

EPHESIANS #94 6:4b 4-12-15  
*THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD*

(Ephesians 6) It was two Sundays back we began our look at what Ephesians 6 says to parents. At that time I exhorted our children to check on their parents to insure they were paying attention or else risk missing dessert. So, I'm wondering, how many of you parents had to skip dessert on March 29? I saw a sign that said, "Life is short, eat dessert first." I'm fascinated by the proliferation of *life is short* slogans because, you know, that is a biblical theme. Compared to eternity, life is short, but I am fascinated by what people do with that reality. I saw a shirt this week that said, "Life isn't so short, it's just that death is so long." That's getting close to the truth. Another one I saw said, "Life is short - watch TV." No surprise that I saw that one on TV. Not the application I would come up with though. More common slogans are, "life is short play hard." The Christian version: "Life is short pray hard." Today I guess we will say, "life is short, parent hard." The time we have with our children, to shape them and fashion them as arrows that can hit the target are indeed very few. Then they go flying from our homes to land, hopefully, in the vicinity of where we were aiming. The direct New Testament counsel to parents is not extensive. Ephesians 6:4 is as thorough as any. **4** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* Now there is a lot more to parenting than that isn't there? But, if that is what God chose to say to us, then this must at least summarize the most important things. And it doesn't mention getting them enough vitamins and iron. It doesn't mention buying them nice clothes or making sure they brush their teeth. It says to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Last week we looked at what not to do, as we considered how parents provoke their children. Then we noticed how the passage encourages intentional parenting. Parents are not to be passive, but active in the shaping of our children. Our kids don't come to us as some amorphous chunk of play-dough that is easy to mold as we please. Each child is wired differently, and each child is designed to accomplish special and unique things, but there is a general goal toward which all parents are to direct their children. We saw last week that it is the goal of Christian maturity and therefore the way to the goal is called here *the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Next week we will get to look at the parental duty of instruction. Today we look at the duty of discipline. You ready? For many of us the need for God's word on this point is obvious. We have discovered that, like the butterfly, when we got together with another really nice and graceful butterfly, we ended up giving birth to some creepy, crawly little things that don't always do like

they should. Every parent I know of experiences a combination of delight and disappointment with their children. We see that they are not what they ought to be. If they were houses we would call them "fixer-uppers." They need a lot of work, and we parents are the workers - very imperfect workers too. You are not a perfect parent. We all fail to one degree or another, so we do well to get over any judgmental attitudes we bring to this subject, and we do well to get over any personal defensiveness. Almost nothing will make people madder than feeling condemned about their parenting. We are really sensitive here. But, if we care about our children, if we want for their sake, and the Lord's sake, to be the best parents we can be, we must get over our sensitivities and open our minds and hearts to what God says on the subject. What you get today will not be one man's opinions. I have some opinions about child raising, and if you ask me I'll tell you in private, but from the pulpit I don't deal in opinions. Here I try to be very careful to speak what God's word teaches and little more. You can study all the experts if you like. That is fine. But if they all say A and God says B - friend, you had better do B. Children are a gift of the Lord and with that gift come some instructions. Follow them and don't worry about what the neighbors or the experts have to say.

4 *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* That word, *discipline*, is variously translated but what it means is made clear when we read Hebrews 12 where it is used four times in the obvious context of parental discipline. Hebrews 12: 5 *and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;* The same word "discipline" is used here to refer to how God works with His children. What does it involve? 6 *FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.* There the word *discipline* is placed parallel to what word? The word *scourge*. Apparently, to discipline is to inflict intentional pain on someone else. When this is done by a caring father, it is quite the loving thing to do. Proverbs 13: 24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.* 23: 13-14 *Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. 14 You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.* It is beyond debate (R) that God commands parents to discipline their children and He even appears to be okay with a physical expression of discipline. Today we will look at what God says about the purpose, the motive, the frequency and the manner of parental discipline.

First of all then, the purpose of discipline. The passage we read speaks to that 14 *You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.* From death, from hell. When you discipline a child you have that child's earthly and eternal destiny in view. You discipline to keep the child out of hell and hell is the result of sin. Proverbs 22:15 *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.* Now here again we read the word "rod" and I suppose I should clear up what that is. A rod could be anything from a cane to a stick. As it is used here it simply means some stick-like device used for what we might call *spanking*. A ruler, a paddle, a spatula, all could qualify as a rod. A rod is a physical object. It is not a threat or a word. The "rod of discipline" is a spanking tool and as such it is emblematic of what is called "corporal punishment." Now again, the purpose for such corporal punishment according to Proverbs 22:15 is to rid a child of his foolishness. One more word on this matter is found in Hebrews 12 where we read about God's discipline of His children. 7-8 *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* Discipline is so intrinsic to the job of parenting that the lack of it is the sign of being illegitimate or orphaned. Then 9-11 *Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.* What is the purpose for discipline? That the child would be holy and show forth the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Simply put, the purpose of discipline is to make the child a better person.

