needed in that case. However, when a child becomes obstinately rebellious and refuses to obey with great disrespect or when the child lashes out in angry violence at others a more severe means of discipline will be needed to make the point that this behavior is unacceptable to you as a parent and unacceptable to God.

(3) A child who is being spanked (or is receiving some form of physical discipline) should be able to understand to some degree for what he/she is being disciplined. There should be some connection between the understanding of the child and the discipline of the child in order for the discipline to be effective. It should be administered in the atmosphere of love and the gospel, not in the atmosphere of rage and perfectionism. Through the constant use of spanking for every act of disobedience, our children may in fact grow callous to the strokes they are given. They may even build up a stronger resistance to our authority and harden their hearts to the truth. If parents would capture and lead the hearts

of their children, there must be reasonableness and not harshness to the discipline that is administered. The discipline must fit the act, degree of disobedience, and age of the child.

e. But what is so important to remember about the rod (physical discipline) is that it is not intended here by God to be a cruel and unusual tool of VINDICTIVE PUNISHMENT (whereby we seek to get even with our child for having disobeyed us). Rather the rod (physical discipline) is a useful and profitable tool of RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE. The parent is not administering retributive justice, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. That is what a civil magistrate is to do: to repay evil with a just punishment (“for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” according to Romans 13:4). To the contrary, when a parent uses the rod in chastening his/her children, the goal of the parent is to teach and to train them in the ways of righteousness and truth. The goal in loving discipline is not judgment and condemnation, but correction and edification. Thus, biblical discipline is always to be administered in love and not in a fit of anger. The surest way to make a child despise us and harden his/her heart to discipline is to administer it in anger and to make the child think that you are getting even with him, rather than assuring him/her of your love (Colossians 3:21).

## 2. **Reproof gives wisdom.**

a. It is not only the “rod” that gives wisdom, but the “rod and reproof”. Whereas the rod in Proverbs 29:15 focuses on the outward, physical aspects of loving discipline, reproof considers more the verbal instruction and correction of loving discipline.

b. Dear ones, it is possible (in various circumstances) that a parent may only need to verbally reprove the child (without the use of the rod) for some misbehavior. But a parent must never administer the rod to a child without verbal correction and instruction administered in love and in the atmosphere of the gospel (confession and forgiveness). Is it time consuming to give loving verbal reproof and instruction when discipline is administered? Yes. Does it require diligence and consistency on a parent’s part? Certainly! But how your child will profit from the time you take not only to administer the rod, but also the time you take to explain in tender love why discipline is being administered. To administer the rod (physical discipline) without loving reproof is to consign a child to ignorance as to what he/she has done wrong, why it is wrong, and who has been wronged. It is to send your child running from you rather than fleeing to you. It is to harden his/her heart rather than to soften it. Dear ones, our Heavenly Father not only chastens us, but He also corrects us and instructs us by His Word and Spirit (Hebrews 12:5-6). Use the Scripture in your verbal corrections, and let your children know that they have not only disobeyed you as a parent, but they have sinned against God.

c. Our verbal reproof must be administered in tender love and not in fits of anger. Thus, calling our children names (like stupid, idiot, or other choice names), or uttering angry words (like “I hate you” or “I wish I had never had you”) are not words of loving correction. The use of such names and words uttered in anger are like swords to the heart. Most children would rather incur the sting of the rod than the sword of the tongue. For the effects of the rod heal more quickly than the effects of angry, bitter words. Dear ones, not only should correction be given, but encouragement as well. Those who have no encouragement to keep on working or encouragement when a job is done well will likely become very discouraged and want to give up.

d. Dear ones, much more time should proportionately be spent using verbal correction than using the rod. It’s much easier in some ways to simply get it over with and spank your child, but the fruit of faithfulness is manifested in patiently reproving and then spanking (if necessary), and it will be the far more profitable use of time in the long run. Have you ever considered that God is growing you, as a parent, in the fruit of faithfulness in lovingly and patiently disciplining your children as a means of sanctification in your life as much as a means of sanctification in your child’s life? The Lord is teaching you faithfulness, patience, self-control, love, and mercy as you take the time to instruct, pray with, and lead your

child in confession of sin and forgiveness of sin. Are you frustrating God's means of sanctification in your life or are you growing by means of it?

## **II. The Fruit of Faithfulness Leaves Not a Child to Himself ("But a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" Proverbs 29:15).**

A. A child is left to himself when he is left to indulge his own desires, his own words, his own behavior without loving discipline (in the form of the rod and reproof). The word used here in the Hebrew language is also used for cattle who pasture at their own liberty and without any restraint. A child left to himself will bring grief, sorrow, and shame to a mother (and no doubt to a father as well), but perhaps in a particular way to a mother in as much as she bore this child in her womb and gave birth to him/her. If we leave even our garden to itself, the weeds will take over and choke out the vegetables. How much more this is true of children.

