Discipline – From Law to Gospel
Class Outline

Discipline has both a positive and negative side – instruction (training) and correction. We can be tempted when our children disobey saying to ourselves, he should know better. But how often have we asked ourselves if we have sufficiently taught and equipped our children?

Hebrews 12:6–7 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

An important opening assumptions: Discipline is born out of love and administered in love. Let your affection be so rich towards your children that they never doubt your love.

A. The Purpose of the Law is Introducing the Gospel. Parenting young children follows a similar trajectory.

Galatians 3:21–27
“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus ‘you are all sons of God, through faith.’”

“It was not that God’s grace was weak or insufficient for our salvation, and that, consequently, it was necessary to introduce the law. No, the law was given for a totally different reason: to drive men to acknowledge that they are sinners, and to cause them to despair! For unless this happens, their consciences will not be prompted to take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

John Calvin ¹
1. Just as the Law is our schoolmaster or pedagogue to lead us to Christ so the law leads our children to make sense of the Gospel.

- Greek – paidagogos – In Paul’s day a pedagogue was usually a slave assigned to make sure a boy arrived to and from school without distraction.

“The paidagogos was not the boy’s teacher so much as his disciplinarian. He was often harsh to the point of cruelty, and is usually depicted in ancient drawings with a rod or cane in his hand.”

John Stott

2. Legalism, finding our hope in the law, is as much an enemy in parenting as it is an enemy in our salvation since it holds out the hope that a person can become righteous apart from grace by observing the law. The end of our discipline is not outward compliance. Rather, the design of discipline is to demonstrate the failure of anyone to achieve righteousness apart from the law. “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” James 2:10

- We enforce the law to accentuate their inability to keep the law.

No one is good, not even one...

- We are all sinners.

- Sin breaks our fellowship with God.

- Sin must be punished for God is holy.
• The penalty for sin is death, eternally.

• No man can save himself from the judgment of God for his sin.

“Be sure, whatever you leave out, that you teach the children the three R’s – Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration. Tell the children they are ruined by the fall, and that there is salvation for them only by being redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.”  

Charles Spurgeon

3. When the realization dawns on them that they cannot keep the law, and the punishment for the failure is certain, we point them to Christ.

4. The Rescue of Grace – How wonderful the Gospel sounds when we are drowning in our failure in the law! Each time they need correction, take your children back to the cross.

• Train your five to six year old children to understand that their sin against their sister is also a sin against God

• We cannot regenerate our children, nor can they regenerate themselves. Teach your children that only Jesus by his Spirit can change their heart.

• Don't expect correction to be the speedy process it was with your two year old. Though you might be correcting your six year old fewer times per day, you will likely spend more time correcting him.

5. Help your children build their testimony

• Even children born into “good Christian homes” are enemies of Christ prior to conversion. Yet, how many Christians brought up in Christian homes have a view that they were always pretty good. If your children are aware of their particular sins, when they come to Christ they will be able to give a faith-filled testimony of what God did in changing their heart. They will see themselves as converts. Once I was this way, but I have been changed!
B. Following the Biblical Pattern for Correction.

1. The foundation to biblical correction is love.

   • Hebrews 12:5–11 – “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

   • What love would allow a son to knowingly proceed down a dangerous path to certain death? Is it not the duty of love to halt such progress? Any who think less seriously about the end of sin do not have an adequate understanding of the holiness of God.
Al Mohler – “The Bible presents a very clear and sober message about the absolute necessity of parental discipline. Parents are to teach and require obedience of their children. The issue of obedience is at the very center of the Bible’s concern for submission to authority and instruction in godliness. Parents bear an unavoidable responsibility to discipline their children even as they are raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Failure to require obedience is characterized in Scripture as a tragic parental failure. In effect, parents who do not require obedience of their children are themselves demonstrating disobedience to the command of God.”

2. Corporal punishment administered in love is the method of discipline provided by God.

Al Mohler – “Does the Bible instruct parents to spank their children? The answer to that must be an emphatic, Yes.”

- Proverbs 23:13 – “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with a rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.”

3. The rod is the prescribed instrument. Rod – “scion” stick

- Proverbs 13:24 – “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”

- Aurthur Hildersham pastor 1800’s – “No parent may hope to weaken and destroy the corruption that is in his child’s heart, though he teaches him never so well, and uses all the allurements he can to draw him to goodness, if he does not also correct him and use the rod sometimes. The Lord Himself, who is both the wisest and the best father, and who loves his children a thousand times more than any of us can love ours, takes this course with His children; yes, in this way He gives Himself as a model for all wise parents. Deuteronomy 8:5, “Consider in thine heart, that as a father chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”

- Since the rod is the instrument God ordained for the correction of our children and since it is to be administered in love, it is best to
use the term, ‘rod’ for the discipline of your children.

