

Loving Discipline or Spanking (Ephesians 6:4)?

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on September 23, 2012

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One of the headlines that caught my attention on the sermonaudio “News in Focus” page was “Presbyterian Church USA Passes Resolution Against Spanking Children”:

‘The 220th General Assembly...passed a resolution...against using corporal punishment on children. Many Christians believe corporal punishment is a biblical practice. Proverbs 13:24 says, "Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them." Still, other Christians believe ... “Let us love them and not hit them," said Commissioner Susan Maara of New Hope Presbytery...’¹

Susan defends their anti-spanking vote by “let us love them” but God’s Word says a parent “*who loves their children is careful to discipline them*” (and it mentions the “rod,” Hebrew for corporal punishment, and the OT context is clear it is careful loving discipline). It’s Susan vs. Scripture. If you don’t know, the PCUSA is the liberal wing of Presbyterians in the USA, in some areas more liberal than USA’s government or even liberal CA laws. Line 2 of the PCUSA resolution “calls upon all states to enact licensing laws prohibiting corporal punishment ...” CA tried unsuccessfully to make a law banning spanking a few years ago in the state, but this “church” calls for a national ban on it, while studies say 80% of even liberal America have spanked.²

The article on PCUSA adds ‘A study published online by the journal "Pediatrics" [7/2012] suggests that there is a link between the "harsh physical punishment" of a child and ... mental disorders ... harsh physical punishment as a child ... was defined by being at least "sometimes" physically punished through pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping or hitting. These punishments are generally considered more extreme than the "conventional" use of paddling’³

And I would add, current law and God’s law both forbid abuse. Interestingly enough, in that study used to support anti-spanking initiatives, their study focused on punishments other than spanking, things they call “harsh...more extreme than...paddling.” I’ve seen all kinds of articles like that—you have to read a big stack of them if you want to adopt nowadays—but the studies never cover non-harsh non-abusive non-angry loving corporal discipline as the Bible defines.

In fact, a 2004 report by UC Berkeley’s research psychologists to the American Psychological Association in San Francisco concluded such use of ‘spanking does not damage a child’s social or emotional development, according to a study of long-term consequences ... "We found no evidence for unique detrimental effects of normative physical punishment ... I am not an advocate of spanking ... but a blanket injunction against its use is not warranted by the evidence...” Her study of spanking ... was undertaken in response to anti-spanking advocates who have claimed that physical punishment, by itself, has harmful psychological effects on children and hurts society as a whole. These claims ... have not distinguished the effects of occasional mild-to-moderate spanking from more severe punishment ... “What really matters... is the child rearing context. When parents are loving and firm and communicate well with the child...the children are exceptionally competent and well adjusted...”⁴

But the PCUSA didn't just ban spanking, they 'also affirmed and expanded the PCUSA's support of abortion.'⁵ Some wanted their health plan to only fund abortions if a mom's life was in danger, but not PCUSA majority. So they didn't vote to end some abortion but did vote to end all spanking. My cliff notes of the assembly: no loving correction of kids, but if you don't love ones in the womb, you can kill them! Discipline after birth isn't ok to them but death pre-birth is?

Let's make what Scripture says against the law, and let's ignore the Law of God that treats killing the unborn as murder (Ex 21:22-23)! No corporal punishment if kids are guilty of rebellion and defiance but *capital* punishment is ok on innocent unborn kids? Educating children as Scripture says is banned but not executing them? On a side note, the PCUSA did pass a resolution on protecting the environment of the planet but did not pass resolution to protect the unborn in their far more fragile environment in the womb?! Sounds like Romans 1:25:

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator..." (NIV)

I want us to see *the truth of God* in Eph 6:4 today, in exchange for the lies of our world and so-called churches that no longer preach the gospel. There is such a thing as *loving discipline*. The reason it's important we study this is because of the gospel. The gospel tells us God the Father "in love" adopted us (Eph 1:5) and because He loves true sons He disciplines us, even chastisement we feel at times (Heb. 12). But if we think all discipline, including physical pain, isn't loving, we are misinformed and have to misinterpret many Bible verses, and also misread what God is doing in our life as our Father. We misunderstand our pain in life is part of His love and we miss out on His training and instruction He intends by it.

