

DISCIPLINE IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: “TO SPANK OR NOT TO SPANK?”

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I. THE DILEMMA

It does not take much reading in the area of childrearing to realize that the current debate on disciplining children is a hotbed of contention.¹ In fact, on a current website the debate is largely divided between fundamentalists and evangelicals (those who believe in “inerrancy”) on the one side and the rest of the scholarly world on the other.² There has always been a wide variety of childrearing advice given to American parents, much of which has been contradictory.³ In his bestselling book on childrearing from the 1920s, John B. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, warned parents against displaying love toward their children.⁴ By 1948, a more balanced approach between loving and disciplining a child was promoted by Benjamin Spock in his classic book, *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, though very little is said about spanking.⁵ Even today several popular childrearing books take significantly different approaches: Thomas Gordon, a clinical psychologist and president of Gordon Training Institute, has written a very popular book entitled *Parent Effectiveness Training* which emphasizes good communication, but strongly discourages disciplinary measures. Gordon states, “If

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¹ I would like to thank Dr. Robert E. Larzelere for reading a preliminary copy of this paper and providing helpful insights which I have made an effort to incorporate.

² This website is [religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) (B. A. Robinson, “Religious Tolerance.org,” n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spanking.htm>). It makes a clear distinction between fundamentalists or evangelicals (or those who believe in inerrancy) and non-evangelicals (e.g. every time Dr. James Dobson is mentioned on this website he is referred to as a fundamentalist evangelical).

³ For much of this historical survey I am indebted to Robert E. Larzelere, “Combining Love and Limits in Authoritative Parenting,” in *Parenthood in America: Undervalued, Underpaid, Under Siege* (ed. Jack C. Westman; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 81–89.

⁴ John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: Norton, 1928; repr. New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1972) 69–87.

⁵ Benjamin Spock, *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Meredith, 1946) and a later revision (Benjamin Spock and Steven Parker, *Baby and Child Care* [rev. ed.; New York: Dutton Books; Penguin Putnam Books, 1998], esp. pp. 35–37, 428–48). In the 1968 edition, Spock states: “I’m not particularly advocating spanking, but I think it is less poisonous than lengthy disapproval, because it clears the air, for a parent and child” (p. 338). However, in a later revision he writes, “The American tradition of spanking may be one reason that there is much more violence in our country than in any other comparable nation” (p. 438).

parents could learn only one thing from this book, I wish it were this: each and every time they force a child to do something by using their power or authority, they deny that child a chance to learn self-discipline."⁶ On the other hand, James Dobson, a clinical psychologist, author, and chairman of the board of Focus on the Family, incorporates both good communication and nurturing of children with a more disciplinary response to misbehavior.⁷ He states, "Developing respect for parents is the critical factor in child management."⁸ In the realm of child management Dobson reserves room for corporal discipline: "In my opinion, spankings . . . should be reserved for the moment a child (between the ages of eighteen months to ten years old) expresses to parents a defiant 'I will not!' or 'You shut up!' When youngsters convey this kind of stiff-necked rebellion, you must be willing to respond to the challenge immediately."⁹ A third popular child psychologist and writer, Fitzhugh Dodson, appears to fall somewhere in-between with an emphasis on both nurturing and discipline. He states his position as follows:

It is certainly clear from what I have said in this book that I believe mutual agreement is far superior to the stark imposition of power by either parents or children. And it is abundantly clear that I believe it is far better to solve a conflict by negotiation and agreement rather than through power. However, in certain extreme cases, where all other resources have been tried and have failed, I believe we have to fall back to sheer power to bring order out of chaos in the lives of some children.¹⁰

To be fair, there may be far more agreement between Dobson and Dodson than these quotes suggest.

A similar disagreement can also be found in the social sciences between cognitive developmental psychologists and behavioral psychologists concerning optimal disciplinary responses. In general terms, the former emphasize reasoning and gentle disciplinary tactics,¹¹ while the latter tend towards some form of punishment as a response to disobedient children.¹²

⁶ Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children* (New York: Guilford, 1975) 158.

