

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 9

[CHURCH BUILDING MINISTRY] DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN IN THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Introduce. An important part of training children in the Christian family is discipline.

Hebrews 12:5-6 says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves.” And Proverbs 3:12 says, “The Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in.” According to God’s Word, discipline is an expression of love. Therefore, discipline should never become an expression of uncontrolled anger or unjust punishment. Discipline should always be exercised in an atmosphere of truth and love.

1. Discipline is an important part of training.

Discover and discuss. In what way is discipline a part of training?

- **Read** Proverbs 22:6. The word “training” (Hebrew: *chanak*) in Proverbs 22:6 and “training and instruction” (Greek: *paideia*, *nouthesia*) in Ephesians 6:4 means *to acquire good habits especially by means of discipline and correction*.
- **Read** Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21. Notice that according to God’s Word, *the fathers* are responsible for the discipline and the training of their children. Although the mothers help the fathers in this area, the fathers may not neglect their God-given responsibility!
- **Read** Hebrews 12:10-11. “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace who those who have been trained by it.” Discipline does not primarily mean “to punish” a child for stepping out of line. It rather means *to train a child in the way he ought to go* (Proverbs 22:6). Therefore, true love will train a child in the way he should go. But love will not discipline a child harshly, because God forbids the father to exasperate or to embitter his children. To exasperate means to provoke to anger. To embitter includes irritating. Such actions of a parent discourage a child. If parents love their child, they will discipline him, but they will not discourage him. The great advantage of discipline is that it trains the child to become holy in his relationship to God, to do what is right in his life in relationship to other people and to bring peace to his own heart.

2. Discipline means setting boundaries or limits.

Discover and discuss. In which areas do God and parents set boundaries?

(1) God and parents set different kinds of boundaries.

- **Read** Deuteronomy 5:17-21. The Ten Commandments are ten important boundaries. Without them, society in relationship to God and in relationship to one’s neighbour would fall apart!
- **Read** Matthew 5:13-16; Psalm 1:1; Psalm 119:37; Proverbs 1:10-15; 4:14-15,23-27; 5:1-8; 6:20-29; 7:24-27; 1 Corinthians 15:33 “Bad company corrupts good character”. Although Christians should not stop influencing all people and therefore should not withdraw from involvement in society, God and parents set boundaries with respect to the kind of people one may associate with on close terms. Christians should avoid associating on close terms with wicked people, mockers, people who entice them to do evil, gamblers, criminals, sexual immoral people, etc. Christians should not mislead themselves to think that bad company would not corrupt their character!

(2) The reason why there should be boundaries.

Discover and discuss. Why do God and parents set these boundaries?

Read 1 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 5:1,13,24; 1 Peter 2:16.

Notes. If parents love their children, then they will not give them unlimited freedom! Genuine love draws a circle around a child so that he can *know the difference* between right and wrong, and between good and bad. Setting clear boundaries around a child helps him to *feel secure* within these boundaries. The boundaries help him to realise the bad consequences and the unhappiness it brings to him and others if he goes outside that circle! Without those boundaries, a child would not have a clear idea what is good and what is bad and consequently he would not be able to evaluate the consequences of his actions. The boundaries function as fences. They *protect* a child. They help him to know and feel sure that when he stays within these fences, he does the things that please his parents and God.

The boundaries or limits are often summarised in *the house rules* of a family. The parents clearly communicate with their children what these house rules are, and why they are important. Parents should not have unnecessary rules, but they should set clear limits. For example, parents should especially discipline their children for disobedience, for dishonesty (telling lies, etc.) and for disrespect. Setting clear boundaries for a child is the only way to provide security for him, because he knows at all times what he may or may not do. When a child has learned to respect boundaries or limits in the home, he will most probably also respect the boundaries and limits in society as well as the boundaries and limits set by God.

3. Discipline means rebuking and correcting.

(1) The necessity of rebuking.

Read 1 Samuel 2:22-24; 3:12-13; Proverbs 27:5.

Discover and discuss. In what way did the father, called Eli, fail to discipline his children?

