The Loving Art of Spanking

by Philip Lancaster

One of the saddest stories in the Bible is that of Eli and his sons (1 Samuel 2-4). Eli was the chief priest of Israel in the generation before King Saul. It was he to whom the boy Samuel was entrusted by his mother Hannah, to be raised in the priestly family. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests under the direction of their father during the time Samuel was being brought up.

Startlingly, the scriptures record that "the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD" (2:12). What? The sons of Eli, the man who tenderly taught Samuel to recognize the Lord's voice (3:1ff.), did not know the Lord? The priests of Israel were corrupt?!

Yes, and their corruption was not of a minor sort. We are told that they utterly disregarded the Lord's direction for how the sacrifices of the people were to be administered. God in His law carefully specified how the animals of sacrifice were to be killed, which parts were to be burned, and which part the priests were to receive as their share. However, the sons of Eli totally ignored God's law for the sake of personal appetite. They claimed the best parts of the sacrificial meat for themselves, and if the one making the offering objected, they would simply threaten to take the meat by force. "Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD" (2:17). As if this were not enough, Eli's sons "lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (2:22). The sin of these priests was notorious. Instead of urging the people toward holiness, they were actively engaged in corrupting them.

So what was Eli's reaction when "he heard everything his sons did to all Israel" (2:22)? Here is the report: "So he said to them, 'Why do you do such things?… No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?'" (2:23-25) This sounds like a righteous response. He rebuked his sons in a way that showed the seriousness of their offenses. But it wasn't enough. "Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them" (2:25).

A few verses later we hear the words of a prophet the Lord had sent to address Eli. He spoke the words of the Lord: "'Why do you kick at My sacrifices and My offerings which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?'" Obviously God was not pleased! He blamed Eli for his sons' behavior and accused him of honoring his sons more than God. How could this be? Eli had rebuked their sin in no uncertain terms. What more could he have done?

We learn the answer when we read the content of Samuel's first prophecy, which was a prophecy of doom on Eli and his household. "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (3:13). Apparently God regarded Eli's verbal rebuke of his sons as inadequate. Something more than scolding was called for. The Lord expected this father to actually "restrain" his sons and put their offenses to an end. He was in the position of authority. His sons were under his control. His failure to get beyond scolding to actually demanding and obtaining a change of behavior was a sin sufficiently large to call for the most severe of judgments. "I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever" (3:14).

God takes seriously a father's duty to demand and to get proper behavior from his children.

But what could Eli have done? His sons ignored his rebuke. They were adults. Could he have taken them over his knee and spanked them? Would that have done any good? Of course it was too late for that. But that is precisely the lesson we need to learn from this story: a father must train his children to obey when they are young because it is too late when they are grown. Obviously Eli had been a permissive father and had not made demands on his sons. Oh, he apparently scolded them when they did wrong. But they learned that this meant nothing. They could go on and do what they pleased with no consequences.

Eli should have restrained his sons' behavior when they were growing up; then he wouldn't have had to deal with their outrageous offenses when they were older. Even then he should have dismissed his sons and, if necessary, called out the Levites who assisted in the temple work to remove his sons from their priestly service. He had the power to do that, and that is what the Lord expected of him. But he was not used to restraining his boys and stayed with the patterns that apparently he had long ago established: rebuke the sin, but don't actually put a physical restraint on the behavior.

THE ROD: A MEANS OF GRACE

If we are not to repeat the sin of Eli we must learn how to train our children when they are young, and specifically, we must learn how to train them in a way that goes beyond scolding to enforcement of God's standards of right and wrong. But how is this done? What is God's method of enforcing proper behavior on our children? How do we "restrain" their actions, even to the extent of taking physical measures to assure results?

The solution offered in Scripture is the rod. "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (Prov. 23:13,14). Fathers are given the tool of corporal punishment to shape the behavior of their children. The rod represents the father's authority (and hence the mother's as well, since she

shares his authority as his helper). It is the parents' means of physically restraining the bad behavior of their children and bringing them into line with God's standards.