⁷ He states, "Respectful and responsible children result from families where the proper combination of *love and discipline* is present. Both ingredients must be applied in necessary quantities" (James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1970] 21).

⁸ James Dobson, *The New Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1992) 18.

⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

¹⁰ Fitzhugh Dodson, *How to Discipline with Love—From Crib to College* (New York: Penguin, 1977) 92.

¹¹ Joan E. Grusec and Leon Kuczynski, eds., *Parenting and Children's Internalization of Values* (New York: Wiley, 1997); Joan E. Grusec and Jacqueline J. Goodnow, "Impact of Parental Discipline Methods on the Child's Internalization of Values: A Reconceptualization of Current Points of View," *Developmental Psychology* 30 (1994) 4–19; Martin L. Hoffman, "Moral Internalization: Current Theory and Research," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (ed. Leonard Berkowitz; New York: Academic Press, 1977) 10.85–133.

¹² Russell A. Barkley, *Defiant Children: A Clinician's Manual for Parent Training* (New York: Guilford, 1997); Sheila M. Eyberg and Steven R. Boggs, "Parent-Child Interaction Therapy: A Psychosocial Intervention for the Treatment of Young Conduct-Disordered Children," in *Handbook of Parent Training: Parents as Co-Therapists for Children's Behavior Problems* (ed. James M. Briesmeister and Charles E. Schaefer; New York: Wiley, 1998) 61–97; Rex L. Forehand and

It is interesting that the book of Proverbs is often brought into this modern debate, generally because the book contains several strong statements concerning discipline. In fact, commentators sometimes face a dilemma of integrating the biblical text with modern conceptions of child discipline.¹³ Adah Maurer and James S. Wallerstein take an extreme position and claim that Proverbs is not the Word of God, but merely the "word of mortal man"¹⁴ and that "[t]he Biblical authority for whipping of youths in school and home rests solely on King Solomon's Proverbs and has no other Biblical support."¹⁵ Sometimes anti-spanking proponents even point out how corrupt Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was (1 Kgs 14:21-24), how he had to flee from those who were ready to stone him (1 Kgs 12:18), and how he split the kingdom shortly after his father's death (1 Kgs 12:1-24).

A recent commentary by Richard J. Clifford sidesteps the use of corporal punishment in Prov 13:24 as follows: "Sparing the rod and hating the child are paradoxical and memorable ways of stating the effects of parental indifference

Richard J. McMahon, *Helping the Noncompliant Child: A Clinician's Guide to Parent Training* (New York: Guilford, 1981); Gerald R. Patterson, *Coercive Family Process* (Eugene, OR: Castalia, 1982).

¹³ Ellen F. Davis highlights recent research that points out the detrimental effects of corporate punishment and attempts to integrate these findings with the biblical text:

The problem with which the proverb [Prov 13:24] confronts us is how to judge between a clear biblical teaching and reliable evidence that seems to contradict it. This is a problem that the biblical wisdom literature anticipates and even highlights. Two of the most compelling witnesses to faith in Israel's God, Job and Koheleth (Ecclesiastes), are compelling precisely because they struggle with elements of the tradition they can no longer affirm. Tradition is neither immutable nor closed. On the contrary, it *must* grow and change in order to be 'tradition,' literally '(a process of) passing on' from mind to mind, and not merely an artifact preserved in a history book. Tradition is *the shared learning of the community over time*.

Consequently, an important function of tradition is to make us aware of the extent to which our feelings and understandings are limited by our personal circumstances and location in time. Inevitably the consensus of the community shifts at various points, when social and historical changes confront us with instances in which the old wisdom does not work, or perhaps when social norms no longer require us to hide painful aspects of our experience. Then it is the work of new 'sages' to investigate, reflect, teach and write, and thus to foster the emergence of a new consensus (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Songs* [Westminster Biblical Companion; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000] 88).