Notes. Eli had two sons who did very evil things. He *talked* a lot to his two sons, but *failed to rebuke* and *to restrain* them. He asked them, “*Why* do you do these things?” This is not a rebuke, but rather a plea to stop. Instead, this father should have asked his wicked sons, “What have you done?” He should have confronted them with their wickedness and the consequences of their wickedness. He should have rebuked them for their sin!

(2) The different aspects of rebuking.

Discover and discuss. What are different biblical aspects of *rebuking* (Greek: *elenchó*) a child?

- *Read* Ephesians 5:11. The parent exposes (Greek: *elenchó*) the specific sin that his child has committed. His child must know very clearly *what* his transgression was. The parent should also make sure that his child realises *why* his action was wrong, either in God’s eyes or the parent’s eyes.
- *Read* Proverbs 27:5-6; 28:23. Then the parent rebukes (Greek: *elenchó*) his child by scolding or disapproving of his conduct.
- *Read* Titus 1:9. If necessary, the parent refutes (Greek: *elenchó*) the arguments of his child when he tries to justify himself without a good reason. However, the parent should give his child the opportunity to explain his conduct. His child may have a very good reason that the parent overlooked. Whenever the parent made a wrong assumption or undeserved accusation he needs to apologise to his child.
- *Read* John 16:8. In the mean time the parent prays quietly that the Holy Spirit would convince (Greek: *elenchó*) his child of his wrong and convict (Greek: *elenchó*) him of the seriousness of his transgression, so that he feels guilty or ashamed of his transgression and desires to repent.
- *Read* 2 Timothy 3:16. Finally, the parent corrects (Greek: *elenchó*) his child by helping him to go in the way he ought to go.
- *Read* Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 22:15. And if his child persists in disobedience by being foolish, arrogant or rebellious, hardening his heart against his parents or challenging the authority of his parents, then the parent must punish (Greek: *elenchó*) his child in the appropriate way.

4. Discipline means giving appropriate rewards.

Discover and discuss. What are appropriate rewards and punishments?

(1) Reward appropriately.

Parents should devise different kinds of ways to encourage and reward their children in order to motivate them to stay on the right way.

(2) Possible rewards that encourage the child to continue on the right way:

- Thank and praise (commend) the child for doing what is right.
- Hug the child and give it undivided attention.
- Take the child on an outing the child is looking forward to.
- Give the child more freedom to meet his friends.
- Give the child some kind of reward.

5. Discipline means giving appropriate punishments.

Discover and discuss. What are appropriate rewards and punishments?

(1) Punish appropriately.

Parents should also devise different kinds of punishments in order to motivate their children to repent of their wrong ways and return to the right way.

(2) Possible punishments that motivate the child to change his wrong ways:

- Rebuke the child for its transgression, but do not abuse (assassinate) his character.
- Isolate the child (in the corner of the room) in order to give him an opportunity to think about his transgression.
- Cancel a planned outing with the child.
- Remove some freedom to meet his friends.
- Withhold some of his pocket money.
- Assign some extra chore around the house.
- When really necessary, punish the child with a rod.

(3) Punish with a view to save.

Read Amos 4:6-12; Haggai 1:2-11; Luke 12:47-48; Galatians 6:7-8.

Notes. God punishes (judges) people in the present time with temporary punishments in order to save them from eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46).

- God uproots and tears down a nation in order to motivate the people to repent and submit to him (Jeremiah 18:5-17). The Living God punishes people with hunger, drought, failure of the harvest, sickness or the plague, defeat in war and destruction of their cities in order to motivate the people to return to him (Amos 4:6-12).
- God punishes his people with failure of the harvest, with empty purses and with failure of everything they do with their hands in order to motivate them to stop their sinful neglect of God in their daily lives (Haggai 1:2-11).
- “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). God punishes his people in the present with temporary punishments in order to save them from eternal punishment in hell. God is perfectly holy and just and also his punishments are always perfectly fair and just (Luke 12:47-48). God wants to be taken seriously and desires that people share in his holiness of life on this earth (Galatians 6:7-8).