Beating with a rod is not acceptable to modern psychologists who think they know better than God. These false teachers view spanking as a form of violence, of child abuse. Well, it is indeed a mild, restrained use of force and pain (not violence); but it is not child abuse. It is a carefully administered dose of superficial injury which is designed to bring about repentance and a change of behavior. We know it is restrained since the proverb tells us that the child beaten with the rod "will not die." The aim is not serious injury. The aim is pain which results in a change of heart and of actions. "Child abuse" would be defined from the biblical perspective as a failure to use the rod. Those who disdain its use do not love their children enough to save their souls from hell! Just as Eli's undisciplined sons grew into incorrigible rebels destined to the severest judgment, so any child from whom the rod is withheld is in danger of hell. That is why another proverb concludes: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (13:24).

Proverbs presents parents with the choice: they can give their children a moment of physical hurt or an eternity of soul-tormenting pain. The rod is the means God has designed to transform children from rebellious to obedient. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). A fool in Proverbs is not a simpleton or a merely naïve person; he is a rebel. So when the verse tells us that foolishness is bound up within the hearts of children, it is saying that they have a deep-rooted tendency toward rebellion. It is so deeply rooted that mere scolding will not dislodge it from the heart. More drastic measures are required. And God promises that bodily chastisement with the rod will have a beneficial effect: it will drive the rebellion out of the heart. If Eli had done this to his boys when they were young he would not have had such grief when they were older.

This is an amazing truth. In the rod we have a veritable means of grace, a measure that is part of what God uses to transform our children from rebellious offspring of Adam into obedient sons of God. Now there is no gospel grace in the rod itself, of course. The physical instrument of spanking does not have a direct effect on the soul, and many who by spanking in childhood have been shaped into decent, moral adults nevertheless have not yielded their wills to Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet God uses the infliction of physical pain by the Christian parent as part of the process of opening the heart of a child to the Lord. How can a child who is stubbornly resisting his parent's authority possibly be open to the gospel of grace in Christ? Rebels don't bow before the cross. But as the heart is freed from its mutinous instincts through chastisement, the soul is opened to the further gracious influences of the Holy Spirit which lead a child to salvation.

WHEN NOT TO USE THE ROD

Clearly the godly father will want to make use of the rod since he loves his children and wants to see them submit to the Lord all their lives and avoid the pains of hell. But when should the rod be used? Do I beat my kids every time they do something wrong? It should already be clear from the scriptures we have referenced that the rod is used to deal with rebellion. “Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools [rebels]” (19:29). Let’s clarify the matter by taking a look at some instances in which the rod should not be used.

First, the rod should not be used to correct mere inexperience and childishness. A two year old who knocks over a potted plant on the coffee table at a friend’s house is not being rebellious; he’s being curious. It would not be appropriate to spank him for doing what comes naturally at this age of exploration. Now if the toddler persists in touching the plant after having been told firmly, “No, don’t touch,” then a firm swat on the backside with the rod is in order since the act has been elevated to rebellion due to the command of the parent.

Second, the rod should not be used in response to accidents. When a nine year old trips on the steps carrying in the groceries and shatters all but one of the eggs in the carton he is not being rebellious. Perhaps he is clumsy, and this clumsiness can be corrected through training, but clumsiness is not revolt. To spank a child when he unintentionally breaks something may make the parent feel better (especially if it was grandma’s china plate that was broken), but it is likely to embitter the heart of the child since he senses the injustice of the attack against him.

Third, the rod should not be used when a child exhibits a lack of ability to accomplish a task. It would be an outrageous misuse of corporal punishment to spank a child who was having trouble learning how to ride a bike, or whose handwriting persisted in sloppiness despite his real efforts to be neat. The rod is designed to change the heart. It does not create a sense of balance or a steady hand. For a parent to resort to spanking when a child is reaching the limits of his or her ability in a task is a form of child abuse (though no concern of the state).

The rod is for the back of fools. It’s use should be carefully reserved for those times when a child is clearly revolting against authority. Which brings us to the question, How do we define rebellion? What does it look like? Or to put it more positively, What does obedience look like?

THE NATURE OF TRUE OBEDIENCE

My handy desk dictionary defines obedience as both “an act or instance of obeying” and as “the quality or state of being obedient.” Someone who is obedient is “submissive to the restraint or command of authority: willing to

obey." We get the sense, which certainly agrees with Scripture, that obedience is not just a matter of outward conformity to the will of another; it involves the attitude that lies behind the action. Obedience is not just doing what an authority wants, it is doing so in a certain way. Let's consider the nature of true obedience.