Dr. Davis so easily jettisons the biblical text or the tradition of wisdom in the biblical text based upon certain findings in contemporary psychology. However, Diana Baumrind's research on parenting styles suggests little difference between children who had no corporal punishment and those who had reasonable amounts of it; the more important component was whether the punishment was given in the context of a loving, caring relationship (Patricia McBroom, "UC Berkeley study finds no lasting harm among adolescents from moderate spanking earlier in childhood," n.p. [accessed 24 August 2001]. Online: http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/08/24_spank.html). Most people who argue for a balanced view of corporal punishment generally limit it to children between eighteen months to about age ten and moderate its use with other forms of discipline. However, more authoritarian writers believe that the biblical view of discipline relies primarily on corporal punishment and suggests its use well into the teen years.

¹⁴ Adah Maurer and James S. Wallerstein, *The Bible and the Rod* (Berkeley, CA: The Committee to End Violence Against the Next Generation, n.d.) 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 2.

to their children. The necessity of parental discipline is a common topic in the wisdom literature: Prov 19:18; 23:13–14; 29:17; Sir 7:23 and 30:1–13. It goes without saying that this paradoxical language cannot be used as an argument for the corporal punishment of children.¹⁶ It is interesting that none of the other passages noted by Clifford has any type of paradoxical language.

Still, there are good reasons to want to tone down or eliminate the use of corporal punishment in our society, especially with the staggering statistics on child abuse. In 2002 an estimated 896,000 children were determined to be victims of child abuse or neglect, eighty percent of which was committed by their parents.¹⁷ This problem is compounded when parents have a high usage of alcohol¹⁸ and drugs.¹⁹ In that same year an estimated 1,400 children died from abuse or neglect.²⁰

¹⁶ Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1999) 140. Paul E. Koptak states, "This verse can never be taken as support for corporal punishment. The various uses of *musar* throughout this chapter and the similar sayings make it clear that the issue is one of instruction, not the means used to bring it about (cf. 17:10; 19:18)" (*Proverbs* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003] 362). Most commentators disagree with this view: D. Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964) 50–51, 105; William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 457; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 98–99; Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999) 66; Allen P. Ross, *Proverbs* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 5.982; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 18; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 94; Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899) 278; R. Norman Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 210.

¹⁷ National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, "Child maltreatment 2002: Summary of Key Findings," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://nccanch.act.hhs.gov.pubs/factsheets/canstats.cfm>.

¹⁸ "Based on victim reports, each year 183,000 (37%) rapes and sexual assaults involve alcohol use by the offender, as do just over 197,000 (15%) of robberies, about 661,000 (27%) aggravated assaults, and nearly 1.7 million (25%) simple assaults" (*US Department of Justice, Alcohol and Crime: An Analysis of National Data on the Prevalence of Alcohol Involvement in Crime*, 4/98). "Alcohol is typically found in the offender, victim or both in about half of all homicides and serious assaults, as well as in a high percentage of sex-related crimes, robberies, and incidents of domestic violence, and alcohol-related problems are disproportionately found among both juvenile and adult criminal offenders" (*National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Eight Special Reports* xi). The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, "Alcoholism and Alcohol-Related Problems: A Sobering Look," n.p. [accessed 5 May 2005]. Online: <http://www.ncadd.org/facts/problems.html>.

¹⁹ "Nearly 1/4 of sexually active teens and young adults aged 15 to 24 report having unprotected sex because of alcohol or drug use. And 43% of teens and young adults say that they are concerned that they might do more sexually than they had planned because they were drinking or using drugs" ("Special Analysis Report: Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sexual Behavior," in *Youth Knowledge and Attitudes on Sexual Health: A National Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults*, 2002); Campaign for Our Children, Inc., "The Low-Down About Drugs & Alcohol," n.p. [cited 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.cfoc.org/411AboutSex/drugsex>. At least 45% of rapists were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed the crime according to the report, *Violence Against Women*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice, 1994 (Campaign for Our Children, Inc., "Facts: sex and violence," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.cfoc.org/Factssexandviolence>). Women who are sexually abused during childhood are

Do today's parents take the easy way out and generally ignore their children's misbehavior most of the time, except when it is so serious that it cannot be ignored? At that point, do parents discipline more out of anger than love? While it would be very difficult to verify, the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse in Canada claims that "85% of all cases of physical abuse result from some form of over-discipline through the use of corporal punishment."²¹