(4) Punish promptly.

- **Read** Ecclesiastes 8:11. The Bible says, “When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong” (All the time they devise new ways of doing wrong).
- **Notes.** When the governing authorities of a country do not promptly punish criminals, then the criminals will become more arrogant and commit many more crimes! Likewise, when parents do not administer discipline promptly and clearly, then the child will wonder if his parents are serious or not. One child will become more and more arrogant and do more wrong things. Another child will become more and more insecure and develop psychological problems.

(5) Punish with love.

- **Read** Psalm 89:30-34.
- **Notes.** Also God punishes the children of his covenant whenever they fail to keep his commands. Nevertheless, he never takes his love from them! “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24).

(6) Punish with a rod if necessary.

Read Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17.

Notes. No governing authority in the world has the right or authority to oppose God’s clear commands with regard to exercising discipline towards one’s children. Every governing authority that rejects God’s teachings and commands in the Bible rejects God himself and will be rejected by God at the final judgement (Psalm 2; Proverbs 1:28-33; Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10)!

The Bible gives several important reasons why it is *sometimes* necessary to punish a child with a rod. “A rod” is a stick or flexible shoot cut from a tree. It is not a whip. When a child is left to go his own way, he might fall into crime (Proverbs 4:14-15) or acquire some other serious consequence of his bad behaviour (1 Corinthians 11:30). But when he is quickly punished for his disobedience or arrogant behaviour, he will most probably not become a criminal or die of the bad results of his behaviour. The Bible teaches, “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with a rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his life from death” (or: “save his soul from hell”) (Proverbs 23:13-14). And, “Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being” (Proverbs 20:30). Sometimes it is necessary to punish a child by making use of a rod, because it remains the only way to purge his inmost being and to save his soul.

However, do not beat the child anywhere where it will cause permanent damage. Also it is best not to beat the child with your hand, because at other times he might begin to fear your hands as well. Rather always use “a rod” as a symbol and instrument of punishment. The child ought to fear the rod if he transgresses, but he should not develop an unhealthy fear for his parents or his parent’s hands.

Some more reasons why *at certain times* a beating with a rod is necessary. The Bible teaches, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). And, “The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother. Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul” (Proverbs 29:15,17). Children sometimes do foolish things, show disgraceful conduct to their parents, do evil things or commit a crime. The various passages in Proverbs teach that *sometimes* punishment with a rod is necessary, in order to give the child a clean conscience and to bring peace in the home. It is necessary in order to turn him away from evil and foolishness, and to save his soul from death! When a parent promptly administers punishment, the child will most probably grow wise and peace will return to the house and in the hearts of the children and the parents!

Generally, when children become teenagers, parents should no longer punish them by beating them with a rod. Discipline should then be exercised in the same way as is done with adults who transgress.

5. Discipline means expecting obedience consistently.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:5.

Discover and discuss. What could be the consequences if a parent makes threats to punish his child, but fails to carry them out?

Notes. Ecclesiastes 5:5 teaches, “It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfil your vow”. It is better never to make empty threats, like for example, “If you don’t do this, then I will punish you!” Threats may cause a child to live in fear of punishment, or to tell lies to his parents in order to avoid punishment, or to secretly plot how to escape punishment. That is why making a threat is generally not a very helpful method of disciplining a child. Instead of making threats, a parent could help their child to think through the consequences of his wrong behaviour. However, if a parent does make threats, he must carry them out! If the parent does not carry out his threats, a child becomes convinced that he cannot believe or trust his parent.

To expect obedience consistently is much better than making threats. The parent should not nag or plead with their child to obey. He should also not give in to his child’s whims. If the parent nags his child to obey or gives in to his child’s whims, then his child will always follow this pattern of scheming to avoid obeying or to escape punishment! In the area of obedience, the parent should not give the child a choice, but he should also not make unreasonable demands on the child! Discipline means expecting obedience and doing this consistently!

6. Discipline means comforting the child after repentance or punishment.

Discover and discuss. Why are forgiveness and reassurance so important for the child?

