

Lesson 4 Principles for Discipline

Discipline is essential to every family and without it there is nothing but anarchy and confusion. Most professing Christians agree that discipline in the home is important, but the problem is that most Christian homes really lack in discipline. There is a large gap between theory and practice.

The Bible and common sense tells us the basic principles of discipline, but Christians must exercise obedience to put these principles into practice. Apart from the power and grace of God, we as Christians are unable to apply what we know is right; therefore, we must be constantly claiming God's power to apply God's Word.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR FAILURE TO DISCIPLINE CHILDREN

If parents are not willing to discipline their children, then they must be willing to suffer the consequences. A good Biblical example of this is priest Eli. Eli had two rebellious sons who did not know the Lord (1 Sam. 2:12). ***“Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.”*** Apparently, Eli did little to curb the evil ways of his boys when they were younger, and only tried to admonish them when it was too late. ***“Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I heard from the people about these wicked deeds of yours. No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the LORD’s people. If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him, but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?” (1 Sam. 2:22-24)?*** The Lord brought judgment on these wicked sons by promising that they should die for their rebellion, but this didn't convict these boys, for sin has a hardening effect. ***“His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death.”(1 Sam. 2:25).***

God's judgment came upon Eli as well as his sons, and the blame was put squarely on Eli himself. Why was Eli judged? Because his sons ***“made themselves contemptible, and he (Eli) failed to restrain them”(1 Sam. 3:11-13).*** God's anger was so aroused at Eli and his house that no amount of repentance or sacrifice could change God's mind (1 Sam. 3:14). A failure to keep God's revealed will in the Bible concerning the disciplining of children will bring the judgment of God, and sometimes, no amount of repentance or dedication will change God's mind about the judgment. Eli was a saved man, but his rebellion brought God's judgment down on him, and his family.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR DISCIPLINING CHILDREN

Negatives

Never Compare Children. All children are different and each personality must be handled differently. A parent makes a big mistake when he says, “Billy, why aren't you like Bobby?” The answer is simple: Billy isn't Bobby! Comparisons simply confuse a child. Each child should be encouraged to develop his own personality.

Do Not Humiliate the Child in Front of Others. To reprimand, ridicule or scold a child in public brings great embarrassment to the child and he loses respect for his parent. This may get immediate results, but it will provoke the child to wrath. If the child is acting up, take him out of the room, in a private atmosphere, and there punishment can be given. Remember, children have feelings too.

Do Not Bribe Your Children. It is very unwise for a parent to promise a child some reward if he will be good. The reward is usually dealing with money. When a parent says, "Johnny, if you will be good over at the Smith's place tonight, I will give you a quarter," he is in real trouble. A problem has not been solved, but made more acute. If he is an intelligent child, he will raise the prices on you. Never bribe a child for anything. You should not pay your child for mowing the lawn, washing the dishes, etc., for these things are family responsibilities. The best thing to do is to give a child a weekly allowance. This way bribing is eliminated.

Do Not Threaten Your Children. Never say, "Billy, if you don't do such and such, I will not love you anymore." That is a lie and the child knows it. If he doesn't know it, then he will be an insecure child for every child needs to know his parents love him all the time.

Do Not Allow the Children to Play One Parent Against the Other. Children are clever and often love to get parents arguing among themselves over the discipline of a child. Often a father will tell a child not to do something. Then the child will go ask mom and she says to do it. The child takes mom's orders over dad's orders, and when he comes home the father asks why he did it, and the child says, "Mom said it was okay." The child is off the hook for disobedience. Parents should be united on discipline and "no" means NO!

Do Not Get Angry With the Child When Disciplining. About 90% of discipline is administered when the parent is angry with the child. When a person is mad, his temper is not under control, and this can have bad effects upon the child mentally and physically. Get cooled off before exercising discipline to a child. Parents often take out their own frustrations on the children. Perhaps things have gone wrong, and the child simply becomes a parent's frustration object for pent-up emotion. This causes a child to think that parents are very unfair. Sometimes parents will say, "Well, spanking the kids may not do them much good, but it sure helps me." This is a wrong motivation for discipline.

Do Not Expect Perfection from Your Child. So often a parent will expect a child to do what he cannot execute himself. You cannot ask a child to operate on an adult level. Children must grow up. Parents should challenge and motivate their children but they should not expect perfection. However, that does not mean that standards should not be set high.

Positives

Teach Children that Disobedience is Against God. When a child does wrong, he has sinned against God first and others second. Disobedience is sin and transgression of God's law, and even a child must pay the price for disobedience.

Explain to the Child that Parents are Not Perfect. Children have to understand that parents have a sin nature, even as Christians, and that they are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ like everyone else. Parents should apologize to their children when they have been wrong. Never apologize to a child for legitimate discipline because this will cause the child to lose respect for the parents. However, a child's respect will increase for the parent who

really knows how to say, “I’m sorry,” when the parent has been wrong. This will not lower a child’s confidence in a parent but build it.

Praise the Child When He Does Something Well. A child has an ego that needs to be praised as well as a will that needs to be broken. Children must have their confidences built and this is done by wholesome praise and interest on the part of the parents for the children. Every kid should have the feeling: “Mom and Dad are for me; there’s nobody for me like Mom and Dad!” So many kids never get the idea that anybody is for them.

Martin Luther was brought up in a very strict home. In commenting on this type of training, he gave us a bit of sound advice, “Spare the rod and spoil the child—that is true. But, beside the rod, keep an apple to give him when he has done well.”

Help the Child Evaluate His Disobedience. Talk with the child and help him to see his mistakes. Help him to avoid the same mistakes the next time. Keep those lines of communication open at all costs.

Allow the Child to Express His Own Viewpoint. God has given a child the ability to reason and every child needs understanding. How many times parents have disciplined their child when they did not have all the facts, or before they heard the child’s side of the incident. Children expect a fair shake in life, and well-trained children will expect prompt and just discipline when they have been disobedient (even though they won’t like the discipline). There is real security for a child when he is being disciplined in love. It takes the burden of guilt off and shows him that somebody really cares.

Restore Fellowship After the Discipline. Parents, after administering discipline, should forgive and forget. Never hold a grudge against the child. When God forgave us our sins in Christ, He said “I will remember their sins no more.” We must make the child understand that discipline is not rejection, but it is something done for their own good. Parents should restore fellowship immediately after disciplining the child.

The Goal of Discipline is Inward Conviction. The ultimate purpose for discipline is not outward conformity but inward conviction. Discipline is not to raise good people but children who have convictions about right and wrong. To give inward convictions, sometimes we must let our children make some mistakes. For instance, let a child make mistakes with five or ten cents, so that later he will not make the same mistakes when handling a dollar. Much of what a person learns in life is through mistakes. The child who never makes mistakes will be the problem child. However, the child who makes mistakes and is helped by his parents to understand will become a responsible child. Do we want our children to be holy or happy? Do it God’s way and they will most likely be holy and happy.

Let the Child Know that Discipline is Out of Love. The parent should show with his life and repeat over and over again that all discipline is motivated by love and a desire to be faithful to God’s Word. The parent who doesn’t discipline his children is really not interested in them.