Now, when the Bible says this to us it assumes something that you want to understand and many don't. Your child, not just mine and Solomon's, your child needs to become a better person. The Scriptures do not teach that a child is born good or even that he is born morally neutral. In Psalm 51 David says he was sinful from conception and the verse we read Proverbs 22:15a *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.* Your child is not exempt! To say, "my child would never willfully disobey" or "my child doesn't do things that require discipline" only tells me something about you. It is naive. It is deception. All children are born with a sinful nature. And all children are born moving in a sinful direction. Maybe your car is out of alignment right now so that if you take your hands off the steering wheel it would veer to the right and into the trees and be crushed. So too,

children naturally move to the way of destruction and you must keep straightening the child out or he'll die morally and spiritually if not physically as well. Susannah Wesley, the famous mother of John and Charles Wesley as well as 15 others, once wrote this: *The parent who studies to subdue self-will in his child works together with God in the renewing and saving of a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil's work; makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and damns his child, body and soul forever.* That is why Proverbs 23:14 *You shall strike him with the rod And rescue his soul from Sheol.*

The results of failure here are often quite tragic. Tragic to the child. Tragic to his family. So often homes are not pleasant places. So often kids drive their parents nuts. We say, *Insanity is hereditary, you get it from your kids.* Why is that? Proverbs 22:15a *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.* Proverbs 29:15 *The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.* I was in a long line at a grocery store once when this kid escaped from her mother. Mom called the kid back, threatened the kid, but off the little girl went, ignoring Mom. That mother not only lost her place in line but she also lost face. Her child's disobedience brought shame to that mother and we have all seen graphic examples of this - the mother whose pre-schooler is out of control. I feel sorry for such women and more sorry for their children. On the other hand Proverbs 29:17 *Correct your son, and he will give you comfort; He will also delight your soul.* Why so? Because having been disciplined he will bring forth the peaceful fruits of righteousness.

Well, if this is true and if Scripture is as clear as we find it to be, why don't parents do this? Three reasons. Reason #1 is guilt. Parents who feel guilty will often not discipline for a variety of reasons. Maybe you have disciplined your child out of anger and hurt him either physically or emotionally and you so grieve over that you won't ever hurt him again. I understand your response, but the fact is that in so doing you may hurt your child worse than ever. More often though, parents don't discipline because of a false guilt. They hear a secular psychologist who says that spanking teaches your child to be violent. They hear the so-called defenders of children crying out against oppressive parents who discipline their children and so they don't do it for feelings of guilt they got somewhere else besides God.

Secondly then, fear is a major reason parents don't discipline. Fear of what neighbors might think, friends might think, grandparents might think. How about being afraid of what God might think? Parents also are often afraid of the child. Afraid that "*I won't be liked by my child.*" And oh,

we so want to be popular with our children! So, we do what they want; and they certainly don't want to be disciplined. We are afraid our children will reject us, but we don't fear God.

Thirdly, parents often fail to discipline because of laziness. Laziness. It takes effort to properly discipline. You have to do it when you are tired and when you are busy and when you are with others, and you must do it consistently. It is difficult and wearing physically and emotionally. So many don't bother which is a terrible shame because the purpose of discipline is to drive away foolishness and bring in righteousness. I understand why parents don't discipline. I understand the difficulty, but there is one thing much harder, Mom and Dad, and that is to watch your children grow up without it. If you love your kids, then you determine to let nothing stop you from raising them in the discipline of the Lord.

Now to our third major heading which is the motive for discipline. (R) We've seen three motives for not disciplining-- guilt, fear, laziness. Now what is the motive for discipline? Is it to vent my feelings? Is it to keep the kids under foot? No, no, no. If the purpose is that my child grow wise then my motive in discipline is love. (R) Proverbs 13:24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.* Parents, get this verse engrained into your thinking. Memorize it. Do you love your child? Do you want what is best for your child? Listen up 24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently* What could be clearer? Now, if I went up to some non-disciplining parent and said, "You don't love your child." I'd get smacked. But that is what God says. Listen to this sound byte from a famous dad. (play Homer) *Listen kid, I'm not the kind of dad who, ya know, does things or says stuff or looks at ya. But the love is there.* Do you recognize that voice? That is Homer Simpson of the cartoon family. Listen to him again. *Listen kid, I'm not the kind of dad who, ya know, does things or says stuff or looks at ya. But the love is there.* His appeal is classic. He is claiming to love his child, despite ignoring the requirements of love. Lots of parents think they love their children, but their failure to discipline shows they only love themselves. Sorry. 24a *He who withholds his rod hates his son.* Emotionally? No, but for all practical purposes you may as well. By failing to discipline you damage your child. You say, "*I don't spank because I love my child too much.*" God says you don't do it because you don't love your child enough. Love calls for diligent discipline. And here we see too that we have for our model parent, God Himself, the One whom we call *Father*. If you accuse someone of being a bad father because he inflicts pain upon his kids, in the same breath, you have blasphemed God. What did it say in Hebrews 12:6? 6 *FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES*

*HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.* You see God only promises discipline to His sons, to the ones He loves. He does not let them enjoy their sin. He straightens them out through chastening. Parents who allow their kids at any age to continue in their folly without suffering consequences are not helping but hurting. In Romans 1 however, it speaks of God giving men over to their evil desires. He doesn't correct everyone. Some he allows to go in their own foolish way. They are not his sons and His letting them go is His curse upon them. His blessing, His love means discipline and the parallel is drawn between father in heaven and father on earth. God is our model and when we discipline our children it is because of love and for their good.

Now God recognizes this reality Hebrews 12:11a *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful.* When your child screams and cries and yells, it is hard. It is sad. 11a *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful.* And that is why many refuse. They are more concerned to please their foolish child than to love that child. But God's love is tough. He chastens us even though we cry and even though we may think He is mean. You think God would be wimpy and let up because of our crying and because we accuse Him of being mean? No, He loves us too much for that. And just so, it is right for you parents to inflict upon your child --a little pain now to prevent big pain later. Proverbs 19:18 *Discipline your son while there is hope, And do not desire his death.* You have your child get inoculated, right? They get their shots. Do they like it? No. They may scream bloody murder. It is no fun at all. But you are willing to inflict a little pain now to avoid big pain later. That's why we discipline and that, that is love. Anything else is something less. Proverbs 13:24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*

Major point #4 is up now. We have seen what God says is the purpose and the motive of discipline. Now, let's look at the frequency of discipline. Every caring parent struggles over this issue. How much shall I spank Jr.? Am I disciplining too little or too much? The answer is -- probably. No, I can't answer that one, but I will mention two relevant considerations. #1 - the frequency of discipline is determined by your child. Not all kids are the same. Some act up more than others and require more discipline. It makes no sense for a child to complain that sister doesn't get as many spankings as me, or doesn't get grounded as often as me. It is the child, by his/her conduct, who determines the frequency of discipline. Hopefully, your child's age will play into this. Typically the frequency of discipline diminishes as a child grows older and the early training begins to bear its sweet fruit.

The second consideration comes from Proverbs 13:24 *He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.* That word "diligently" which is not in some versions, but is in the Hebrew implies a high degree of frequency. When you are told to be diligent about something, does that mean to do it once a month? Once a week? No, the word implies frequency. If discipline was not needed regularly then diligence would not be required. But it is. And one of the most important factors in discipline is consistency. Some kids only get disciplined for doing certain things, in certain places, around certain persons. If he acts up in public, mom won't do anything. That's not consistent. If he acts up when I'm tired he doesn't get disciplined. That's not consistent. Maybe only Mom disciplines or only Dad. That's not consistent. Consistency of discipline requires effort and that is because it requires a significant degree of frequency.

Now, just how often a child is disciplined is determined also by a parent's decision about what behaviors call for discipline. Do we do it over pushing other children? Or temper tantrums or what? I have opinions on this but I'll simply mention God's word. Proverbs 22:15 *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him* What is the rod to remove? Foolishness. It doesn't say *rebelliousness*. When the child stomps his feet, spits on the floor, and says, "no!" for God's sake discipline that kid. But there are other grounds for discipline than that. "Foolishness" covers a whole lot. It covers attitudes as well as actions. God disciplined Israel for grumbling. You can read about it in Numbers 11 and 17, but in many households in America the child whines and gripes and fusses from sun-up to sundown and beyond. It should not be. The rod is meant to drive away foolishness. I'll say no more but ask you to think through what that means. I've heard parents say, "I don't discipline just for childish behaviors" and they define as *childish* what God calls sinful. Let's be honest with ourselves and with God.