First, true obedience is prompt obedience. Children are commanded to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12) as part of their general duty to honor all authority, and ultimately the authority of God himself. This attitude of honor is made evident as children respond to the command to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). Is God pleased if He commands me to do something and I take my time about responding? No, true obedience, that springs from honor to God and those He has placed in authority over me, is prompt obedience. If the heart is submissive it will cause the child to want to respond immediately when a command is given. Delay and dawdling suggest that he does not want to obey and is putting it off since it does not suit him at the present. Postponed obedience must be treated as disobedience. It is not obedience "in the Lord."

Second, true obedience is complete obedience. Just as delayed obedience is an assertion of self-will as to the timing of the act of obeying, so incomplete obedience is an assertion of the will as to the amount of conformity necessary. King Saul did not destroy all of the people and goods of the Amalekites as God had ordered. Even so, he boasted to Samuel "I have performed the commandment of the LORD" (1 Sam. 15:13). After Samuel confronted Saul with the evidence of his failure to obey fully and rejected his excuses, he asked the king, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord?" (v. 19) Saul thought 90% obedience was good enough. God had a different measuring stick: He demanded 100% conformity to His will.

If my six year old daughter is told to bring all the dishes off the table into the kitchen and she brings all but the water glasses, that is not obedience, however promptly it was carried out. She may figure someone else should help her. She may decide it would be handy to leave the glasses so they are available for the next meal. She may think a lot of things to justify herself, but 90% obedience is disobedience.

The need for complete obedience on the part of a child suggests the need for a parent to be very clear in giving directions. If the command is vague, obedience cannot be exact, and it would be wrong to spank a child who simply did not understand what was expected of him. Now of course, we all know that children can take advantage of the situation and claim that they did not understand or did not hear, but that all the more underscores the need to be clear. It is best to have eye contact with the child to be sure your command is heard, and perhaps even to have the command repeated back if there is any tendency for the child to "misunderstand" or "not hear." Requiring a "Yes, sir" or "Yes, ma'am" as a sign that the direction was heard and understood is also a good idea.

Third, true obedience is cheerful obedience. Here we get thoroughly into the matter of attitude. God is always more concerned with heart attitude than with outward actions, though both are important. The great error of the Pharisees was in thinking that God only cares about external conformity to His will. Jesus told them they looked great on the outside, like a beautiful tomb, but that inside they had the putrid stench of decay (Matt. 23:27). Their hearts were far from God, though they scrupulously fretted about being outwardly righteous. Jesus' most scathingly denunciations were reserved for those who thought pleasing God was just a matter of externals and who left their hearts out of their religion.

In announcing the curses He would visit on His people when they did not keep His covenant, the Lord said, "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies…" (Deut. 28:47,48). Sometimes God's people grudgingly obey on the outside, but their hearts are not in it. They see God's commands as burdensome and they chafe, even as they obey outwardly. God does not accept such behavior. He wants those who serve Him with gladness.

Our children must not only conform their actions to the commands we give them, they must also do so with a cheerful spirit and without complaint. This does not mean they cannot seek clarification to be sure they understand what is expected, but their attitude must be right. They cannot be permitted to gripe, or to heave a big sigh of disgust, or to roll their eyes, or to scowl, or to shake their heads, or to walk away from us with body language that communicates disdain. Such behaviors clearly evidence an unsubmissive spirit even if accompanied by outward actions of conformity to the directions given. The rod should be used in such cases as surely as if the child had steadfastly refused to obey at all.

To fail to discipline for inward as well as for outward rebellion is to assure that the heart will remain unyielding. The result will be that we create children who learn to do what they are told, but whose hearts remain self-willed, like the child who when told to sit down does so but mutters under his breath, "But I'm still standing up on the inside." If this kind of attitude, however expressed, is allowed to persist, a father will end up producing Pharisees who are outwardly compliant but whose hearts are full of rottenness.

So, obedience is not doing what I'm told when I feel like getting around to it. It is not doing most of what I'm told to do. It is not doing what I'm told with a complaining and downcast spirit. Obedience is doing what my authority tells me to do, and doing it promptly, completely, and cheerfully. Anything less is rebellion and calls for the rod of correction.

Now we must deal with the question of what exactly is meant by the use of the rod. What is a rod? How should a parent spank a child?

WHAT IS A ROD?