Does the book of Proverbs have answers for us today in terms of raising our children? If this book is inspired and ordained as God's guidance for us, should it not bridge time and cultural gaps to provide wisdom for guiding our children and teaching them wisdom? Does the book of Proverbs really condone spanking as a disciplinary tool or have many commentators incorrectly argued that some proverbs suggest that corporal punishment is sometimes necessary?²²

II. A BIBLICAL SOLUTION

"Spare the rod and spoil the child." This common maxim (a one-size-fits-all approach to child discipline) is often wrongly attributed to the Bible.²³ In reality the book of Proverbs, when taken as a whole, encourages its readers to use multiple levels of discipline ranging from pointing out improper behavior to the use of corporal punishment. In fact, the Hebrew word מִּסָּר *mûsar*, commonly translated as "discipline" in the OT, has a wide range of meanings that suggests various levels of discipline, including on one end of the spectrum "teaching or instruction" (Prov 1:2, 3, 7; 4:13), then progressing to "exhortation or warning" (Ezek 5:15; Job 20:3), and climaxing with "discipline or chastening" (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13). To draw from only a few Proverbs (e.g. Prov 13:24 or 23:13–14) would be to miss the complexity

at increased risk for drug abuse as adults, according to NIDA-supported research conducted at the Medical College of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Using data gathered from interviews of 1,411 adult twins, Dr. Kenneth Kendler and his colleagues assessed the association between three levels of childhood sex abuse (nongenital, genital, and intercourse) and six adult disorders—major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, bulimia nervosa, alcohol dependence, and drug dependence. Women who experienced any type of sexual abuse in childhood were roughly three times more likely than unabused girls to report drug dependence as adults (K. S. Kendler *et al.*, "Childhood sexual abuse and adult psychiatric and substance use disorders in women: An epidemiological and co-twin control analysis," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 57/10 [2000] 953–59). Patrick Zickler, "Childhood Sex Abuse Increases Risk for Drug Dependence in Adult Women," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: http://www.nida.nih.gov/NIDA_Notes/NNVol.17N1/Childhood.html.

²⁰ National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, "Child maltreatment 2002: Summary of Key Findings," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://nccanch.act.hhs.gov/pubs/factsheets/canstats.cfm>.

²¹ B. A. Robinson, "Child Corporal Punishment: Spanking: The anti-spanking position," 4 [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spankin4.htm>.

²² Kidner, *Proverbs* 50–51, 105; McKane, *Proverbs* 383, 457; Murphy, *Proverbs* 98–99; Murphy and Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* 66, 96, 110, 116; Ross, *Proverbs* 5.982, 1035; Toy, *Proverbs* 278, 375–76, 419, 433; Whybray, *Proverbs* 210, 322, 402.

²³ This maxim comes from a poem written by Samuel Butler in 1664.

and range of discipline discussed in the book. The book of Proverbs provides a full range of discipline so that even extreme behaviors can be adequately handled. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines discipline as "[t]raining that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character of a person."²⁴ The implication is that this is an ongoing responsibility of parenthood, from infancy to at least late teens, but it does not mean that the same disciplinary techniques will be used throughout this process or that spanking will be the supreme disciplinary technique. The person who has wisdom will understand the principle of using the proper amount of discipline to curb improper behavior. It is not always easy for a parent to know the appropriate amount of discipline for each situation, but wise parents will have multiple levels of discipline at their disposal and be prepared to use them with increasing severity until improper behavior is curbed. The book of Proverbs contains multiple levels of discipline which overlap to some extent, but generally they begin with gentle instruction and proceed toward more severe punishments.