Eph 6:4 (NASB) *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

The title of today's message is "Loving Discipline." Some Bibles have "training" in v. 4; KJV "nurture." We could call it "nurturing training" or "loving discipline of the Lord." The Lord says in Rev 3:19 *'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline [same Grk root as Eph 6:4]; therefore be zealous and repent.'* Because He loves, He reprovess and disciplines us His children so that we'll repent.

Turn to Heb 12. Loving discipline in Scripture includes reproof verbally as well as physical chastisement in the case of children. It is as important as last week's message (honor authority). Eph 6:4 addresses parents, but this principle has application for all of us:

- to understand loving reproof is part of discipline/discipling (Rev. 3:19 Jesus loves us so He reprovess and disciplines, and He often uses His people as part of that very process)
- to understand church discipline is loving, too (Lk 17:3, Mt 18:15), and the goal is repentance, restoration (Gal. 6:1)
- to understand God loves us when He spiritually spans us

Heb 12:6 **FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.** [not just “time outs” or taking away toys, He also trains in ways that bring pain]

The biggest Greek dictionary says “scourges” here means ‘impart corrective punishment’ for ‘the education of a beloved child [that] may sometimes demand blows...of God’s educative love.’⁶ It’s not to harm or injure, the context is to help and instruct in fatherly love. Just as a newborn son receives blows to the backside right after birth, that the baby doesn’t fully appreciate at the time, but it helps him cry and clear crud out so he can breathe and live, Father-God receives and rears children, including loving blows for their growth.

And because God views us as sons and loves us, He reprovess and restores us to Himself by chastising, metaphorically or physically (how physically? afflictions, suffering, thorn in flesh for our good). Because God loves us, He reprovess us, and our spiritual backsides may need spiritual spanks in His loving discipline to true children, to help us live and grow and develop. The *Theological Lexicon of NT* says the *scourge* in v. 6 ‘was the special implement of Israelite discipline (Hebrew *mûsâr*), whether wielded by the father ... or by God himself for the perfecting or purifying of his own people.’⁷ It is painful (see v. 11) but v. 10 says it’s temporary and for our good to be made like Him, through short-term pain for our lifelong gain.

I want to come back to that before the end of this message but it may be part of the reason why Eph 6:4 says (and you can turn back there): “**Fathers...bring them up in discipline.**” It not only points to fathers as heads of earthly family, it points to a Heavenly Father. Paul explains in the end of Ephesians 5 that a husband’s love for his wife pictures the love of the Lord to His church. And the loving discipline of father to child pictures God’s to His child (Heb. 12). But we need to start with earthly fathers, then end in the heavenly.

Eph 6:4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Outline:

- How NOT to discipline (*provoke your children to anger*)
- How TO discipline (*bring them up in...discipline*)
- WHY (*of the Lord*—gospel, His fatherly loving discipline)

Next week we’ll consider the last part of the verse, the “*instruction of the Lord*” by fatherly instruction and shepherding, family worship, discipleship, etc.

Let me repeat what I said last week: I am no expert as I stand here except in some of the ways NOT to discipline, many that I’ve been guilty of, some still convict. I can tell you honestly, “this hurts me more than it hurts you.” I’ve felt the reproof and chastisement of my loving heavenly Father who disciplines me to make me more like Him. My earthly parents are here and when they brought me up in the Lord I received many a reproof and physical chastisement from them. I deserved all of them, even the pinecone one, and I’m sure I deserved more than I got! I want to honor my dad and mom by saying “thanks for the spanks,” for loving, not sparing the rod. I’m deeply thankful to my parents for their positive modeling of loving discipline in this passage.

The negative warning to earthly fathers (and moms by application) in Eph 6:4 is not to neglect discipline or training and also not to provoke children to anger. This is important because anger gives the devil a foothold (4:27). Some versions say ‘exasperate’ and the parallel in Col 3:21 is translated by one as ‘*Fathers, do not **embitter** your children, or **they will become discouraged.***’

What are ways parents can provoke anger, exasperate, embitter?

