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"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

Parental Discipline

Lesson Subject: Parents nurture their children through instruction and correction.

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Topic: Children; Family; Home.

God said, *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6). This injunction teaches two things: (1) The parent is to train a child for years as he grows toward maturity. (2) The influence of childhood training will remain with a person throughout his life. Training a child is sometimes unpleasant, often difficult, but always necessary.

Training up a child involves more than spanking him if he does wrong. Child training includes all a parent does to teach a child to respect authority and discipline himself according to the laws of God and man. The goal is to send out into society a self-disciplined person who trusts and serves God. That end is worth all the effort required to produce it.

The Bible tells us how to raise a child properly: (1) Love him sincerely (Ephesians 6:4). (2) Teach him diligently (Ephesians 6:4). (3) Train him constantly (Proverbs 22:6). (4) Discipline him properly (Proverbs 29:17). It is concerning the discipline that this study is devoted.

I. DISCIPLINE LOVINGLY (Hebrews 12:5-7)

Discipline is a sign of love. *"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Hebrews 12:6). God's example is sufficient instruction for us.

A. Loving discipline is required in the Scriptures. Proverbs 13:24 reads, *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* What does that mean? It means that allowing a child to grow without discipline is not a sign of love. It is a wrong done to the child, as if one hates him. Love motivates the guardian to be diligent in corrective discipline as the need arises. Occasionally a parent will say, "I love my child so much I cannot say no to him." That is not love to the child; it is weakness in the parent. Love sometimes motivates a no. Love must be tough enough to say no, yet tender enough to feel sympathy.

B. Loving discipline is proven in life. True love will say, "I love you too much to permit you to _____" when there is wrong in the life of the child. A little boy has a new tricycle. The easiest place to ride it is the middle of the street. Will a loving mother let the child ride in the street, when cars are passing and there is danger of injury? No! She loves the child too much to permit that. He may cry when he is required to stay out of the street, but love will demand that he do so. Discipline is not a sign that love is gone. It may be that love is most evident when discipline is being administered. Remember that when you have to administer discipline to your child, or when you are under the discipline of God.

II. DISCIPLINE CONSISTENTLY (Hebrews 12:9, 10) A great problem in the parental discipline of children is a lack of consistency. Here are three principles which you may use in disciplining your children or in teaching your children how to discipline their children in time to come.

A. Discipline according to need, not according to your feelings. On a "bad" day, a parent may soundly spank a child for an act which only brings a mild rebuke on a "good" day. The child does not learn from that inconsistency. It is wise never to spank a child when you are angry. The punishment could turn out to be more severe than it would have been if you had waited until your anger subsided. If the discipline is suited to the need of the child, it will be consistent. If it is suited to the emotion of the parent, it will be quite inconsistent. Beware at this point.

B. Discipline for the right purposes. The Bible gives four great purposes for disciplining children.

1. Discipline is to give wisdom to the child. *"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame"* (Proverbs 29:15). The "rod" is physical punishment. "Reproof" is instruction by words. We will see how the two work together later in this study.

2. Discipline is to drive away foolishness. *"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him"*

(Proverbs 22:15). The folly which is innate in a child is removed by the rod and instruction. Proper discipline matures a child.

3. Discipline is to deliver the soul. *"Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell"* (Proverbs 23:14). How can that be? Very simply, the child that is not taught to respect the authority of his parents will not respect the authority of God. He will rebel against God and end up in hell. What a reason that is to discipline!

4. Discipline is to make the child a joy to his parents. *"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul"* (Proverbs 29:17). It is a delight to the parents' souls to see their children grow to maturity, select good partners in marriage, settle in honorable professions, and establish homes of their own.

C. Discipline before it is too late. Child psychologists tell us that the patterns are set in a child's life between eighteen and thirty-six months of age. Proverbs 13:24 says that he who loves his child will discipline him *"betimes."* That term is sometimes translated "early." The discipline must start early in life in order for it to help the child establish good patterns in his life. The "child" is the one who needs discipline. By the time young adulthood is reached, the parents have largely lost control if discipline was not given earlier.

A lady asked a minister when she should begin to teach her child. He asked how old the child was. She said, "Three years." He replied, "You have already lost three of the best years." Begin early teaching your child.