The rod of correction in Proverbs is not some high-tech torture device. It is simply a stick, a piece of wood. My grandmother from North Carolina called it a switch. (The first time I heard her threaten its use on me, I thought she was planning some kind of electrocution, though I did think that a bit out of proportion to my offense.) A Hebrew father would take a small branch from a tree, one that was solid enough to inflict pain upon application to the hind regions, yet yielding enough not to inflict real injury. I have used a dowel rod purchased at the hardware store, about 5/16th of an inch by 18-24 inches, seems about the right balance of heft and flexibility.

As in everything, we are safest when we adhere closely to the wisdom given in Scripture. Could we substitute something else for a wooden rod? Perhaps, but why should we? Many parents, mine included, have used a hefty leather belt. This choice can be quite effective. The only danger is if the parent gets a bit carried away and strikes the child with the buckle (this happened to the boy next door once – big ouch!). Some use wooden kitchen spoons, which seem reasonably close to a rod. A paint stick is too wimpy, except maybe for the bare backside of small children. I once saw a specially designed paddle made of heavy wood that was about a foot long and 3/4th inch thick with rounded edges and a hand grip on one end. This was far too solid for a rod: you could kill someone with that weapon. Others have promoted plastic versions of a rod. My main objection to them is that they will not break, like a wooden stick does, if used too hard.

There is real value in having a unique instrument to serve as the rod of discipline rather than whatever household item is handy. The rod then comes to symbolize the disciplinary authority of the parents and is used only for corporal punishment. A belt or a spoon have other daily uses and are confusing symbols.

It is good to avoid the use of the hand as a means of spanking. The hand in Psalms symbolizes God’s leading (139:10), God’s provision (104:28; 145:16), and God’s deliverance and help (37:24; 119:173; 144:7).It also pictures discipline (32:4) but not in the sense of being struck by God’s hand. The hand does wield the rod, and it is the parent who is applying the discipline, but the use of a neutral instrument underscores that the parent is not acting in his own right and for his own ends but is representing God’s authority by taking up the form of punishment He has ordained. It is not personal vengeance being poured out on my child; it is the chastisement God has authorized me to use as I act in His name.

HOW TO SPANK

We know when to administer corporal punishment: it is for rebellion against authority; it is for disobedience. We know what to use to administer that chastisement: the rod. Now let’s address the practicalities of how to apply the

rod. What is the process we should go through when our children require a spanking?

The first thing to stress is that a spanking should be given promptly after the offense. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Just as the child’s obedience should be prompt, so the sentence for disobedience should be carried out swiftly as well. Justice delayed is not true justice. “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov. 13:24). It is important to connect the crime with the punishment in order to reinforce the fact that actions have consequences.

It is also unloving to make the child wait in dread for the pain he knows he has earned. My great-grandfather used to tell his boys when they disobeyed that they had a switching coming. Then he might wait a week or two and suddenly as he and his son are walking along the road, he grabs a switch and tells the boy its time to give that switching he is owed. Talk about exasperating a child (Eph. 6:4)! Such a way of handling discipline is sure to tempt a child to despise his father. No, punishment must be swift.

The spanking should be administered by the father if he is present (and by the mother in his absence). He wields the authority of the rod as the head of the home and he should apply the discipline when he is with the offending child. This would apply even if he is in the basement fixing the plumbing while Mom is out in the garden with the children. When one of them disobeys Mom, she should get Dad to administer the discipline. This honors him as the family leader and reinforces to the rest of the family that Dad is in charge. The failure to obey Mom was not only an offense against her, it was also a sin against the father whose authority in the home (delegated to his wife) has been challenged. Besides, as we have already noted, the force required for spanking is more readily exercised by a man than by a woman.

Now it is important that the mother not become the comforter while the father becomes the bad guy. She must support his role as primary disciplinarian and not allow any attempt of the child to set the parents in opposition to each other. As we’ll see below, when Dad spanks a child, he himself should end up comforting him. Then Mom receives the child back as one properly chastened and back in fellowship, but she should not give comfort in a way that suggests that Dad was either wrong to spank or too harsh. As the man’s helper, the wife must stand by him as he deals with the souls of his children.

When Dad is not home, Mom must do the duty of spanking. She should use the same force and demand the same respect as her husband (although we can readily see the disadvantage of having fathers away from home so much of the time). She should not use the line, “Just wait until your father gets home” since discipline must be prompt and she has the right to wield her husband’s authority in his name just as if he were doing it himself. Having said this, it is not inappropriate for a father when he gets home to use the rod on a child

who has shown a general spirit of disobedience during the day with his mother. Besides whatever spankings the young one received at her hands for specific offenses, his Dad can deal with the general attitude of non-cooperation which constitutes a distinct offense against the authority of the father who has left the mother in charge. “Mom spanked you for not cleaning your room when she told you to, for hitting your brother, and for throwing your sister’s doll. I’m spanking you for disrespecting my wife and assistant by not obeying her orders as if they were my orders.”