1. *Level 1. Encourage proper behavior: A wise parent encourages a child to behave properly.* Numerous passages in the book of Proverbs encourage a very low level of discipline or instruction whereby parents wisely endeavor to shape the behavior of their children by merely encouraging and giving examples of proper behavior.²⁵ This principle is demonstrated in the following verses:

- a. Prov 1:8–9, "Hear, my son, your father's discipline (מוֹסָר *mûsar*)²⁶ and do not forsake your mother's instruction (תּוֹרָה *tôrâ*),²⁷ for they are a graceful wreath upon your head and ornaments around your neck."
- b. Prov 2:2–5, "Make your ear attentive to wisdom (חִכְמָה *hokmâ*)²⁸ and incline your heart to understanding (תְּבִינָה *têbûnâ*);²⁹ for if you cry for discernment (בִּינָה *binâ*)³⁰ and lift up your voice for understanding (תְּבִינָה *têbûnâ*), if you seek for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God."

A wise parent encourages a child to see the benefits of proper behavior. When a child can actually see the benefits of proper behavior, it is logical

²⁴ *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1973) 325.

²⁵ For additional references, see Prov 2:1–13; 3:1–18; 4:20–22; 10:5; 23:24–25.

²⁶ "Discipline, chastening, correction" (BDB 416c); "discipline, training, exhortation, warning" (KB³ 2.557). This noun is used 50 times in the OT. Eugene H. Merrill describes its intended meaning as follows: "Fundamentally, it has to do with teaching/learning by exhortation and example, with warning as to the consequences of disobedience, and with the application of penalty following failure to adhere" (*NIDOTTE* 2.480–81).

²⁷ "Direction, instruction, law" (BDB 435d); "Direction, instruction, decision" (KB³ 4:1710–11).

²⁸ "Wisdom" (BDB 315); "Skill in technical matters, experience, shrewdness, wisdom" (KB³ 1:314).

²⁹ "Understanding" (BDB 108b); "Understanding, cleverness, skill" (KB³ 4:1679–80).

³⁰ "Understanding" (BDB 108a; KB³ 1:123); "Intelligence, aptitude, skill" (*NIDOTTE* 1.652).

that he or she would choose this behavior at least in some cases, as the following verses indicate:³¹

- a. Prov 3:13–15: "How blessed is the person who finds wisdom (חֵכְמָה *hokmâ*), and the one who finds understanding (תְּבוּנָה *těbûnâ*). For its profit is better than that of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her."
- b. Prov 4:7–8: "The beginning of wisdom (חֵכְמָה *hokmâ*) is to acquire wisdom (חֵכְמָה *hokmâ*); and with all your acquiring, get understanding (תְּבוּנָה *těbûnâ*). Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her."

2. *Level 2. Inform of improper behavior: A wise parent is proactive and addresses certain issues before the child might be confronted by them.* Generally parents are fairly good at informing a child of improper behavior, but often it is done in anger or with a threat. We have all heard visibly angry parents yell things like, "Now stop that, Ryan!" or "Stop that, Amanda, or I will come over there!" Often when Proverbs addresses inappropriate behavior, however, it appears to be before the start of that behavior, not in the midst of it. If we educate our children concerning inappropriate behavior early enough, they will begin to associate wrong behavior with undesirable consequences, and thus hopefully avoid the behavior. When children are caught in inappropriate behavior their tendency is to shift blame, justify themselves, or even rebel. If a child has a particular pattern of misbehavior, parents often wait to address it until they are "fed up." The tendency, then, is to overcompensate and say angry things, threaten consequences that are not really appropriate, and fail to follow through. If, however, parents have talked through consequences to inappropriate behavior before it happens, the child can be more objective when thinking through the situation. The book of Proverbs contains many examples of this level of discipline,³² but notice that it appears to be in a neutral context, not when the child has been caught misbehaving.

- a. Prov 1:10–15: "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us let us lie in wait for blood, let us ambush the innocent without cause; . . . ' my son, do not walk in the way with them."
- b. Prov 3:31–32: "Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways. For the devious are an abomination to the Lord; but He is intimate with the upright."

3. *Level 3. Explain the negative consequences of sin: A wise parent points out the negative consequences of sin that lie along the path of life.* The primary purpose of the book of Proverbs is to teach wisdom to subsequent

³¹ For additional references, see Prov 3:13–26; 4:3–9; 5:1–2.

