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Spare the Rod?

Jerry Dailey

Much has been said and written about whether or not to use paddling or spanking in the training of children. Most of the opinions seem to come from the extremes of the issue. On one hand, there are those who use the book of Proverbs to justify the beating of children into submission. On the other hand, there are those who reject the Bible entirely and totally refrain from all physical punishment. The truth lies, as it usually does, somewhere in the middle.

We need to turn to the Bible, which provides us with all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Peter 1:3), to discover the truth on this issue. We need first to examine a scriptural principle and then some specific facts after which to pattern a course of action.

The congregation of Israel, soon after entering the wilderness, camped at Rephidim where there was no water. They began to murmur and complain against Moses and blamed him for their predicament. Jehovah, in response to Moses' plea for help, instructed Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water would come forth (Ex. 17:6). Some time later they found themselves in similar straits when camped at Kadesh (Num. 10:1-12). They again murmured, complained and blamed Moses because they had no water. God on this occasion told Moses to speak to a rock and water would come out of it. He chose, instead, to strike the rock and lost his place in the Promised Land as a result.

What has all this to do with training children? Perhaps not much, but I think a Biblical principle is demonstrated which we would do well to observe. God, on two different but similar occasions, gave Moses two different sets of instructions to accomplish the same results. Striking the rock was appropriate on one occasion but not the other. Parents are also given two different methods to be used in teaching their children right from wrong, striking and speaking. I think the principle is obvious and easily grasped, but knowing which to use and when to use it is far more difficult.

Fathers are taught in (Eph. 6:4) to "Provoke not your children to wrath but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Vine's dictionary of the New Testament words indicates that the word "nurture" carries with it the idea of physical punishment and "admonition" means to use verbal instructions. Thus we have two different methods of training, like Moses, striking and speaking. This passage also contains a solemn warning to be careful not to provoke them to wrath. This is painfully easy to do if we are unskillful or careless in the administration of our "speaking and spanking."

We need to be particularly careful not to punish out of anger or to soothe our feelings. I can find no scriptural evidence to even suggest such actions. Vengeance is the province of God alone (Rom. 12:19). The actions we take need to be motivated solely out of love and the necessity of bringing them into a covenant relationship with God.

The book of Proverbs is filled with passages which teach the necessity of physical punishment. We will notice only two. "He that spareth the rod hateth his son" (Prov. 12:24). "Withhold not correction from the child for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die." (Prov. 23:13). The above passages spell out clearly the need for physical punishment in the teaching of children but of themselves alone provide little insight as to when and under what circumstances to administer the rod. The passages which deal with verbal instruction are presented from a different perspective

Southeast Church of Christ

35 Walnut Ct

Mogadore, OH

330-628-7432

Service Times:

Sunday: 10 am, 10:50am; 6:00pm

Wednesday: 7:30 pm

and I believe they are the key to our understanding the matter. They do not enjoin the parents to use verbal instructions but rather the children to listen to their parent's teaching. "Hear ye children, the instruction of a father" (Prov. 4:1). "A wise son heareth his father's instruction" (Prov. 13:1). These two passages are sufficient to illustrate the idea.

How then do we reconcile all this to our use? I think the answer is becoming obvious. The method must be suited to the child's ability to bear it. Spanking is more suited to small children who are not capable of understanding the verbal teaching. It seems to me that when a small child misbehaves in services that a simple "No" reinforced by physical stimuli is far more effective than a sermon on reverence. I believe it is equally counterproductive to humiliate a mature child by beating him.

As children grow and mature the need for spanking decreases and the need for verbal teaching increases. A wise parent gradually replaces one with the other, not only with Book, Chapter and Verse, but by their example in the way they lead their lives. The way they treat their spouses, their neighbors and even their enemies have a tremendous impact on the success of all forms of teaching. The attitude we have toward fulfilling all our Christian responsibilities speaks volumes toward training up a child. The positive effect of an example that we really believe the things we preach cannot be understated.

An attempt, intentional or not, to replace a positive example and righteous instruction with physical abuse and with a "Do as I say not as I do" attitude will surely provoke a child to wrath and is but a thinly veiled attempt to lead from behind (no pun intended).

SIX QUALITIES of STRONG FAMILIES

Nicolas Stinnett

Nicolas Stinnett, after studying many families, isolated the following qualities as characteristics of stable, loving families.

1. In strong families, members express a great deal of appreciation for each other. They look for the best qualities in each other.
2. Strong families spend time together. This is not a forced kind of thing; they genuinely enjoy being together.
3. These families are deeply committed to promoting one another's happiness and welfare. They actively try to make life more enjoyable for the family.
4. Strong families have good communication. They talk to each other, listen to each other, and fight constructively (by getting their disagreements out in the open).
5. Most strong families are religious. This is more than "going to church." It involves a commitment to a spiritual lifestyle.
6. Strong families are able to deal with crisis in a positive manner. They are united by a crisis instead of being fragmented by it. Though it all, they remain supportive of one another.