

## TLP 74: Spare the Rod | Punishment Versus Correction

### I. What is Punishment?

- According to Merriam-Webster, the English word “punish” means: “to impose a penalty on for a fault, offense, or violation, **b** : to inflict a penalty for the commission of (an offense) in retribution or retaliation.”
- Please note that this concept is strictly meting out consequences for an infraction.
- Generally speaking, the Hebrew and Greek words most often translated punish in the Bible carry a similar meaning.
- A good example of this is I Peter 2:13-14 which says, “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”

### II. What is Correction?

- Merriam-Webster defines “correct” as “to make or set right : *correct* an error : to alter or adjust so as to bring to some standard or required condition.”
- In the Greek, this particular word shows up in a very famous verse. II Timothy 3:16 says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*” and carries with it the meaning of restoration to an upright state and the improvement of character.
- Now, to be fair these two words are used almost interchangeably in our daily communication, and there was a little of that in ancient Hebrew and Greek as well.
- But I believe that's a poor choice. It's true that language evolves, but I think it's very important for a Christian to say what he means and mean what he says as best as possible.
- Punishment is action taken to hurt someone who's broken the law. Correction is designed turn someone toward right because sin hurts. The differences are crucial.

### III. What is Discipline?

- How do we define discipline?
  - It's important to note that the Greek word translated discipline includes both training through nurturing, but also chastisement.
  - Chastisement may not be familiar to all of you. If you look it up you'll see it's a synonym of punishment. In fact, it's pretty severe.
  - The word discipline perfectly combines both the idea of punishment and correction. In fact, the punishment simply becomes a tool that the authority uses to correct. The punishment is not merely the end in itself.
  - Hebrews tells us, “*For the Lord disciplines the one he **loves**, and chastises every son whom he receives.*”
  - Proverbs 3:11-12 says, “*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he **loves**, as a father the son in whom he delights.*”

- Second, we have to come face to face with the fact that God commands discipline.
  - Proverbs 19:18 reads, *“Discipline your son, for there is hope;”*
  - Proverbs 23:13 says, *“Do not withhold discipline from a child.”*
  - Proverbs 29:17 tells us, *“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest;”*
  - Ephesians 6:4 tells fathers to *“bring . . . up [their children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*
- Third, we need to understand that not only does God command that we discipline, He also models discipline.
  - I can’t take the time right now, but from the Fall of Man to the end of the Millennium, God has been actively disciplining His creation.
  - And that discipline has been and will be extremely severe.
  - But remember, the punishment He inflicts is designed to draw people to righteousness.
  - Why will the tribulation period last seven years? God wants to give as many people as possible the opportunity to repent. He could immediately wipe everyone out, but He won’t because His main desire is to draw people toward Him.
  - There will come a time where discipline and correction will be over and all those who refused His free gift of salvation will enter into pure and eternal punishment.
  - But God is patient and gracious and would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
- Lastly, I want to see that God not only commands discipline and models discipline, but He also describes discipline.
  - Proverbs 13:24 - *“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”*
  - Proverbs 22:15 - *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.”*
  - Proverbs 23:13-15 - *“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad.”*

#### IV. Considerations

- Now, some people will say that the book of Proverbs is the only book that specifically states that we should use a rod on our kids. And these same people often say the book of Proverbs is either just a collection of man’s wisdom, or that it’s filled with generally truisms that don’t always work and are therefore not requirements for Christians. But, my friends . . .
  - The book of Proverbs is not a sub-standard book. It’s the Word of God.
  - The book of Proverbs is not merely filled with pithy, mostly true sentiments. It’s the Word of God, and every Proverb is accurate and viable.
- There are also some who will say that the rod represents the shepherds crook designed to gently guide sheep or pull them from destruction, but if we’re honest with the Bible, that can’t be logically argued. Proverbs 23:13-15 - *“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.”* This is not a gentle prodding He referring to here.

- I also need to point out the New Testament book of Hebrews. In chapter 12, verse 11 it says, *“For the moment **all** discipline seems **painful** rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* Whether it be spankings, groundings, or whatever, discipline is inherently painful.”
- Allow me to finish with Hebrews 12:5-11 — *“And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? ‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”*

#### IV. Conclusion

- The problem we face when disciplining our children is pretty straightforward. We err on one of two sides.
  - There are those parents who hatefully and angrily punish their kids for daring to cross them. They hurt their kids too much, they do it the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.
  - And there are those who cannot bring themselves to inflict any kind of pain on their children. They believe they have a better way of parenting than God does and far too often their children reap pain far beyond the little discipline God wanted for them.
  - Both of these are wrong. Both are unbiblical. Both are sin.
- I regret that due to time considerations, I’m not able to address this concept fully. It’s not difficult, but I’m concerned that without dotting every “i” and crossing every “t” someone out there is going to get the wrong impression. So, allow me to close with this: discipline is utilizing the two-pronged approach of . . .
  - Providing enough pain to remind the child that sin hurts. As we grow, the pain that sin inflicts is always worse than the discipling parents are commanded to give. And please understand that I’m not saying you spank everyone all the time for everything. No! I’ve said before that we should always take the lowest intensity approach to every situation.
  - Provide whatever correction is needed to teach the child that the behavior is wrong and give them the proper biblical motivation for doing right.
  - If that doesn’t work, then — at some point — the parent will need to ramp up their approach and start working in consequences. These consequences should be appropriate to the sin and should start small.
  - Only after a child has . . .
    - repeatedly and consciously chosen to rebel against the instruction, or
    - the nature of the sin is such that a more significant consequence needs to be employed do we move to spanking.
  - And spanking should be age and size appropriate. A delicate pat on a diapered hiney is perfect for some, but a more aggressive approach will be needed for older kids.
  - The Bible does not detail the degree, the amount of pressure, the number, or anything like that. It assumes that a Christ-follower who loves God and his children will wisely and righteously only use the right forms of discipline at the right times. And biblically, that will involve spanking. And that transitions us to the second prong:

- The first prong is appropriate consequences, and the second prong is correction.
  - Love for our kids and God will curb our anger, and surround our consequences in wisdom and kindness.
  - Every time we discipline our children we must correct. We must instruct. We must admonish. We must teach. We must train. We must communicate high biblical expectations and the worldview that achieves them through the power of the Spirit.
  - That is biblical discipline.

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