1. **Not giving grace** (notice Paul starts in 1:2 ‘*grace to you*’)

Not grace *instead of* discipline, communicating grace *in it*. Elyse Fitzpatrick, in her book *Give Them Grace*, writes in contrast to much parenting teaching on “easy steps,” “hints for success,” parents and kids need ‘a Savior who has gone before them ... who was a child himself, and who lived and died perfectly in their place ... we need the gospel of grace and the grace of the gospel ... Grace, or the free favor that has been lavished on us through Christ, ought to make our parenting radically different from what unbelievers do ... [The] gospel message tells us that we are all (parents and children) both *radically sinful* and *radically loved*. At the deepest level of what we do as parents, we should hear the heartbeat of a loving, grace-giving Father who freely adopts rebels and transforms them into loving sons and daughters...the gospel needs to transform your parenting’⁸

2. **Not pointing them to God’s resources** (like in 1:3-14)

God as Father (1:3) gives to children his spiritual resources. I don’t want to be a Pharaoh expecting bricks w/out straw, I want to be a father telling of Father’s provision (2 Pet 1:3)

3. **Not praying for and with them** (as Paul does in 1:15-19)

Tim Chester’s good book *The Gospel-Centered Family*, explains on this point: ‘We can change our behavior—at least a bit for a while. But we need a Savior to change our hearts. Acknowledge what you’re asking is hard for your child. “We need God’s help. How about we pray?” Godly discipline highlights for a child their need for Christ.’⁹

4. **Self-righteousness** (forgetting what we were in Eph 2:1-3)

- By ungracious reactions to their sin (“What were you thinking? Why in the world would you do that?”)
- By forgetting that we were (and are) sinners (“I would NEVER have done that when I was your age”).¹⁰

Ephesians 2:3 *Among them **we too all** formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest ...** ¹² **remember that you were** at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having **no hope and without God in the world.***

5. **Legalism**—giving our kids the impression that obeying our rules, or doing good works, makes them pleasing to God. Any true Christian parent knows the law couldn't save us, but if we're not careful, we act like the law saves our kids, or like rules are what sanctify, or keep them saved/safe. But the law (ours or God's) cannot save (Gal. 2:21) or sanctify (Col. 2:20-23). It is a yoke; we need gospel (Acts 15:10-11)

Eph 2:8: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works...*

Titus 2:11-12 (ESV) "*the **grace of God** has appeared ... **training us** to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly [God's grace trains us to this]*

6. **Pride** (Eph 2:9 continues "... so that no one may boast")

Symptoms: not humbly receiving correction from a spouse a child when we sin. Never admitting we were wrong. Self-centered reactions ("how could you do this to ME?"), being more concerned of what other people think of my parenting

Look also at Eph 4:2, which comes before 6:4: *with all humility...*

7. **Harshness** (2nd phrase in Eph 4:2 adds "*and gentleness*")
8. **Impatience** (4:2 "*with patience*"; Ps 103:13-14 "*father has compassion on his children ... for he knows our frame*")
9. **Not speaking the truth in love** (4:15)
10. **Focusing on externals only, not their hearts** (4:20-24)
- Tedd Tripp writes in his excellent book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*: 'change in behavior that does not proceed from the heart is not commendable, it is condemnable.'¹¹
11. **Sarcastic, ridiculing, demeaning speech that doesn't build up**(4:29)
12. **Unloading on them our anger, wrath or clamor/yelling** (4:31)
13. **Not forgiving or asking forgiveness** (4:32)
14. **By self-centeredness rather than sacrificial love** (5:2)
15. **Husband and wife not united** (5:22-33)

Lou Priolo's book *The Heart of Anger*, gives 25 ways parents can provoke anger, including being a child-centered home, hypocrisy, inconsistency, favoritism, comparing, not enough freedom...or too much, not listening to or taking time to talk to, invest in our kids. He writes:

1. Identify the specific ways you have been provoking your child
2. Confess these sins to God: Read 1 John 1:9.
3. Ask your child's forgiveness for your sins against him [Jas 5:16]
4. Develop a plan with your child's assistance to replace those sinful behaviors with their biblical alternatives: Read Prov 28:13.
5. Consider specific ways you can provoke your children to love and good works: Read Hebrews 10:24.¹²

That's painful to go through, but it's for our good (Heb 12:10-11). It hurts me as much as it hurts you. But God's fatherly love doesn't leave us with How NOT to, he tells us How TO discipline:

Eph 6:4b ... *but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

We don't have time to adequately cover "instruction," which needs another sermon, but for today we'll conclude with the first part:

