

## Parenting and Consequences, Part 1 | punishment vs consequences

### I. An Important Introduction Concerning Language

- In the same way we can read into the Scriptures modern or fallacious understandings of words — words like faith, love, the spirit, the heart, and so on — we can also read wrong *concepts* into Biblical teaching where the words were never even used.
- The English word “punish” means: “To impose a penalty on for a fault, offense, or violation, to inflict a penalty for the commission of an offense in retribution or retaliation, to deal with roughly or harshly, to inflict injury on.”
- The English word “punish” shows up 4 times in the NASB translation of the New Testament. Three of those times it’s being used in a legal sense — as in an authority who has the judicial right to give punishment. The last time it’s used, it’s referring to unique apostolic authority to punish disobedience.
- However, colloquially, nearly every English-speaking home in American uses that word to describe an activity that shouldn’t be understood in the same way.
- Parental correction is never anywhere in Scripture defined or illustrated as being penal in nature. And every discussion in the Bible concerning punishment has no bearing on the home.
- God gives governments the right to exact penal consequences. God Himself is actually the perfect example of righteous punishment. He condemns people to hell as the holy response to their offense against His character.
- But parents — unless they are acting in a governmental faculty as they preside over the crimes of their own children — should not approach discipline in the same way.
- But by utilizing the wrong word, by attaching the wrong ideas to biblical concepts, I believe most Christian families have completely skewed God’s intention for family discipline. And it’s been skewed in a huge, life-altering way.

### II. The Nature of Family Punishment

- At its most basic, punishment is a transaction. It has very clearly defined participants and purposes that are unique to it.
  - The participants are the criminal and the judge. The criminal has broken the law, and the judge is tasked with upholding the law by — in part — punishing evil doers.
  - The purpose of the punishment is two-fold. On one hand, it’s designed to serve as a deterrent to would-be criminals. On the other hand, after a crime has been committed, the punishment is an eye-for-an-eye transaction.
  - To act like there are any other meanings or understandings of the word is to water it down — deliberately or unintentionally.
  - But the real problem is not that we’re propounding a false understanding of punishment. The real issue is that we believe punishment — as it’s properly defined — is exactly what God expects from parents with their children.
- When a parent believes it’s their God-given responsibility to punish their children, at least four very bad things happen.
  - The parent is going to misunderstand God and His expectation for them.
  - The parent is going to pervert the discipline God wants them to give.
  - The parent is going to lead their children astray by giving them the wrong idea about God and authority.
  - The parent is going to tempt their kids to reject them.

- Punishment is nothing more nor less than a mere penal accounting with no expectation or process for change. It demands pain to pay for pain. It requires discomfort from them to cover the cost of the discomfort they caused someone else. That's it.
- And though punishment is a very real thing that can and should be done to God's glory by the right people, it's not the parent's job
- Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:26-31; Romans 12:19-21
- Two dangerous responses to this truth.
  - Some parents execute a pendulum swing in the opposite direction and stop giving any negative consequences all-together.
  - Other parents will superficially start itemizing different forms of discipline into arbitrary categories.
- The only way to glorify God in any area in our lives is to know the depth and breadth of His Word, understand it, and live it, we must apply diligence to accurately understanding consequences within the context of parenting.

### III. The Nature of Family Consequences

- Merriam-Webster's best definition of "consequences" for our purposes here is, "something produced by a cause or necessarily following from a set of conditions." Consequences — whether comfortable or uncomfortable — are a natural reaction to the initial action.
- **Consequences make existence possible.**
  - Since consequences are the reaction to action, they make up two sides of the same coin. They can't exist without the other.
  - Consequences make everything in life possible.
- **Consequences teach.**
  - Non-penal consequences have the higher purpose of imparting information.
  - When consequences are stripped of their intended design — to teach us about life — we get into a lot of trouble.
  - On one hand, when we don't learn from consequences, we're doomed to repeat them. History is the living record of that reality.
  - On the other hand, when we interpret consequences within a punishment framework, we distract from the teaching the consequence was intended to provide.
- Recognizing how non-penal consequences are different from penal-consequences, the Bible's teaching concerning the role of the parent becomes abundantly clear.
- As a parent, it is not our God-given right to divvy out final judgement. We're not to write-off our kids. We're not to portion out pain because the child earned it. We are commanded by God to teach our kids, reprove our kids, correct our kids, and train our kids. We're called to nurture our children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord. We're called to speak the truth of God in the love of God and teach our kids how to know, understand, and wisely live that truth in their lives. That is our calling.
- That calling absolutely requires consequences — both comfortable and painful. But we absolutely must understand and submit to the purpose of the consequences otherwise we're going to slip into punishment-mode and work contrary to God's will.
- When our kids sin, there will be consequences that occur whether or not we do anything about it and whether or not the children even recognize that the consequences took place. Therefore, it's our responsibility to lovingly teach our children about the reality of those consequences.
- In addition to that, God expects for us to introduce additional consequences designed to teach the child vital lessons about what they did — the initial action. And the whole goal is maturity.