The father should not spank in anger. Now anger is not inappropriate for a person whose authority has been rejected or ignored. But he should wait until his anger subsides so that he is not tempted to be violent while he is using the rod. He should be in full control of his emotions when he sits down to begin the ritual of corporal punishment. He is supposed to reflect the character of God, the Father, who always acts for our good. The spanking is not a way for the parent to get back at the child, and to spank out of anger will not achieve godly results. James warns us that “the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (1:20). The use of the rod should draw father and child closer together, but a spanking in anger will have the opposite result and may harden the heart of the child and make him less responsive to the promptings of grace.

As to the spanking itself. It should be carried out in private to focus the attention of the child on the parent and to eliminate any other influences (not to mention the threat of hotline calls if you discipline in public). The reason for the spanking must be clarified so that the child understands exactly why he is about to experience pain. At this point it would be good to identify not only the specific offense, but the root problem and any applicable scriptural principles as well: “You threw your sister’s doll even though we’ve told you to leave your sister’s things alone. When you do that you are breaking God’s eighth commandment (do not steal) which teaches the need to respect the property of others. For that reason I have to spank you. It’s the duty God has given me as your father to help you learn to obey God.” For the child to be able truly to repent, he must understand his offense as a sin, a sin against God as well as his sister.

For the spanking itself the child must be put in a good physical posture for the act. Smaller children can be laid across the knees or lap. Older children could be told to lay over a chair or the edge of the bed. Part of the child’s duty in receiving the discipline is to cooperate with the process and to assume the necessary position without complaint.
Speaking of complaint, the child must have an attitude of submission during the process. He should not be allowed to protest or resist your attempt to put him over you lap. He must have a submissive attitude in accepting the need for discipline and receive it willingly. His carrying on and fighting you would become another offense that requires another spanking.

Scripture tells us the part of the body to spank: “Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools” (Prov. 19:29). God has designed

an area of the body to receive corporal punishment. The back, the buttocks and the back of the upper legs are a safe place for a beating since there are no vital body parts that may accidentally be injured in the process, and the latter two parts are preferable since they are farther from the head and have more natural “padding” (and are less likely to be visible to anyone else in case the “stripes” remain a while).

How hard and how long do you spank? The idea of corporal punishment is to inflict enough pain to break the will without doing serious injury. In the King James translation of Proverbs 19:29 it recommends “stripes for the back of fools.” This suggests that a proper beating will be forceful enough to leave marks: red lines or even possibly welts that disappear shortly. A spanking is supposed to hurt! Mere tapping with the rod, or spanking through layers of clothing and diapers, will not be effective. It is the pain that works brokenness. A father may need to teach his wife how to use the rod in his absence. Most women are by nature more gentle and find it hard to apply sufficient pain in spanking to achieve the intended result. But without pain a spanking is a waste of time and will only serve to frustrate both parent and child.

Your aim should be to spank until you elicit a cry of repentance from the child. Some children will begin crying before the rod even makes contact with their back sides, but it is not mere tears that you are after. Other children will respond to the blows with the rod by crying out in protest or anger, but this is definitely not what you are after. This response must be distinguished from a cry that signals the child is yielding his will and succumbing to the pain. Perhaps this sounds cruel, but what do you think is the point of spanking?! If it is not a token gesture, a symbolic event, then we must press on with the infliction of real pain, despite our sensibilities. The pain is what God uses to break the will and produce a submissive spirit. Call it tough love. Just remember you are fighting for the soul of your child, and the Lord expects you to persist until you win the battle for his life. God will hold your responsible if you don’t restrain your child’s behavior and train him to yield to authority. The rod is your tool to that end.

Once the discipline is inflicted, you are not finished. It is time for the all-important follow-up time. Now is a very important moment in your relationship with your child. Don’t allow him to run off crying or to run off at all. There are several things you should aim to do at this time, once his crying has subsided.

> **1) Seek a confession of sin from the child** (if it was not made before the spanking) and have him ask for forgiveness. This casts the whole event in its proper light and keeps the focus on the godly motive for discipline.
>
> **2) Express forgiveness and love for the child.** Comfort him and hold him close. Remember that you disciplined him because you love him, not because you hate him (Heb. 12:6). You should assure him verbally of your

love.