I move on now to our fifth and final point for the day which covers the manner of our discipline. (R) So much can be said here and parenting books can fill in the gaps. I have time to mention just a few things. First of all, I note that according to Scripture, a rod is to be used. It's clear isn't it, that spanking is the primary means of discipline mentioned in Scripture. There may be a place for denying privileges and for "time-out" but doesn't it seem there is also a place for the rod? It is immediate in its message. It is temporary so that when it is over the tension between parent and child is relieved. A friend emailed me a CNN web-page on spanking which says, quote, *Spanking chips away at the child's liking for, and trust of, the parent. There is never a reason to spank a child, period.* When I read that I wonder if this writer has ever been around children. All the ones I

have spent time with have needed spankings and are usually more pleasant because of them. The God who made them says they need them, and it is never wise to trust CNN more than the Lord.

The Scriptures not only tell us to discipline our children, they also address the issue of how aggressively we do it. It only makes sense that the inflicted pain should fit the crime. One needs to ask, "how blatant and serious was the offense?" and discipline accordingly. Often we discipline according to the degree of our aggravation. That is not right. How serious was the offense? Also, consider the context of the offense. Do not excuse misbehavior due to tiredness or sickness. My sin is not ignored if I am feeling bad, but that can be a factor in determining intensity in punishment. Just think, be wise, and be consistent. Proverbs 23 speaks to the intensity question. 13-14 *Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. 14 You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol.* This clearly implies that the spanking is going to hurt. It's supposed to hurt! It says, "strike him" and that does not mean "swat him." Proverbs 20:30 *Stripes that wound scour away evil, And strokes reach the innermost parts*

We are out to make an impression on the conscience of that child. When God disciplined his people, Old Testament or New Testament, He didn't mess around. The earth would open up and swallow a few thousand, or pestilence would come or the Philistines would invade. Discipline is supposed to hurt. Some parents only discipline enough to make the child mad. Al Martin says his mom used to say to his dad, "Spank him some more he's not sweet yet." Spank him till he's sweet, till he's willing to come crying into your arms. God says, "he will not die." So, be firm. One way you know whether or not you have been sufficiently firm in your discipline, whether it is corporal punishment or something else, is by how the child responds. If the bad behavior continues, then the child is saying "too weak Mom and Dad! Too weak!"

I am treading on dangerous ground here aren't I? God's word puts us there. The power to discipline is a dangerous thing in the hands of sinners and we must be careful not to abuse it. Clearly there are parents who go too far. There are parents who don't discipline in love but punish in anger. If you have lost control and hurt your child out of a pretense of discipline you need to repent, and if you have a habit of this you need to seek help NOW. Our church office can refer you to some fine local counselors who may be able to help.

Proper discipline will be done sweetly not harshly although your child may need some very firm words. Discipline is to be done lovingly not angrily. It is to be done in the context of forgiveness and grace. You hug that child. Pray with that child. Spankings and any other type of discipline is to

teach. So teach the child. Use Scripture to show how the child's behavior should be. Explain to the child why you discipline. Get the child to apologize, express affection and agree to do better. In our house we were never done until apologies were said, hugs were given and the child said, "Thank you Daddy or Mommy for disciplining me."

A word about older children and then we will be done. Most of us would agree that there comes a time when our children enter a new relationship with Mom and Dad. In the Jewish system it was after age 12. They were no longer regarded as children but as young adults. It seems appropriate to develop new measures, new ways of discipline. But frankly, outside of the rod the Bible doesn't give us much direction. Discipline still involves a process of maturing through expectations that are joined with rewards and punishments and all of it empowered by grace. Such a system needs to be in place in your home, especially if you have older children under your training. You train them with rewards and punishments. This isn't contrary to grace. You love them no matter what they do, but you tell them, *you do X and you get loved one way; do Y and you get loved another way. I'm gonna love you, but you determine how pleasant the loving is going to be.* And there may come a time when the most loving thing you can do is remove a child from your home however painful and risky that may be.

Finally, brethren, don't destroy yourself worrying about whether you made a mistake as a parent in your discipline. You never can be sure if you did it all just right. Your child won't be a gangster because you over or under-disciplined this morning. Follow God's word as best you can, pray for love, pray for wisdom, and pray that our Lord uses your feeble efforts to mold your child into a mature lover of Jesus. And speaking of Jesus. As we point out to our children their sin, we are to point their eyes toward Christ who can not only teach them to walk in uprightness but who can wash away all of their guilt. Guilt is something every child has, and every parent as well. And for that need we have Christ, who offers Himself as the Lamb of God suffering in our place. There was a season, a short one, but a memorable one, when Beth and I would move toward spanking our youngest child, and her sister, Sarah, would offer to take the spanking for her. Wild huh? But that is a picture of what Jesus does for us. He accepts the death we are due and by His wounds all who believe in Him are healed. This Christ does not deliver us from fatherly discipline, but He does take almighty wrath, divine justice, upon Himself. Look to Him who disciplines perfectly, forgives liberally and loves unconditionally and in that looking you will be saved. Let's pray