- "*bring them up*" (same word as Eph 5:29, "nourishes and cherishes"), used here of the rearing or raising of children. I said last week, that what the world calls "adolescence" is in biblical terms the time parents train "children" to transition to be adults, and to be treating them as responsible to God.
- I was talking with someone afterwards who said, I think rightly, if they're no longer a child but are living under their parents roof or still dependent on them in some ways, even though they have to submit and need to abide by the house rules if it comes down to it to stay there, relationship should change from authority to parental influence or input
- "*in discipline*" – this word *paidea* seems to focus on the younger years, while the last part of v. 4 "*instruction*," starts young but is to grow beyond discipline as they grow

2 Tim 3:15-17 is the only other place outside Heb 12 that *paidea* is used: "*from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training [paidea] in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*" (NIV)

So this training, this loving discipline from his Jewish mother (1:5, it seems his father was not a believer), this training in the Scripture began in his early childhood and was what took him from baby to boy to man of God, from little Tim to Pastor Timothy. A reminder to moms seeking to be faithful with husbands who may not be, of the potential and power in Scripture-filled discipline and training. Scripture can produce a man of God with an unsaved dad or no dad

Turn back to Proverbs 3, and I want to highlight some of the very Scriptures that Timothy as a Jewish boy would have learned, that were able to make him wise to salvation. The word "discipline" in Eph 6:4 (*paidea*) in the Greek version of OT occurs often in Prov.

Prov 3:11 *My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD* [same as Eph 6:4b] *Or loathe His reproof,*¹² *For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights*

Loving corrective discipline. Look at Pr 13:24. I read it earlier: *He who withholds his rod* [or “spares,” HCSB “will not use the rod”] *hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

The ESV marginal note, says the end of v. 24 can be translated, he ‘who loves him disciplines him *early.*’ The idea is not early in the morning necessarily, but early in life for the good of the rest of his life, while a child is young. There are 5 Bible versions I could find that paraphrase ‘the rod’ as ‘spanking’ in Proverbs 23:13 (NLT, NCV, GNB, GW, The Message).

I think he was being a little “cheeky.” J. Vernon McGee spoke of “the board of education for the seat of learning.” There are times for a “*board* meeting parent-child conference.” It takes that sometimes to get to *the bottom* of things (pardon the puns). In all seriousness, we do need to make clear spanking is not to harm our child but to help them and get their attention, and should never be in anger but should always be in control and in love. We know this from other Proverbs about self-control and Proverbs against anger and violence and abuse that are all part of the context of the “rod” for loving discipline. The idea isn’t big boards or metal “rods,” some would say the Hebrew concept can include a hand giving swats to a rear end. Some give psychological objections to that, but Scripturally it seems the concept could include any spanking or what some in modern times might call “whoopin’ the behind.” The ancient Egyptian saying was “sons have ears on their backsides.”¹³ The ancient Hebrew Proverbs was “*the rod and reproof give wisdom*” (Proverbs 29:15). It can make you wise after it makes your bottom smart in pain.

Spanking is to break the will not break the skin (my mom broke more than one wooden spoon on my buns which weren’t hurt as much). Both Pr 10:13 and 26:3 say the rod is for the backside of sinners. God has providentially padded a certain portion of our hindquarters, and I think it unwise to apply a rod elsewhere. Michael and Debi Pearl I think give unwise instruction to use a rod or switch, which he defines as plumbing supply line ¼ inch thick from a hardware store,¹⁴ and using little switches to “spank him on the hand...on the leg or the calf, or the ankle...”¹⁵ I know some people love their books, but think he mishandles Scripture dangerously explaining Pr 10:13 “the rod is for the back.” [He writes] That would include anything that is not the front—the back from the shoulders down to the feet ... You can spank half as hard on the back with a light, stingy switch and be more effective than spanking harder on the bottom ...¹⁶ That’s the kind of teaching that can easily be abused and become abusive that I don’t think is biblical.

If you want a better book, Tedd Tripp’s books and a number of others are on our website under “recommended reading,” that not only handle this better but handle the gospel better.¹⁷ Look at Prov. 22. Pr 22:6 is the famous ‘train up a child in the way he should go,’ v. 15 explains how: *Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline* [same word as Eph 6:4] *drives it far from him.*

“Folly” (ESV) is sinful folly, not childish foolishness or silliness. Discipline is for clear defiance and rebellion, and the goal is the heart.