³² For further references, see Prov 1:7, 10–19; 3:27–35; 13:1; 22:24–25; 23:26–28.

generations.³³ Parents should have a wealth of information learned from life's lessons that they can pass on to their children. None of us want our children to make the same mistakes that we have. A wise parent helps extend the vision of a child; helping them to see the long-term consequences of sinful behavior. Usually sin looks very good in the short term ("the passing pleasures of sin," Heb 11:25), but generally it has very painful long-term consequences. The book of Proverbs contains numerous references to this level of discipline since describing the negative consequences of sin unmasks its seductiveness and lets the child see it for what it really is.³⁴ The parents mentioned in the book of Proverbs generally do a good job of pointing out these negative consequences, as is demonstrated in the following verses:

- a. Prov 1:18–19: "But they lie in wait for their own blood; they ambush their own lives. So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; it takes away the life of its possessors."
- b. Prov 5:3–6: "For the lips of the adulteress drip honey, and smoother than oil is her speech; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of Sheol. She does not ponder the path of life; her ways are unstable, she does not know it."

4. *Level 4. Gently exhort: Wise parents will, on an ongoing basis, advise and exhort their children against sin that can easily become a pattern and encourage them to use wisdom.* This level differs from the preceding ones in that exhortations are much more personal and solemn. As the level of discipline rises, so does the personal accountability, as the following verses indicate:³⁵

- a. Prov 4:1–2: "Hear, O sons, the discipline (מוֹסָר *mûsar*) of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding (בִּינָה *bînâ*), for I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction (תּוֹרָה *tôrâ*)."
- b. Prov 4:14–16: "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not proceed in the way of evil people. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble."

5. *Level 5. Gently rebuke or reprove: The wise parent knows when to use rebuke properly.* It is interesting that there are far fewer proverbs that deal with rebuke. Hopefully if parents have done their job well up to this point, far less rebuking is necessary. Nevertheless, the word "rebuke"

³³ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 80–83; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1993) 59, 67; Kidner, *Proverbs* 50–52.

³⁴ For additional references, see Prov 1:18–19, 27–33; 2:14–22; 5:3–23; 6:6–35; 7:6–27; 9:1–18; 13:18; 14:14; 16:18, 26; 17:20; 18:13; 23:10–12; 24:17–20.

³⁵ For additional references, see Prov 1:8; 4:1–9, 10–27; 5:1–6; 6:1–5, 20–35; 7:1–27; 23:22–23.

(יָכַח *yākah*)³⁶ is presented in the book of Proverbs as a positive method of discipline:

- a. Prov 3:12: "Whom the Lord loves He reproves (יָכַח *yākah*), even as a father, the son in whom he delights."
- b. Prov 24:24–25: "He who says to the wicked, 'You are righteous,' peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him; but to those who rebuke (יָכַח *yākah*) the wicked will be delight, and a good blessing will come upon them."

The impression given is that rebuke or reproof is sometimes necessary, though a fool will not learn from it (Prov 9:7–8; 15:12).³⁷ God himself sometimes uses this method of discipline, but it is done out of love (Prov 3:12).

6. *Level 6. Corporal punishment that does not cause physical harm: A wise parent knows when to use corporal, non-abusive punishment.* The next verses have some uncertainty as to their exact meaning, but the main intent appears to be that temporary punishment is better than allowing wickedness or evil to run wild and lead to more serious punishment. The word "discipline" (יָסַר *yāsar*) in Prov 19:18 has a wide range of meaning, from a verbal reprimand or instruction (Deut 4:36; Prov 9:7; 29:19; 1 Chron 15:22) to chastening with a whip (1 Kgs 12:11, 14). Thus even within this level of discipline there are various levels of severity, and the wise parent uses only the level of discipline necessary to curb the incorrect behavior.

- a. Prov 19:18: "Discipline (יָסַר *yāsar*) your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death."

