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Eight Principles Of Parental Discipline

I've had the question of parental discipline a number of times and so am addressing it publicly here. When I first met Robin she asked me what I thought about discipline. I had been in the usual Psychology and Family & Human Development courses on the university campus, so I responded, I think you should discipline in love. You shouldn't spank a child. You should put them in a corner for five minutes. Robin laughed at me! Soon I learned that the word of man I had been taught on the university campus was in direct contradiction to the word of God.

***Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline
will remove it far from him
(Proverbs 22:15)***

For a long time I thought I knew face value what this and similar texts meant. A rod was a wooden spoon or a homemade paddle like the ones coach so and so used to use in Middle School. And as long as you did some of that you were doing what the Bible said. Then during our study of the book of Amos, especially chapter 4, I began to investigate the "rod." I came to discover it was not what I thought. And I also glimpsed why the pagan society around us was so dead set against spanking children. If it was being done the wrong way then they did have a point. So herein let me try to develop in a very short fashion eight principles of parental discipline, in no way intended to be exhaustive, because space prohibits us from addressing many other important principles.

First, ***the model of discipline***. Parental discipline should reflect God's discipline of His people (Heb 12:10-11). He is the perfect disciplinarian. He would never do anything wrong because He is the standard of righteousness.

And therefore His discipline is always for our good. And He becomes the perfect model of discipline. We should attempt to mimic Him.

Second, ***the objects of discipline***. God only disciplines His own children. He does not discipline the world system. He judges them! Discipline is therefore reserved for your own children. It is because they are your children that you discipline them. They have a unique relationship to you (whether natural or adopted). God has invested authority in the parent and the duty to discipline them.

Third, ***the promptness of discipline***. In the Book of 2 Maccabees the Jews stated, “Not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately, is a sign of great kindness. For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us in order that he might not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. Therefore, he never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people.” God disciplines His own promptly and parents should do the same with children. There needs to be a close association between the violation and the discipline. If no discipline is carried out then one violation leads to another and eventually a whole pile of violations lies before the parent and the parent unleashes in a fury of wrath against the child. This is unbiblical and can only be avoided by diligent and prompt discipline after the infraction.

Fourth, ***the reason for discipline***. God disciplines His children because He loves them. And you ought to discipline your children because you love them. Joshua is one of my sons and if I love him I will discipline him. It is hard to do this. It is not an enjoyable experience. It takes discipline to obey the word of God. But if you do not do it you are damaging your child and you do not love him. *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently* (Proverbs 13:24). To withhold diligent discipline is to directly violate the word of God. *Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die* (Proverbs 23:13).

Fifth, ***the purpose of discipline***. The purpose of discipline is to learn authority orientation. God’s model is outlined in Heb 12. He is the authority and we all need to learn to say, “Yes Sir,” to God’s commands. A child of God should not argue with God and your child should not argue with you. The

purpose of parental discipline is the same, to orient your child to authority. God invests authority in the parent. This is why it was a capital crime in the OT to rebel against your parents (Exodus 21:17). Rebellion against a parent was rebellion against God who invested them with authority. Your child comes into this world equipped with a sin nature (Ps 51:5) and you will never have to teach your child how to do what is wrong. Children already know how to do wrong (Proverbs 22:15). Very early in life they will begin to master certain sin patterns and it's your responsibility as a parent to say "No" to those sin patterns, to cut him off so he does not develop highly advanced skills of the sin nature. Obviously you're not going to get rid of the sin nature but you will teach him authority (if done correctly)! Finally the ultimate purpose of parental discipline is to prepare your child for the gospel because the gospel comes with authority. God says you can come to Me but only My way and My way is Jesus Christ, there is no other way. People don't like that because it comes on His authority and not your authority. So we discipline to orient our children to authority structure in preparation for the gospel.

Sixth, ***the manner of God's discipline***. What the Bible calls "the rod." Now, the rod, in disciplinary contexts is not a wooden spoon or a hand-crafted paddle, the rod in the Bible is a very specific instrument. To discipline with a paddle or your hand would not be the biblical method. There's something about the rod that makes it superior to any other instrument. The rod (Heb = *sebet*) refers to a long slender branch-type instrument. A dowel rod or switch would qualify (dowels or switches of different thickness and length can be used at different stages of development, we use a piece of bamboo that has been cleaned of anything sharp, it is light and fast). So it's thin and it's long, it's not a baseball bat. Clubs and paddles can injure children if the parent gets out of control or the kid puts his arm in the way or twists. The rod will eliminate that. The rod won't injure, it may leave a red mark, it may leave a whelp but it won't bruise, it won't injure. And the place you put the rod is the buttocks, not the head, not the face, not the legs, the buttocks. The Bible is absolutely consistent in saying use "the rod," the father who does not use the rod hates his son and so forth (cf Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15, 17). The procedure is to have the child pull the pants down, don't try to go through the clothing, children wear different thickness of clothing and you want to be consistent. Pull the pants down (in private) and put the rod across the buttocks. It will sting because the nerve receptors, the pain receptors called nociceptors are on the surface of the buttocks, they're not deep down. A

child who you spank over and over with a paddle or other object will build tolerance to the pain and over you'll have to increase the intensity and then you are in real danger of injuring a child, so you don't do it that way, you follow the biblical method, the rod.

Seventh, ***the underlying wisdom of God's way of disciplining***. Since God's wisdom underlies all creation when He says something we must do the way He says to do it. We may not know why immediately and we may say, well I could substitute so and so for that. But that is taking matters into our own hands. In the area of the rod, the symbology God attaches to this word is very important. What is it that Jesus Christ rules with in the Millennial Kingdom? A rod of iron (Gen 49:10; Ps 2:9; Heb=*sebet*). Why the rod? Because it's a symbol of authority. God designed it that way and God designed a child to recognize a rod as a symbol of authority. The hand doesn't carry that symbology, the hand carries the symbology of striking, hitting, beating and fighting. That's not what you're doing when you discipline, it's not a fight, it's saying, "I'm the authority, now child will you submit?" And finally, a rod is humbling because the thing is so small and thin that frankly it's humiliating to feel the sting from such a little thing. And of course, these may get bigger as the child grows but once they reach the age of 10-12 there should be little reason to use the rod if you've been consistent. If you haven't learned of this method and the child is older, then, of course, this will take more time but once you learn the truth you should implement it.

Eighth, ***the escalating intensity of discipline***. God's discipline escalates in stages. If the child does not respond positively to the spanking then you increase the intensity. And if they still don't respond positively, turn it up some more. This procedure should continue until the child submits. Severity stages in God's discipline are described in Lev 26, Deut 28, Amos 4, etc...

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. Heb 12:11

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