

# THE CHRISTIAN HOME

by

Norman V. Williams

Copyright © 1952

## CHAPTER NINE

### DISCIPLINE

SOMEONE HAS SAID that discipline is a lost word in the vocabulary of our generation. Yet discipline is required in the life of a child if he is to be well established spiritually, moderate emotionally, socially adjusted, and happy personally. The Word of God has guidance for us at this point, and as we study His Book we shall be thankful for the wise guidance He has afforded us on this important question.

Spanking is one form of discipline, and a very necessary form. In Proverbs 13:24 God says, **“He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”**

Faithful discipline in the way of the rod will spare the child heart-breaking experiences later in life. Later God is constrained by His love to do this job that in many cases should have been cared for by the parents (Psalm 39:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

“God will,” as one old writer says, “wither their brightest comforts—children, property, talents, friendships—if they turn them to idols; and this not for His pleasure but for their profit (Hebrews 12:10; cf. Lamentations 3:33); and how many have not blessed Him that He did not refrain His discipline until it had I done its perfect work?”

God says foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child (Proverbs 22:15; Genesis 8:21). All choose from the very beginning of life the broad road that leads to destruction (Isaiah 53:6).

We should note God says foolishness, not childishness. Childishness is no sin, but foolishness is. Foolishness manifests itself in different ways: now as the passion of anger; now as willfulness that would despise all that crosses the personal will; now as selfishness, grasping greedily to satisfy self and ignoring the claims and needs of others. We might say that foolishness means selfishness that issues forth as a determination to have our own way irrespective of the will of God and of others; and when willfulness is frustrated it quickly becomes anger and hatred.

Augustine mentions his being struck with the sight of an infant before it could speak, showing an evident look of envy and passion toward another infant about to share its nourishment. He adds, in reference to himself, “When, I beseech Thee, O my God, in what places—when or where—was I innocent?” (Confessions, l.c.7)

Satan begins with the infant in arms (Psalm 58:3; Isaiah 48:8). The violent cry of passion is the first evident stir of Adam's corruption. Vigilant spiritual training must begin as early. Every vice begins in seed form in the nursery. The secret is to establish authority in the dawn of life; to bend the tender twig before it is a mighty oak and beyond our power (Ecclesiastes 12:1-2). Self-will must be broken in the very beginning (See chapter 5, "The Christian Mother").

The child must be made to obey. The child's self-will must not be yielded to either to appease his anger or his crying. In either case the child gets the idea that he can "get his way" by being disagreeable, and it then becomes practically impossible to break self-will. Willfulness, when denied, seeks to force and coerce satisfaction of its desire by the violence of hatred and anger or by crying. If willfulness is yielded to under either of these forms, the personality of the child will ever after seek to satisfy its willfulness by being as disagreeable as possible. This behavior pattern can frequently be noted in adults who confess, as life refuses to yield to them, that they are most miserable and unhappy people.

The rod is to be used for the purpose of inflicting pain on the willful child. The pain is inflicted that the child might early learn that pain is the price life exacts of the selfish and willful.

The child is thus saved from the false notion that life will sanction or reward willfulness and disobedience. The pain he suffers will cause him to give up the way of life which draws the pain and suffering upon him. Being faithfully taught early in life the child will be spared the tragedy of hardening into selfishness and willfulness which in later life would be well-nigh impossible to break. An old divine has written:

"Insurmountable indeed is the difficulty when the child has been allowed to become the early master. When the habit of disobedience has been formed and hardened it is almost impossible to then break the spirit of disobedience. God's word says, **'It is good for a man if he bear the yoke in his youth'** (Lamentations 3: 27)."

Sentimental kindness to the children in their disobedience is a great sin that will plague and curse their lives. "Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and his house so much, as by his kindness to his children's sin. Parents need no other means of making themselves miserable than by sparing the rod." So wrote the great Bishop Hall in his *Contemplations* (Book 11.vii). Scripture reveals plainly the bitter sorrow that comes from winking and passing over the child's disobedience. Read and ponder Proverbs 29:15; 1 Samuel 3:13; 1 Kings 1: 6; 2:25 and compare with 2 Samuel 13:39.

Bridges says on Proverbs 22:15, "Observe the rooted character of this evil. It is bound in his heart— held firmly there by chains invincible to human power (cf. Genesis 44:30, 31; I Samuel 18:1). It is woven and incorporated into his very nature, and so various are its forms, so subtle its workings, that the wisest parent is often at a loss how to detect and treat the evil. The general rule however—the prescribed remedy—is clear. It is vain to bid the foolishness depart. It is no less vain to persuade the child himself to drive it far away. The rod of correction is distinctly named, and repeatedly inculcated, as God's own means for this important end (Proverbs 19:18; 23:13, 14; 29:17).

Only let the child see that, as with our heavenly Father, love is the ruling principle (Proverbs 13:24, with 3:11, 12); that we follow the example of the wisest and best of parents; that we use His rod for driving foolishness away (see II Chronicles 33:12, 13).”

