Correcting Losing Behavior

Correcting Misbehavior by Punishment

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Course III – Unit 12, Lesson 3
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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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In this lesson, we will look the correct way to punish misbehavior. Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing what you think is the correct way to punish your children. Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and then **put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scripture. **Finally, go back for a more in depth-study before completing the** Response Sheet

I. Introduction

In Lesson 2 of this unit, we looked at five ways to correct a child's misbehavior without punishment. They were:

- Use preventive discipline.
- Focus on their needs.
- Ignore it.
- Redirect their behavior.
- Withhold privileges.

We recommend that you review the material in Lesson 2 on these topics if you need to.

II. Biblical View of Punishment as Correction

God's primary concept of discipline is the types of correction we studied in Lesson 2. God recognizes there will be times in which a stronger type of discipline is required.

If we lived in a perfect world, there would be no need for discipline imposed by parents. Unfortunately, we do not so there is a need for discipline. Also, because we live in a fallen, sinful world, all children will not respond to good Biblical discipline. Some children will be rebellious and insubordinate. It is these types of children who require a stronger type of discipline.

The book of Proverbs is filled with advice on punishing the rebellious and insubordinate child (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 29:15). The primary method recommended is what we today would call a spanking. Proverbs 29:15 tries to focus on the entire concept of discipline. It reads,

> *The rod and reproof give wisdom,*
> *But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.*

Solomon says that a selfish, arrogant child does not hurt only himself. He also harms his parents. He says there are two ways to change such a child. One is by reproof, the

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concept of correction in Lesson 2. The second is physical punishment (the rod). If both methods are used properly the child will learn how to live a mature, independent life.

Under the Law of Moses, the unrepentant, rebellious child could be put to death (Exodus 21:15, 17). We do not live under the Law of Moses, and the death penalty for the unrepentant, rebellious child does not apply today. It does, however, show how seriously God views disciplining children.

The New Testament does not really discuss punishment of children. It talks to parents and children about their relationship. The child is to respect and obey his parents. The parents are to love and "...bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Also, parents are warned not to be harsh and dictatorial (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21).

Christianity is more concerned with attitudes than behaviors. Change the attitude, and you change the behavior. Just because you change a certain behavior, does not mean that you have changed the attitude behind it. It just means that children have stopped a particular negative behavior.

When children respect and love their parents, it is shown through their behavior. When parents seek the best interest of their children, it will be shown in how they treat their children.

Remember, the goal of punishment is to change the child's behavior. It must never be used by parents as a means to get even with their children.

III. Parenting Styles

What determines how parents discipline their children? It is determined by their parenting style. Parenting style is the philosophy a parent has about rearing their children. It sounds simple, but it is not. Most people learn their parenting style from their parents. Often, poor or bad parenting styles are passed from generation to generation until someone breaks the pattern and starts a new style. There are four basic types of parenting styles. They are as follows:

A. <u>Authoritarian</u>

The authoritarian parent is a dictator. He dominates the child. Rigid rules are established and sternly enforced. Discipline is excessively harsh, often abusive. The child has little or no freedom to develop his own personality and independence. He is

expected to become whatever his parents want him to become. He has no personality of his own.

According to Wayne Grant, children of authoritarian parents typically are conformists, cooperative, poor decision makers, and self-controlled. Although outwardly passive, they are filled with hate and hostility. Eventually, they will rebel against the uncompromising and dictatorial parent. This normally happens when they become teenagers. The rebellion usually takes the form of getting revenge against the parents. This can be anything from bringing shame on the family to acts of violence against the parents.

B. Neglectful

The neglectful parent ignores the child. The child is allowed to do or not do anything he wants. The neglectful parent is totally unconcerned about his children. He is unresponsive to the child and rejects him. Whether the child lives or dies is unimportant to him. At best, the child is a nuisance.

A child raised by a neglectful parent will have no self-esteem, self-control, or ability to cooperate with others. Often, he will have a feeling that he has no right to be alive.

C. Permissive

The permissive parent allows the child almost unlimited freedom. He interferes only when the child's behavior becomes intolerable or dangerous. He accepts the child and is responsive to the child.

Children raised by permissive parents will be self-indulgent; they flaunt the rules, and are aggressive. They do have some positive characteristics. They are creative, impulsive, energetic, and independent.

At times the neglectful parent and the permissive might act the same. There is, however, a difference between them. The neglectful parent rejects and does not respond to the child. The permissive parent, on the other hand, accepts and responds to the child.

D. Authoritative

The authoritative parent encourages his children to be independent. The child is not allowed to acts as he wants. The authoritative parent places limits and controls on the child's behavior.
Instead of being unyielding, like the authoritarian parent, there is a certain amount of give-and-take in the parent/child relationship. He sees discipline as a way to correct and teach the child instead of getting even with him. Like the permissive parent, he is accepting and responsive to the child. The relationship is warm and nurturing. The parent wants the best for his child. He does all that he can in helping the child to develop into a mature, independent adult. Children raised by an authoritative parent will grow to be socially competent and responsible and self-reliant. Of the four styles of parenting, the authoritative style is the Biblical style.

IV. Types of Punishment

A. Verbal Punishment

Verbal punishment is punishment administered with words. For verbal punishment to be effective, the words, tone of voice, body language, and attitude must agree. If they do not, the child will be confused. He is being sent conflicting messages. A child reacts by believing neither and doing what he wants to do.