B. Let us not imagine that God ordinarily saves our children and makes them a blessing to Himself, to us as parents, and to others, if we simply leave them without the loving use of the rod and reproof. The words spoken about Eli, the priest, should forever be burned upon our memories (1 Samuel 3:13). We are not told that Eli instructed his sons in that which is evil. We are not told that Eli did set a bad example before his sons. Eli taught his sons what was right and even reproved them, but that apparently was all that he did (1 Samuel 2:22-25). Eli did not restrain his sons (by means of some physical discipline and restraint when they were young). Rather Eli left them to themselves (to run their own course in life). Eli may have set boundaries for his sons, but he did not enforce those boundaries when they were young. Dear ones, if all we do is talk, but do not enforce the good and reasonable boundaries that God has given to us, we will teach our children that there really are no consequences to disobedience to parents (or to any other lawful authority, especially the Lord).

C. If we (as Christian parents) would not leave our children unrestrained and to themselves, what guidelines in loving discipline should we follow?

1. Be clear in what you ask your child to do. At times, it is not so much a case of disobedience as it is a case of misunderstanding. End your instructions by asking him/her, "Do you understand?" Be kind in your words (rather than barking out orders). If you want your children to show good manners, show good manners in the way you treat them. And when your instructions are followed look for the opportunity to express to them your appreciation.

2. Before administering discipline, be sure that an express violation of your word or God's Word has been committed. Don't rashly administer discipline. Treat your child with fairness. Don't discipline him/her for mere suspicions you might have. Discipline the child when it is clear that he/she has expressly disobeyed.

3. Don't utter endless threats about the discipline to come (which in fact may never come or may be so long delayed that the child forgets why he/she is being disciplined). Parents who merely threaten their children are teaching them not to trust them. Administer the discipline as soon as you are able to do so for the child's profit, so that the child connects the discipline he/she receives with the act of disobedience. Otherwise, the discipline will lose its effectiveness.

4. Remember there are degrees of discipline that may be used in the home (verbal reproof, loss of privileges, separation from friends, added responsibilities, and spanking—and there are even degrees in spanking as well). I would submit that as parents we should give a stronger dose of discipline to flagrant offenses such as blasphemy, cursing, clear disrespect, violence, lying, stealing, and any willful, obstinate acts of disobedience. Whereas, various infirmities and weaknesses such as mere forgetfulness,

rashness, or unintentional acts on the part of our children should be treated less severely. Likewise, a milder form of discipline should be used for a first time violation, but you may find it necessary to increase the degree of discipline for repeated and willful acts of disobedience.

5. Be liberal and generous in your encouragement, commendation, expressions of love, and even rewarding children for jobs well done. Such love will have the effect of making any discipline they receive much more effective and seen as an expression of love in capturing and leading their hearts and not simply their bodies.

6. If you would train your children to behave properly in public, you must be consistent in giving them that same training at home. When parents do not take the behavior of their children seriously in the privacy of the home, why should parents be surprised when the children do not take their own behavior seriously in public? Dear parents, we should not become so involved in our fellowship after worship that we lose sight of what our children are doing. Good manners in public begin in the home (e.g. children learn how to sit quietly in public worship by learning how to sit quietly in family worship).

7. Make your restorative discipline an opportunity to present the gospel of salvation to your child (by means of confession of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration). Reassure them that the Lord forgives us as we come to him with a humble heart and seek His forgiveness. And always end discipline with a big hug and kiss followed by, "I love you."

D. Dear parents, some of you may say that you did not have the example of Christian parents from whom to learn how to lead your child to wisdom. But there is hope because you have the example of your Heavenly Father (Hebrews 12:5-6). And moreover there is hope for you, dear parents, regardless of what you were taught or regardless of how you were treated in your home because the same wisdom that you desire for your child is available to you. I ask you, who is called "wisdom" in the Scriptures? Is the Lord Jesus not our Wisdom according to 1 Corinthians 1:30? Moreover, God's promise to us in James 1:5-6 is that if we lack wisdom, let us pour out our hearts in faith to Him to supply the wisdom we may not have received as a child, but the wisdom which is now ours in Christ Jesus. Thus, there is certain hope that regardless of the home in which you were raised, you by God's gracious work in your life can have a Christian home, can grow in faithfulness and in wisdom, and can give your children that wisdom in Christ that you did not learn or receive as a child. For Christ is your wisdom. Grow in Christ and you will grow in wisdom.

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