Prayer, the family altar, counsel, pleading, moral axioms, all of it and none of it will substitute for this God-appointed means! We may not claim we are fulfilling Proverbs 22:6, if we are ignoring Proverbs 22:15. There is more than chastening in Proverbs 22:6, but there is not less.

Let it [the rod] not be used at all times. Let remonstrance be first tried; like our heavenly Father, who will never stir the rod with His children if His still small voice of instruction prevails. Magnifying trifles into grave offences, chiding every slip of childishness or troublesome forgetfulness, casts a baneful gloom upon the home. It is “**a continual dropping in a very rainy day**” (Proverbs 27:15). This indiscriminate correction soon brings a callous deadness to all sense of shame. Let it be reserved, at least in its more serious forms, for willfulness. It is medicine, not food. It is the remedy for constitutional diseases, not the daily diet for life and nourishment. And to convert medicine into food gradually destroys its remedial qualities.

Some parents use nothing but correction. They indulge their own passions at the expense of their less guilty children. Unlike our heavenly Father, they afflict and grieve their children willingly (contrast Lamentations 3:33; Hebrews 12:10) to vent their own anger not to subdue their children’s sins. This intemperate use of a scriptural ordinance brings discredit upon its efficacy, sows the seed of much bitter fruit; engendering in their children a spirit of bondage and concealment, sometimes of disgust and even of hatred toward their unreasonable parents. “If parents,” said a wise and godly father (Matthew Henry) “would not correct their children except in a praying frame when they can ‘lift up their heads without wrath,’ it would neither provoke God nor them.” Other parents freely threaten the rod, yet without using it. It was only meant to frighten. Many parents scare, but they touch not and in reality leave the child to go his own way of ruin (cf. I Kings 1:6-9; 2:23-25). It soon becomes an empty sound, powerless and hardening. God’s threatenings are not vain words. If His children will not turn, they will find His warnings faithful and true. This threatening play is solemn trifling with truth; teaching children by example what they had learned from the womb (Psalm 58:3)—to speak lies. Let our words be considerate but certain.

“**No chastening is for the present joyous but grievous**” (Hebrews 12:11); yet when given in prayer, wisdom, and faith, it is ordained for the pain of the flesh that the soul may be delivered from hell and ungodliness (cf. I Corinthians 5:5; 11:32).

Indeed, the purpose and plan of chastening is threefold: for their profit (Hebrews 12:10); for their promotion in holiness (Hebrews 12:10); and for the production of godly traits (Hebrews 12:11).

When chastening is faithfully administered by the parents, together with daily instruction of the child that he may daily be occupied with looking unto Jesus (Hebrews 12:2), the threefold result is certain. Swincock in *Christian Man’s Calling* said, “Lord, do Thou be pleased to strike in with every stroke, that the rod of correction may be a rod of instruction.” Bishop Hall, in *Silent Thoughts*, said, “It is a rare soul that can be kept in constant order without smarting remedies. I confess mine cannot. How wild had I run, if the rod had not been over me? Every man can say he thanks God for his ease. For me, I bless God for my trouble.”

Popular psychology has frequently been at a loss to find a place for “the rod” in the discipline of the child. The reason for this is a weakness in popular psychology itself. Popular psychology looks everywhere for the causes of human misbehavior except to the perverted will of the violator himself. They seek to find all causes in the emotions or the intellect, but they have missed the will and so have ignored that faculty of man which would yield the key to the problem of maladjustment and misbehavior in personalities.

Thus the psychologist speaks of “missing the mark” as a disease, whereas the Christian speaks of it as sin. The Christian recognizes the part the emotions and intellect play in maladjustment and misbehavior, yet he goes deeper and recognizes the key to the problem is in a perverse will, issuing forth in a willing and willfulness that is concerned chiefly with self-satisfaction and is in utter rebellion against those demands, duties, and responsibilities, those situations and events of life that deny selfish desires and satisfactions.

After one theologian had read a popular treatise by a well-known psychologist, he was asked his view of the treatise. He replied, “Much that the psychologist says is true, but he does not go deep enough. His views of man are too shallow and surfaced. He has not gone deep enough to recognize the perverse willfulness and antisocial, anti-God selfishness that is at the heart of man and his problem of maladjustment and misbehavior, or just plain sin, as we theologians say.” It is because man is born with a perverse selfishness and thus a perverse willfulness that the severe form of discipline, such as the rod, is necessary.

Yet, while we recognize the perverse factor in the child, we must recognize as he grows older that all disobedience will not be due to a perverse willfulness but may also be due to emotional frustrations, lack of understanding, and ignorance. Discipline in these cases will take the form of counseling, kindness, and love. The attempt will be made by the parents to understand the child and to remove the cause of his difficulties. As a case in point we would quote from a recent article in the *Evangelical Beacon* by Professor Milford Sholund.