Does a child who broke a vase really believe his mother who says, "That was reckless of you; you will have to buy another one," while she is smiling? Of course not! She is sending him two conflicting messages. Her words tell him that he has done something wrong and that he must pay restitution. Her tone of voice and body language is telling him, "No big deal; don't worry about it." He will ignore her. If her facial expression is stern, it is agreeing with her words. He knows that he is being punished.

Verbal punishment is effective only if the children love and respects their parents. Younger children see it as disappointing mommy or daddy. Older children who respect their parents will see it not only as disappointing their parents, but they will understand the reasoning behind their parents' punishment. If they do not respect the parents, they regard it as nagging.

There is a difference between verbal punishment and being verbally abusive. Verbal abuse is attacking the child's self-image and self-esteem. It tells him that he is worthless. Verbal punishment, on the other hand, tells him that his actions are not acceptable and demands that he change them.

Verbal punishment is most effective with older children and teenagers. The spoken word is powerful. It can be either for good or evil. Parents might want to consider giving their children positive spoken messages to help create a respectful, obedient child. Words of praise and encouragement do more good for a child than any amount of punishment. Remember it is initially easier to develop a positive minded, winning child, than it is to remake a child with negative, losing behavior into a winner.

B. Nonverbal Punishment

Nonverbal punishment is the use of nonverbal messages as punishment. They can be a stern look, a frown, silence, a threatening gesture, or a prearranged signal that means a certain thing. For the nonverbal message to be understood by the child as punishment, it must have been used before with either a verbal message or physical punishment. Otherwise, the child will be confused.

C. Physical Punishment

Physical punishment is using pain as punishment. It includes spanking, paddling, striking the child with the hand or some other object. Because it inflicts pain, it is important that care be taken to insure that it does not become abusive. When using physical punishment, the object is to punish the child, not to get even with him. Physical punishment should be restricted for a child who is openly defiant when other forms of punishment have failed. It is a measure of last resort. Keep the punishment fair. Keep it proportional to the misbehavior.

Punishment is a poor method of teaching. All it does is to teach a child how he should *not* behave. When you punish your children, first tell them what they did wrong. Then tell them what behavior you expect from them. This way they learn what is acceptable behavior.

V. Warnings About Punishment

The result of physical punishment can be tricky. It will either cause a change in behavior or increased negative behavior. The type of punishment and the way it is administered plays a big part in determining how the child will react to it.

A. Positive Effects Can be Short-Lived.

Physical punishment only has positive effects if it is reinforced with positive messages of what type of behavior and attitude is expected from the child. Punishment for the sake of punishment only stops the child from a certain action. Once the threat of

punishment is removed or the child no longer fears it, he will start the misbehavior again.

B. Negative Effects Are Long-Lived.

Some negative effects of improper or abusive punishment are resentment against the parent, open rebellion by continuing to misbehave, creation of defeatism in the child. The results of such negative effects can be life long emotional, social, spiritual, or psychological dysfunction. Sometimes as an adult he can overcome these negatives he learned as a child, but it is a high price to pay for his parents' not being the type of parents God wants them to be.

C. It Sends the Wrong Message.

Punishment emphasizes what a child does wrong. It does not tell the child what is the right and correct behavior. Remember when punishing the child, make sure he knows what the right and correct behavior is. None of us are mind readers, especially children.

D. It Creates Avoidance Tendencies.

Often, children misbehave for experimentation and search for independence. Experimentation is how children learn. Parents are to guide their children in the right areas of experimentation. If punishment causes a child to be afraid to experiment, his development will be stunted. Physical punishment must be administered with great care so it does not make the child afraid to experiment.

E. The Child Learns that Anger Solves Problems.

Too often, when a parent punishes with pain, it is done in anger. The parent is getting even with child. The child learns that anger solves problems. He, in turn, will use anger to solve his problems. As a child, he becomes bully. As an adult, he becomes a spouse abuser, a child abuser, a criminal.

F. It Strengthens Losing Behavior.

There is a chance that the punishment might backfire. A strong-willed, defiant child might continue in his defiance to get back at his parents.

G. It Prevents Social Development.

If a child is punished too frequently and too severely, he will be afraid of dealing with people and social occasions. His reasoning is, "Why try—everything I do is wrong." He becomes hopeless and helpless.

VI. Correct Use of Physical Punishment

A. One correct use is when you are trying to teach your children that “no” means “no.” This is usually used with younger children who are beginning to walk and crawl. You should use a stern, loud voice; say “NO!” and then give him/her a sharp slap on the hand.

B. Another situation where punishment might be necessary is when it is the lesser of two evils. For example, using physical force to restrain the child while he is receiving some form of medical or dental treatment. Also, when the child insists on doing something dangerous, physical force may be necessary. If a verbal correction does not work, a spanking may be necessary.

C. A third situation is when the child refuses to accept your correction to change his improper behavior to proper behavior. Punishment that is administered by a concerned, living, caring parent reinforces proper behavior.

D. Give the paddling, or “swat”, etc. as soon as possible and in front of as few people as possible. Be available for the child to come back to you for a hug, etc. as soon as he/she wants. Do not rush or delay the reconciliation and forgiveness.

VII. Conclusion

Punishment is a means of correction, not of revenge. Its goal is to change a losing behavior into a winning one.

Contrary to many modern sociologists, *punishment can have positive effects if used properly*. If used properly, it can strengthen the parent/child relationship. If used improperly, it can destroy the relationship and be destructive to the child's development.

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**