The problem with our kids is not their environment, it's the heart that is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). From the womb we go astray (Ps 58:3), as Shai Linn says "sinning from the beginning, The womb to the tomb, depraved to the grave, Astray every day."¹⁸ Romans 3:13-14 presents depravity as coming out of the heart up the throat onto the tongue and onto the lips as poison from a viper coming out our mouth, even little "vipers in diapers."

Our little kid's greatest problem is not outside them, it's inside. It's why Pr 23:12 says "*apply your heart to discipline*" (same word as Eph 6:4) and then the next verse says "*Do not hold back discipline from the child...*" It's because 23:7 says "*As a man thinks in his heart so is he ... his heart is not with you*" (NKJV), and so v. 26 pleads "*Give me your heart, my son.*" Pr 28:14 says "*he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.*" Prov 4:23 says to a son "*watch over [guard] your heart.*" It's all about the heart, not mere moralistic or behavioristic change-parenting from Proverbs is after the heart. Look back at Prov 3 to see the God-inspired goal of a godly parent

3:1 *My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments ...* [look at the end of v. 3] *Write them on the tablet of your heart ...* ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart ...*

The father begins his plea in chapter 2: "*My son, if you will receive my words ...* [end of 2:2 says] *incline your heart to understanding*"

But here's my problem: I don't trust in the Lord with all my heart, and I can't incline my own heart in my own strength to my God's truth, and none of us can incline our kid's hearts with even with the best parenting books or techniques. Solomon was the wisest man in Scripture, and wrote more on parenting than anyone in it, and it was God-inspired, but even he wasn't able to make this happen in his son that this whole book is written to. Which is why we need to close not looking at this father and son, but another Father and Son, and His loving discipline and gospel

2 Sam 7:14: God promises David of Solomon "*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me* [God will be a better Father to him than David would or could be]; *when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men ...*

One greater than Solomon has come, a greater Son of David is come, who never committed iniquity, and yet took the punishment that Solomon deserved and that I deserve. He took unloving stripes from sinful men, for sinful men. Isa 53:5 "*The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.*" Earthly fathers are not to discourage or crush their sons, but God "*crushed [His Son] for our iniquities...it was the will of the LORD to crush him*" (Isa 53:5, 10 ESV). We're not to pour out wrath on our sons, but God poured out the wrath we deserved on His Son in our place, for all who believe the gospel and receive Jesus as Lord by repentant faith. We all like sheep had gone astray (Isa 53:6) but the Shepherd came for us and laid down His life for His sheep, and so we can say with Ps 23 "*Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.*" The rod is the loving discipline of a Shepherd and Father that comforts.

Hebrews 12:6 *FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.*" ⁷ *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* ⁸ *But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

¹ http://www.sermonaudio.com/new_details.asp?ID=34550

² http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/09/world/sweden-punishment-ban/index.html?hpt=hp_c3

³ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pcusa-passes-resolution-against-spanking-children-77776/>

⁴ Patricia McBroom, "UC Berkeley study finds no lasting harm among adolescents from moderate spanking earlier in childhood," 24 August 2001 http://berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/08/24_spank.html

⁵ http://www.worldmag.com/2012/07/signs_and_wonders_07_09

⁶ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4:518.

⁷ Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, vol. 2, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 453.

⁸ Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids with the Love of Jesus* (Crossway, 2011), p. 17.

⁹ Tim Chester, *Gospel-Centered Family* (Good Book Company, UK, 2011), 41.

¹⁰ Mark Altrogge, "How to Provoke Your Children to Anger," 2011/02 <http://www.theblazingcenter.com>

¹¹ Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Shepherd Press, PA, 1995), p. 5.

¹² Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 1997), 30-51.

¹³ As cited by Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31* (Eerdmans, 2005, NICOT series), p. 216

¹⁴ <http://nogreaterjoy.org/articles/questions-answered/>

¹⁵ Michael and Debbie Pearl, "Proper Spankings," <http://nogreaterjoy.org/audio/mail-bag-spankings/>

¹⁶ Michael Pearl, "Where on the body?" In *Defense of Biblical Chastisement, Part 2*,

<http://www.nogreaterjoy.org/articles/bible-teaching/article-display/archive/2001/october/01/in-defense-of-biblical-chastisement-part-2/>

¹⁷ <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews/how-not-to-train-up-a-child-part-2>

¹⁸ Shai Linne, "In Adam All Die," Atonement Album.