

# BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE

## Foundational Distinction: Discipline vs. Punishment

- **Discipline** is redemptive: it seeks to bring about change in the one disciplined
- **Punishment** is retributive: it is merely the meting out of justice
  - Sending a murderer to prison is punishment
  - God will **punish** the ungodly on the last day
- We discipline our children, because we love them.

## Foundational Principles

- Biblical discipline is aimed at the heart... but it focuses on the fruit of the heart, which is behavior.
  - Prov 22:15
  - The immediate goal of discipline is to **alter behavior**.
  - *"Discipline is an artificially negative consequence. When a child becomes old enough to get really destructive, leave home, and wreck his life, the consequences are real and forever. When a toddler is spanked, the consequences are momentary – and in a certain sense unreal – but he is being taught to associate sin and punishment... This understanding of law is preparation for understanding the gospel."* – Doug Wilson
- Biblical discipline is a display of love for our children.
- Biblical discipline is about honoring God.

## Foundational Method: "The Rod"

- *Proverbs 22:15: Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.*
- *Proverbs 29:15: The rod and reproof give wisdom / But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.*
- *Proverbs 13:24: He who withholds his rod hates his son / But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*
- *Proverbs 23:13-14: Do not hold back discipline from the child / Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die / You shall strike him with the rod / And rescue his soul from Sheol.*
- Caveat: When used wrongly, spanking can be abusive! Spanking itself – like all forms of discipline – can be wrong or right depending on how it is applied. We firmly DO NOT condone the misuse of the Bible to justify abusive spanking by parents who are not wise and mature and who are unwilling to repent of their own sin.

## The Practice of Discipline

1. Instruct for Obedience: Set clear rules and expectations.
2. Identify Disobedience as Wrong
3. Apply Loving Discipline
  - a. Quickly
  - b. Consistently
  - c. Rationally
  - d. Law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8)
4. Restore Fellowship

## The Don'ts

- Don't spank when you are angry.
  - If you recognize that you are too angry to discipline lovingly, communicate to your child that she will be disciplined later (perhaps "When daddy comes home"). This will prevent your child from thinking that she can get away with disobedience in certain contexts. It also allows you to remain consistent in discipline while avoiding improper (angry) discipline.
  - If you ever DO discipline out of anger, you have sinned against your child, and you must repent. Do so! This allows your child to see that you are a human being, that you are not perfect, and that you are willing to acknowledge when you have done wrong – and it builds a bridge of trust and relationship between child and parent.
- Don't spank in public (it's humiliating). Remove the child to a private area where you can converse and discipline in the context of personal relationship.
- Don't use your hand. Use a neutral object (wooden spoon, etc) on the thick, fleshy part of the bare bottom (not over a diaper, not on the legs).
- Don't spank without clarity.
  - Tell the child how many swats you are going to give him (usually 2-4 is plenty). This provides accountability for you and is fair to him.
  - Give a specific "why" for the spanking. There should be a clear instance of disobedience in mind – not a vague "I've had it with you."

*Additional Resource:*

*For further study, see chapters 11, 14, and 15 of "Shepherding a Child's Heart" by Tedd Tripp*