3) Pray for the child. Ask the Lord to forgive him and to work obedience in his heart. It would be good if the child were able and willing to pray, but this is not necessary. The parent can intercede on his behalf at this time.

4) Plan restitution. The Bible makes it clear that when a wrong is done to another person the offender ought to pay back the person wronged (e.g., Exod. 22:5). If there was someone hurt by his actions, a child ought to be required to ask forgiveness of that person. If property was damaged, it ought to be replaced, with more beside. If the injury was intangible, perhaps a hurtful word, the child could be required to perform some acts of service on behalf of the offended. Parents should be creative to consider if there is some way to make restitution. This teaches a valuable lesson about the cost of sin. When all this is done, it is time to dismiss the child, perhaps with a final hug.

NEVER TOO YOUNG, OR OLD

One final question that may arise: For what age child is discipline with the rod appropriate? The simple answer is, At whatever age he evidences foolish (rebellious) behavior. There is no age too young nor too old. Now practically, when a child is very young it may be hard to discern when a certain behavior is a lack of submission. Nor does it seem appropriate to take a nine month old across your lap and wale away on his naked legs with a rod. On the other hand, there are times when it is clear that the infant is not getting what he wants, so he screams in protest. This is a form of revolt that should be nipped in the proverbial bud. A moderate stroke or two to the legs with a firm, No, seems proportional to the offense. Those who wait until a child is two or three to start spanking may are definitely waiting too long. The child's will evidences itself well before that and ought to be dealt with at is earliest manifestations. The word "promptly" in Proverbs 13:24 may best be translated "early," which would give this rendering: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who love him disciplines him early." It's never too early for loving chastisement.

Nor is it ever too late. There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that once a child grows to a certain age or size he is immune to this form of punishment. Proverbs makes no such distinctions. The fool of any age deserves stripes on his back for his willful disobedience (19:29). This might even be an appropriate form of discipline for the civil government to use against fools who disturb the peace and order of the community. But certainly it is always appropriate within the family. Of course there is a serious problem if a 16 year old does something that marks him a fool, thus calling for the rod. If the punishment has been used consistently through the years, it is hard to imagine it would still be necessary at that age. If it has not been consistently used, it may not be effective once the child is that old. We are reminded of Eli's sons with whom we began this study. They needed restraint, but how do

you restrain someone who is grown and who still has foolishness bound up in this heart? Once again we come to the conclusion that it is absolutely vital to begin the process early and thus avoid the prospect of trying to tame the will of an almost-grown child.

THE COST OF PARENTING

It is evident that using the rod has a considerable cost attached to it. To do it right requires the parent to stop what he is doing and take a few minutes out to deal with the sin of his child. Frankly, there are times when any father would rather let an offense go than to go through all this process. Or he would like to just give a few quick strokes with the rod and be done with it. But any shortcuts in the process risks losing the benefits God intends the rod to bring.

I have heard parents say that they would spend their whole day spanking their child if they were to respond to every instance which called for that response. This is an indication that the child has already won the battle for control: he is not submitting to parental authority, but the parents have given up trying to control him. It probably also indicates that the parents do not know how to apply the rod properly. The father in this case must commit himself to begin immediately gaining control of his son or daughter. If he uses the rod in the way we have described he will get results. It may be tough for a while as the child tries to see if Dad is serious about being in charge, but eventually he will yield if the discipline is carried out correctly.

Using of the rod is not just about developing the character of the child. It is also about the character and faithfulness of the parents. It takes faith, courage, determination, and wisdom to use the rod effectively in the training process. The process we have described here does not come naturally to any parent. We have to be convinced that it is a matter of obedience to employ this method of child training. But as we act in faith and obedience ourselves, we will find that God is faithful to use the means He has ordained to shape our children into God-fearing adults who are motivated to submit to the Lord out of love.

In all of our efforts to train our children we must remember the utter futility of our labors apart from God’s blessing. There is no mechanical connection between a spanking and a change in the child. We must bathe all of our efforts in prayer, recognizing that unless the Lord changes the heart of the child, our labor is in vain. But thanks be to God, He is indeed faithful to use the rod as a means of grace as we apply it faithfully, and with faith in our heavenly Father’s gracious activity in the hearts of our children.