III. DISCIPLINE PURPOSEFULLY (Hebrews 12:10, 11)

Our human discipline is imperfect at best. The Bible says of parents, "They verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). Yes, we discipline "after (our) own pleasure," but God does it "for our profit." We need to ask God for wisdom in the discipline of our children.

A. Our purpose is to develop the child into a well disciplined, self-disciplined, maturing person. It is important, therefore, that the responsibility for making decisions be shifted from parent to child as soon as his maturity permits. Teach the benefits of discipline while it is administered.

B. Our purpose is to send out into society a law-abiding citizen who has respect for authority and those in authority. Somewhere each person must learn to submit to authority. He will do it under his parent's loving care, under a teacher in school, from an officer of the law, or in prison. It is better

for him to learn that lesson from a loving parent. Rebellion against duly constituted authority (of parents, teachers, or officers of government) is rebellion against God (Romans 13:1). The parent who truly loves his child will train him before he enters the “real” world where he has to live day by day.

C. Our purpose is to use methods of discipline which produce good results. Many guidelines should be observed. Here are a few expressed negatively: (1) Do not nag before and after discipline. (2) Do not threaten punishment without administering it. (3) Do not punish when you are angry. (4) Do not yell as a form of discipline, but always speak when your emotions are under control. (5) Do not shift responsibility to the other parent. (6) Do not admit defeat if you have a child who is difficult to control. (7) Do not fail to bring God into your efforts to train up your child. (Sometimes praying with a child about a discipline problem is long remembered.) Proper discipline will lead your child to respect and love you and to reverence God. Let that be one goal in your efforts of discipline.

IV. DISCIPLINE PERSONALLY (Hebrews 12:12-16)

A. Be sure you are under the discipline of God. Otherwise, you will fail in properly administering discipline and in setting an example of what a disciplined life is like.

Here are some things that one who is under the discipline of God will do. (1) Be strong to “*lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees*” (verse 12). (2) Walk straight. “*Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed*” (verse 13). “That which is lame” may be your own child. (3) Keep a calm spirit to “*follow peace with all men, and holiness*” (verse 14). A spirit of anger, resentment, or even embarrassment will cause one to err in discipline. (4) Keep right with God. Without holiness no one can see God (verse 14). Cultivate that grace before Him and your family. (5) Guard against a bad spirit, “*lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled*” (verse 15).

A parent teaches by word and deed. He disciplines by act and attitude. Be disciplined before you seek to discipline.

B. Adapt the discipline to the child's temperament. There are several kinds of discipline: (1) Verbal instruction is a form of discipline. Explain the wrong action, why it is wrong, and show what the better course is. (2) Withdrawal of privileges is a form of discipline. God disciplined Moses by refusing permission for him to enter Canaan. (3) Spanking is a form of

discipline. The Bible speaks often of the "*rod*" in discipline. That indicates two things. (a) Spanking is a proper form of punishment. (b) A neutral object, not the hand, should be used in administering a spanking. Let the hand express affection and provision; let another object administer pain.

V. DISCIPLINE HOLILY

The parent must remember that he is God's agent in administering discipline to a child. And he must remember that he is under the discipline of God. Therefore, he should seek to discipline his children like God disciplines him.

Discipline is never to vent personal frustration or cover personal embarrassment at the misbehavior of the child. It should always be for the benefit of the child just as God always disciplines us "*for our profit*" (Hebrews 12:10). If a parent errs in the discipline of his child, God will discipline him.

It is appropriate for the parent to pray much about how he trains his child. Let him walk in the way that he is training the child to walk. As one has said, "Good counsel is confusing, but example is always clear." He who is disciplined under God can discipline those who are under him.

We are God's agents in this world. Here is the principle by which we should live: "*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (I Corinthians 10:31).

QUESTIONS

1. What is discipline?
2. How does Proverbs 22:6 relate to child discipline?
3. What does Hebrews 12:6 say about the spirit of discipline?
4. Explain this statement: "Discipline according to need, not according to feeling."
5. What is the purpose of child discipline?
6. When should the parent begin to discipline a child?
7. What are some good methods of discipline?
8. How can you know that you are under the discipline of God?
9. How can we discipline our children like God disciplines us?
10. In what way has this study helped you personally?