

Family Heritage Developer

Walkersville Christian Family Schools - *Established 1983*
16827 Sabillasville Road, Sabillasville, MD, 21780; Voice: 301-241-2072
Fax: 301-241-20173; Email: admin@wcfs.edu; Web: www.wcfs.edu



"God forbid that I should forsake the inheritance of my fathers" -- 1 Kings 21:3

May 13, 2014

God's Goodness and Severity in Child Discipline

by Gary L. Cox

The Law is a Schoolmaster to Bring Your Children to Christ

In a recent article, Moralism is not the Gospelⁱ, Albert Mohler warns that many evangelical parents teach a loopholes filled moralism as the gospel, "Improve and you will be approved". Realizing that parenting requires us to focus on good and bad behavior, Mohler's comments naturally raise the practical question, "How can parents correct bad behavior without teaching good morals as the gospel (i.e. raising little Pharisees)"?

The apostle Paul asserts in 1 Timothy 1:8, "*We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully*". He also asserts in Galatians 3:24 that, "*The law [is] our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*". How is the law a schoolmaster to bring our children unto Christ? A significant part of the answer is found in Paul's exclamation in Romans 11:22, "*Behold the goodness and severity of God!*" In this passage, Paul describes the goodness of God as grafting the believer as a wild olive branch into Himself, the *Root* of the olive tree (salvation). Contrariwise, His severity is described as breaking off the natural branches as one

that fell because of unbelief (damnation).

It is impossible to teach the wonderful mercy of *the goodness of God* that leads us to repentance without the stark contrasting reality of *the severity of God*. The reality of hell will teach children a proper *Fear of The Lord*. Such fear learned by grace, has opened the heart of every man, woman and child who ever has embraced the Gospel: *Forgiveness of sin through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone*ⁱⁱ.

Remember, "*If our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost*" (2 Cor. 4:3)! Don't hide the gospel from your children by the manner in which you correct their behavior. Do not minimize your child's infraction by excuses nor misdirect their fear to *you* by angry tirades! Approval and disapproval can wonderfully underscore the gospel when done biblically.

Two Essential Elements of Discipline: Wonder Mule

My dad often told a story about the world's smartest mule. While selling his wonder mule, a man gave a demonstration to a prospective buyer of all the wonderful things his mule could do by voice command. He could turn left, turn right, back up, stay put, give way, go slowly or

trot double-time -- all with a mere voice command! A buyer was much impressed and immediately bought the mule and took him home.

However, upon reaching home, the new owner harnessed the mule and attempted to get the mule to work, all to no avail. He gave every command in the book, but the mule just stubbornly stood there not moving so much as a hair! Feeling taken-in, the man returned the mule and demanded his money back.

Upon hearing the new owner's frustration, the former owner procured a six-foot two-by-four and walloped the mule right between the eyes. Apologizing to the new owner he said, "I forgot to tell you, before you can give your instructions, you must first get his attention!" Then my dad would say, "Kids are like mules, they'll do anything you ask them, but first you must get their attention!"

As a child that story helped me understand that it was important for me as a child to learn to listen! The Bible reveals two critical elements of child training for developing a listening heart: severity, or loving discipline to instill *The Fear of The Lord*, and goodness, or parental instruction in *The Word of God* to fill the

void of a simple mind (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 13:24). (Do a study in Proverbs on the *fool*, *wise*, *simple* and *scoffer*.)

Scripture calls a man wise or foolish based upon whether or not he receives instruction. Moreover, the Bible teaches that children are simple-minded and born with foolishness bound-up in their heart, and thus need training. (Psalm 19:7; Prov. 1:4; 22:15) And the key instrument of discipline? A people-version of the proverbial Wonder Mule's 2x4: *The Rod of Correction*. This rod is beneficial when applied with vision and tender love (Proverbs 10:13; 13:24)! (Or as my dad would say, "The board of education applied properly to the seat of understanding!")ⁱⁱⁱ

Cultivate a teachable spirit: Severity

Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. (Jude v14-15)
Simply put, stained with Adam's sin, the natural-born child is ignorant and unteachable. He has no fear of God and has no interest but to give his own opinion (Romans 3, 5; Genesis 3, Proverbs). Only *The Rod of Correction* is declared to have the power to drive away the foolishness that is bound-up in the heart of a child. Let's briefly explore the rod. However, the rod is for the back of the fool (Proverbs 10:13); its use is limited to dealing with the foolishness. Foolishness is rebellion; "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'.*" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

What is the key instructor/motivator of the rod?

Pain. All mankind has a natural aversion to pain. Pain quickly gets our attention! Pain may be a consequence of ignorance but it immediately creates an attentive pupil with an electric motive to avoid what caused it in the future! Training a child to receive instruction is the only purpose of the rod. Remember, "*The fear of The Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction*" (Prov. 1:7). Jesus said that you should not fear someone that can kill the body, but you should fear God, *Who has the power to send you to hell after the body is dead* (Luke 12:5). Fear the greater pain: God's eternal wrath! A proper use of the rod reveals God's wrath.

What is the rod?^{iv} Any appropriate source of pain. My mother could use a stealth pinch on the earlobe to send corrective electricity through my whole body when sitting in church. A pinch and a look were all it took! A literal rod is only appropriate when used to sting (not to bruise). Often natural consequences are situation-perfect sources of pain, but *a stitch in time saves nine!*

On a side note, today's adoptive and foster parents usually find that they cannot spank in the traditional sense because of prior emotional trauma to the child, so they need a rod of a different stripe!^v (Pun intended.) More time and creativity is required to use a non-physical rod, but it can be wonderfully effective. The greatest sting I ever felt as a child was the sting of stern displeasure that I received from those whose love and approval I desired the most.