C. Understand the culture around us doesn’t always make a distinction between biblical correction with the rod and the physical child abuse of children.

1. The trend

   • “The Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Jean Zermatten, noted that only 33 States had prohibited corporal punishment in all settings of children’s lives, leaving millions of children unprotected against socially accepted violence disguised as discipline.

   ‘For the Committee, there is no doubt that corporal punishment is a violation of children’s rights under the Convention of the Rights of the Child because it is constitutive of violence that causes physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering,” Zermatten said. “It violates children’s human dignity and inalienable human rights, and it negatively impacts on the enjoyment of many other rights and aspects of children’s development including their psychological, health, education and social status.’”

   • Corporal Punishment is banned in most of Europe, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Germany, Cyprus, Croatian, Netherlands, Finland, Spain, Greece, Austria, Sweden.

   • 31 states have now banned corporal punishment in their schools.

2. Florida - "Abuse" means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.
   § 39.01(2) [Civil Code] Be sure to look up your laws for yourself.

3. The wisdom

   • Know the law and your rights under the law.
• Discipline in anger is always wrong – it is better to forego a discipline you administer in anger.

• Discipline will not save our children – remember it is meant to drive the immediate foolishness from them – that is that they can do whatever they want without consequences.

D. Introducing the stages of child training. When do I begin? Every child is a bit different and not all children mature or grow at the same stage.

1. The infant stage – The infant stage is the time from birth to crawling (0–10 months) where there is no active chastising. Though this is the case, there is a certain discipline that is introduced to the life of the newborn.

2. The high chair stage – (6 months –14 months)
   - What to look for? Active defiance and understanding the word “no.”
   - Most children are too young for the rod at first in this stage. Chastisement might begin with a firm touch to the offending body part along with a firm but loving command.

   Examples:
   - A young crawler reaches for an electrical switch plate on the wall.
   - A 9 month old child enjoys doing raspberries with her baby food, spraying it across the kitchen.

3. The Explorer stage – walking (10–24 months) This is the stage when active use of the rod begins.
   a. What to look for?
      - An understanding of the word “no.”
      - Your child gives you a second look after you instruct them not to touch an object, then touches it anyway.
      - Physical violence toward another child or parent.
b. Take courage – Given that the cultural philosophy is so diametrically opposed to God’s Word, parents can feel guilty for the use of biblical correction.

- Take time to look up all the biblical references to correction, rod, discipline, and chastisement to develop a biblical conviction regarding discipline prior to needing to discipline your children.

- Remember how often you fall yourself to the same sins so that you are not surprised if your children do as well. Don’t trust the rod, trust the Lord.

***** Review the Administering the Rod in Love Tool*****

4. The Toddler years (2–3)

- Use of the rod should extend to attitudes. Not only do you want them to obey. They must also obey cheerfully. The result will be that they can not keep the law. Remember failure to keep the law is what points them to a need for another solution.

- Repeat sin is a blessing in this stage. When a child repeats a sin over and over again draw their attention to their inability to obey in an area.

- You can begin to pray the Gospel in more detail at the end of a discipline session and that Jesus would change your child’s heart.

5. The Preschool years 4–5

- Apart from the strong willed child, children have typically reached a level of basic compliance by the end of this stage. But don’t be fooled into thinking the battle is over. Look carefully in the most compliant children for heart issues. Discipline for sinful motives where they are clear.

- Children should begin to be able to understand the basic Gospel message and understand that they are a sinner in need of salvation. You can begin to introduce the heart motivation behind their behavior.
• Family devotions can begin once your children reach this age, but don’t expect them to interact with your program very much. You are simply laying a foundational pattern of faithful discipleship.

6. Early Elementary Grades 1–3

• Conversation in discipline becomes important in this stage. You want children to understand their sinfulness, what they did and how it is a sin against God, and how what they did sinfully is in contrast to God’s Word.

• By the time children reach 8 years–old, they should be aware of their personal testimony as a sinner. The more aware our children are of their sin then the more desperate they will be for a Savior.

• Look for opportunities to set the rod aside.

7. Upper Elementary Grades 4–6

• By this last discipline stage you should be looking for regular opportunities to set the rod aside in lieu of a more mature reflection of their sin. There is no need to discipline a child who is willing to receive your correction, spend time in prayer, confess, and repent of their wrongdoing.

• While the frequency of discipline may be less, the duration of the discipline conversation is much longer. Don’t make the mistake of disciplining an eleven–year–old with the same expediency you did your six–year–old.
1 John Calvin, John Calvin’s Sermons on Galatians, pg. 325.

2 John Stott, The Message of Galatians, pg.97. (The Bible Speaks Today Commentary Series)

3 John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries Volume XXIX, pg. 108.

4 Spurgeon, Charles, Spiritual Parenting, p. 107


8 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/CorporalPunishment.aspx