Read Luke 17:3; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

Notes. After a child has repented of his sin or the parent has punished his child for his transgression, the parent should *forgive* his child, *comfort* him and *reassure* him of his love! If the parent does not do this, he gives Satan a foothold in his child’s life and his child might become bitter and revengeful. If the parent fails to forgive and reassure his child after repentance and punishment, then it becomes very difficult for his child to believe that God would forgive, comfort and reassure him after he has repented from his sin! The Bible teaches that, after the punishment, the parent ought to forgive and comfort his child, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. The parent should reaffirm his love for his child. Reaffirmation is best given by *praying together* with his child, by *giving him a hug* and by *telling* him that his father and mother love him.

Read Proverbs 17:9; Hebrews 8:12; Matthew 18:35.

Notes. Note the difference between ‘forgetting’ a sin and ‘not bringing that sin into remembrance’. God does the last and also expects his followers to do this. After the parent has forgiven his child for a particular transgression, he should not drag that issue up again at another confrontation, because it would only prove to the child that his parent had not really forgiven him after the last offence! Like God, parents should not mention that past transgressions any more. If in the future, the parent still feels angry about that past transgression, he needs to keep on forgiving his child in his heart.

7. Discipline means encouraging the child.

Read Colossians 3:21; Proverbs 15:1.

Discover and discuss. What are some ways in which fathers embitter their children? And what are some ways in which fathers could encourage their children?

Notes.

(1) Ways to embitter children.

The parent should not irritate their child or provoke him to anger either by too much or too little discipline. Colossians 3:21 says, “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged”. “To embitter” means to provoke, to irritate or to cause to feel indignation. Fathers and mothers should discipline their child firmly, but not in a hot temper. They should not make criticisms or judgements about their child’s character, like for example saying to the child, “You *are* stupid!” “You *are* ugly!” “You *are never* on time!” “You *are always* lazy!” This is called character assassination and can cause serious psychological problems later in the child’s personality. There are many ways in which fathers and mothers can discourage their children. One very frequent way to discourage children is to shout at them in anger and to say very nasty things about their character especially in front of other people in order to shame them! Proverbs 15:1 teaches, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”. By observing the reactions of the children to their parents, parents can know which things discourage their children. For example the children get irritated, angry, depressed, withdraw or give up on their parents. These reactions are indications that the father or mother ought to *change their approach* in dealing with their children. Discipline should bend the child in the right direction, but should not break his spirit!

(2) Ways to encourage children.

Maintain a personal relationship with children. Do not treat them as things or objects that should be seen, but not heard. What parents and teachers sow during their childhood will become a part of the harvest of what these children become when they are adults (Galatians 6:7-8). Every child has great need to have a personal, friendly, loving and regular relationship with his parents and teachers. Therefore, even if you have no time, make time to spend creatively with children and especially teenagers and young adults. Every child, teenager and young adult has a need to be wanted, needed and loved.

Tell the child, teenager or young adult regularly that you love him! Especially fathers in some cultures must learn to spend time with their children, to talk with their children and to show affection to their children, that is, to hug them. Many teenagers and young adults complain that they have no relationship or no communication with their fathers! Their

disappointment with their earthly fathers can also cause them not to trust the heavenly Father. And a healthy relationship with their earthly fathers will encourage them to have a good relationship with God the Father. Communication should not only consist of school matters and money matters, but also consist of every important and interesting topic in the world. Do interesting, creative and even challenging things together with the children.

Show a genuine interest in their friends. Let them talk about their friends. Invite their friends to your house. Organise meals and outings together with their friends. Children are encouraged when their parents and teachers approve of their friends and welcome their friends.

Help children, teenagers and young adults with their homework and studies. They need advisors and guides and often a lot of encouragement to persevere with their studies.

Sometimes reward children when they are still small. Praise children and teenagers now and then for the things they do well. And whenever they deserve it, tell teenagers and young adults that you are proud of them and of what they do.

Prove to children and teenagers that you trust them. Give them responsibilities and praise them when they have accomplished their responsibilities.