Let it be said unequivocally that parental anger in discipline is a great error! It is potentially harmful and provocative to the

child, and it closes down their spirit instead of opening it up to instruction. Only the proper vision of rescuing a soul from hell can give the parent the objectivity and love needed to craft the right use of 'the rod' in every circumstance^{vi}. A proper use of the rod reveals God's wrath, not the parent's. When loving discipline happens, the child is tenderly drawn into the parent's arm's and the parent is drawn hungrily into the child's heart. How dear those sweet memories are to me yet today!

Teach the now tender spirit: Goodness

Do you despise the riches of [God's] goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance (Romans 2:4b)? Remember that 'the rod' is effective only to the degree that quality bible instruction follows. Effective instruction must immediately follow the use of the rod and be given in love. Heart-to-heart instruction is the great comforter of all pain! After discipline, the child wants to hear from the parent. It is this now-genuine desire for instruction that gives the child attentiveness to wisdom. Instruction completes the discipline. Guide with your eye. In all of this process of child training from A-Z, remember eye contact! The eye is the gateway to the soul. See the suggestive elements of discipline listed at the end of this article.

Though it may be understood without saying it, instruction must be from the Word of God. You are training your children to fear God; so it must be God's Word that you instruct from. I thank God for the wisdom and help that the pithy Proverbs and Psalms give to parents as they teach their children to, "*obey your parents in The Lord for this is right!*" It is wonderfully

possible that from a child one can know the scriptures which can make them wise unto salvation. (Meditate on 2 Timothy

3:14-17.) Proper discipline results in a child seeking wisdom from parents and the Holy Word of God; indeed, seeking for it

like hidden treasure (see Proverbs 2). How is your family's treasure-hunt going?

How to use the Law as a Schoolmaster

Severity & Goodness: These two elements of instruction work together by using the law as a schoolmaster to bring your children to Christ in every instance of child discipline.

Element One: Severity, Learning the Fear of the Lord

1. **Confrontation:** The law reveals transgression.

By the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)
(Identify sin; recite scriptures that show God's law was violated.)

2. **Confession:** Transgression requires judgment.

Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. (Matt. 18:15)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1John 1:9)

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)

(Establish fault, guilt and blame; admit and confess fault in prayer.)

3. **Chastisement:** Judgment reveals God's wrath.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. (Psalm 89:32)
(Demonstrate God's wrath; use appropriate chastisement^{vii} and demand restitution.)

Element Two: Goodness, Receiving Instruction from God's Word^{viii}

1. **Repentance:** The revelation of God's wrath brings sorrow that can lead to repentance.

For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation.

There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death. (2 Cor. 7:10, NLT)

(Review the law, the infraction and the chastisement; cultivate godly sorrow and encourage repentance.)

2. **Restitution:** Godly fear opens the heart to instruction in righteousness.

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (Matt. 5:24)

Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong.

You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right. (2 Cor. 7:11, NLT)

(Look for and encourage a tender, teachable spirit regarding restitution and reconciliation; provide a plan for restitution and restoration. Genuine conversation, prayer and corrective action is the goal here.)

3. **Restoration:** Instruction brings forth the Good News.

If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (Matt. 18:15)

Now, however, it is time to forgive and comfort him. Otherwise he may be overcome by discouragement. So I urge you now to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Cor. 2:7-8)

(Forgive. After confrontation, confession, chastisement, repentance and restitution is restoration—i.e. the forgiveness of sin in the gospel; having worked through genuine reconciliation, ask for forgiveness and genuinely forgive.)

4. **Exhortation:** Preach The Good News!

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. (Rom. 10:9-10)

"Whosoever shall call on The Name of The Lord shall be saved". (Rom. 10:13)

(Always teach that powerless sinners have a powerful Savior; however, God must be called upon before He will answer! Make sure the gospel is clearly explained at the end of each instance of discipline. Never mind what professions may have been made formerly, today's sin must be confessed. Always make gospel-based repentance and confession the doorway through which reconciliation is made with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.)

Goodness and Severity. In these two elements, every moral violation can be corrected in such a manner that the need for and the provision of the gospel is made known continually by clear and certain "preaching". The desired outcome is godly sorrow and repentance, the confession of sin and the calling on the name of The Lord. Remember that only the Spirit can do in us what we are powerless to do all by ourselves. Remember that confession, repentance and cleansing is a continuous part of living by the gospel. We grow in faith in same way that we enter into faith (See Galatians 3:1-3)!

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

May your discipline be firm and instructive so that your children might clearly *Behold The Goodness and Severity of God!*

ⁱ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/04/08/moralism-is-not-the-gospel-but-many-christians-think-it-is/>

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *There is no reference in scripture for the use of the rod except for the back of the fool. Never spank except for clear cases of rebellion.*

^{iv} *The Hebrew word for rod is also translated "scepter" and "tribe" in many places, indicating authority with the power to enforce law.*

^v *Spanking is also forbidden by law or regulation in most states when children are placed in foster care or adoptive homes.*

^{vi} *This is known scripturally as walking in the Spirit so you do not give in to the urges of the flesh.*

^{vii} *Rebellion is refusal to comply with clearly stipulated expectations. If an incident is not clear rebellion, then correction consists of clarifying the expectation and demonstration that it is understood. This is done by teaching and perhaps a brief 'practice session'. For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not [placed on one's account] when there is no law (Romans 5:13).*

^{viii} *The entrance of God's Word give light. Remember that God has chosen to bless the preaching of the Word as the means for man to understand salvation. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor.1:21). How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14).*

Questions about this article? Questions about Homeschooling?

Contact WCFS

**16827 Sabillasville Rd
Sabillasville, MD 21780**

301-241-2072

www.wcfs.edu

info@wcfs.edu