One day I was asked to teach a group of boys less than ten years of age. There were about seven active lads in the class. Each of them seemed normal and happy in his relationship to the children in the department. But my delight soon became a disappointment. One of the younger boys who was unusually large gave a small girl a sharp push in the small of her back. She went sprawling and crying across the floor. I immediately laid hands on the boy and tried to shake some sense into him. He only looked at me and grinned wryly. He sat down quietly at my side as the worship service continued. In a moment I noticed that my husky blonde challenger had scooted from one chair to the next and suddenly boosted one of the chairs in front of him. An innocent girl fell from her chair. My “problem” pupil only grinned. When the worship service was concluded with prayer, the boys dashed hither and thither grabbing chairs to carry into their class session. Finally teacher and pupil were somewhat in order in the room set apart for them. But peace was to be ours only a minute.

The little “strong man” twisted the arm of a “good little” boy. The victim seemed bewildered and beaten. His big-muscle conqueror gloated in his strength. Needless to say, the class session was thoroughly disturbed with earnest exhortations and vain efforts by the teacher. The Sunday morning of Christian education left me wondering what could be done for this Scandinavian lad who had misdirected his energies in Sunday school.

My good wife suggested that one way of learning more about this troublesome pupil would be to invite him for dinner the next Sunday. We called his parents. They seemed to appreciate the Sunday school, especially its interest in their boy.

The following Sunday the young challenger appeared in Sunday school with abounding energy and a responsive smile. He behaved well in the Sunday school worship service and class period. He spoke freely of his anticipation of a good time at our home. His social adjustment in our house was good. He ate well and played happily with the children. His outdoor activity was somewhat daring and rough, but he was attentive to a word of caution. When we told him that it was time to go home, he seemed anxious to stay longer. The investment of time, dinner, and effort had already won a friend. The problem of discipline was beginning to be resolved through kindness. Our young friend insisted that we meet his parents as we drove nearer to his home.

We found his home to be well-furnished. His parents were cordial, but evidently not interested in attending church. We learned later that the husband had made an idol of his work. He was too busy to either play or pray with his boy. Now he was paying heavily in the heartaches of a son who confronted his parents with disobedience. We also learned through the visit that the boy's mother was rather cool in her affection for him. She often threatened the boy with corporal punishment by the father. The final admission of poor relationships in the home came when the mother indicated that the only time the father paid attention to the boy was when he was scolding or punishing him.

This energetic, healthy boy continues to come to Sunday school. He has outbursts of temper. But the secret of his life is not opened through discipline that sternly rebukes and attempts to coerce him. What he wants and needs is love that warms his heart.

My wife taught the class one day in my absence. Our "problem pupil"—more correctly, "our pupil with problems"—again had his fit of trouble. She took him into a separate room and spoke to him of his troublemaking. Then she said, "My, but you are a good-looking boy!" At once he relaxed and smiled affectionately. His Sunday school teacher had praised him and won him. Someone really cared enough to notice him. He showed the same response as the poor little boy who sat in the rain on the steps of the Sunday school in the Free Church in Portland and confessed to his pals, "The reason I like this Sunday school so much is because they love you so much."

Paul said the goodness of God leads us to repentance. Jesus disciplined His own through love. When every other technique of discipline fails, re-member love never fails (I Corinthians 13).

With rare poetic skill, Robert Burns paints a picture of a family group at worship in *The Cotter's Saturday Night*:

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,  
How Abraham was the friend of God on high;  
Or, Moses bade eternal warfare wage  
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;  
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie  
Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire;  
Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;  
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire;  
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.  
Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,  
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;  
How He, who bore in heaven the second name,  
Had not on earth whereon to lay His head;

How His first followers and servants sped,  
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land;  
How he who lone in Patmos banished,  
Saw in the sun a mighty Angel stand;  
And heard great Bab'lon's doom pronounc'd by Heaven's command.

Then kneeling down, to heaven's Eternal King,  
The saint, the father, and the husband prays:  
Hope "springs exulting on triumphant wing,"  
That thus they all shall meet in future days:  
There ever bask in uncreated rays,  
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,  
Together hymning their Creator's praise,  
In such society, yet still more dear:  
While circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere.

Compar'd with this, how poor Religion's pride,  
In all the pomp of method and of art,  
When men display to congregations wide  
Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the heart!  
The Pow'r, incens'd, the pageant will desert,  
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole;  
But haply, in some cottage far apart,  
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul;  
And in His Book of Life the inmates poor enroll.

Then homeward all take off their sev'ral way;  
The youngling cottagers retire to rest:  
The parent-pair their secret homage pay,  
And proffer up to Heaven the warm request,  
That He, who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,  
And decks the lily fair in flow'ry pride,  
Would, in the way his wisdom sees the best,  
For them and for their little ones provide;  
But, chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside.

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,  
That makes her lov'd at home, revered abroad:  
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,  
"An honest man's the noblest work of God."

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*