The Hebrew word יָסַר *yāsar* means "to discipline, chasten, admonish," but it appears to cover a range of disciplining techniques that would be used to ward off a child's untimely death.³⁸ D. Winton Thomas suggests that this verse is used in a figurative sense to mean "do not chasten him excessively."³⁹

³⁶ John E. Hartley elucidates this word: "The vb. means 'reprove, correct, show the right way,' notably in texts that are concerned with instruction; it is often parallel to *ysr* I, discipline. . . . This is especially the case where the subject has both the insight and the authority to address one for faulty behavior. A key role of the wise instructor is to reprove a student in order to develop that one's character. A discerning student, realizing that reproof is essential for learning, loves the teacher who reproves judiciously (Prov 9:8; 28:23; cf. 25:12)" (NIDOTTE 2.443).

³⁷ For additional references, see Prov 3:12; 9:7–8; 15:12; 19:25; 30:6.

³⁸ "To discipline, chasten, admonish" (BDB 415–16). "To instruct, chasten, rebuke, teach" (KB³ 2.418–19). This verb occurs forty-two times in the OT. Eugene H. Merrill explains: "In the general semantic field of learning and instructing, the vb. *ysr* specifically relates not to formal education but to the instilling of values and norms of conduct by verbal (hortatory) means or, after the fact, to rebuke or even physical chastisement. The subject of the vb. can be either human or divine, in ordinary life or in life before God, to whom all humankind is accountable" (NIDOTTE 2.479). Several times the word is used by Rehoboam to describe how Solomon had chastened the people with whips, but Rehoboam would be even more harsh and use scorpions (1 Kgs 12:11, 14; 2 Chron 10:11); however, the Hebrew word appears to incorporate a broader range of methods of discipline (e.g. Ps 2:10; Prov 9:7).

³⁹ "Textual and Philological Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs," VTS 3 (1955) 288.

It is much more likely, however, that the verse directs parents not to neglect to discipline a child; otherwise his or her life could be cut short, presumably due to destructive behavior.⁴⁰ The verse emphasizes that the purpose or motive for this level of discipline is to change and improve the child's character.⁴¹

- b. Prov 13:24: "The one who withholds his rod (שֶׁבֶט *šēbet*) hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (שָׂחָר *šāḥar*) (cf. Prov 22:15).

The Hebrew word שֶׁבֶט *šēbet* means "rod, staff, club"⁴² and was used for administering blows (Exod 21:20; Mic 4:14; Isa 10:15; Prov 10:13; 22:15), beating out cummin (Isa 28:27), and as a weapon (2 Sam 23:21 par. 1 Chr 11:23). The range of meanings of שֶׁבֶט suggests various types of instruments from a "stick" to a "rod" depending on their use. In a figurative sense, the word describes God's chastisement of Israel (Isa 10:5, 24; 30:31; 14:29) which was at times severe. The Hebrew verb שָׂחָר *šāḥar* means "to seek earnestly, early, diligently,"⁴³ suggesting that parents stay on top of a situation by doling out discipline when necessary. R. Norman Whybray quotes an Egyptian proverb that is roughly comparable in its intent: "boys have their ears on their backsides; they listen when they are beaten."⁴⁴

- c. Prov 23:13–14: "Do not withhold discipline (מִוְסָר *mūsar*) from the child; although you strike him with the rod (שֶׁבֶט *šēbet*), he will not die. You will strike him with a rod (שֶׁבֶט *šēbet*) and deliver his soul from Sheol."⁴⁵

The clear intent of this severe discipline is to deliver a child's soul from Sheol, probably a reference to an untimely death.⁴⁶ This level of discipline

⁴⁰ McKane, *Proverbs* 524; Murphy, *Proverbs* 145; Ross, *Proverbs* 1035; Toy, *Proverbs* 375–76; Whybray, *Proverbs* 283.

⁴¹ Clifford, *Proverbs* 178; McKane, *Proverbs* 524; Murphy, *Proverbs* 145; Ross, *Proverbs* 1035; Toy, *Proverbs* 375–76.

⁴² "Rod, staff, club, scepter" (BDB 986–87; "Stick, rod, staff, scepter" (KB³ 4.1388–1390). David M. Fouts states: "The most common understanding of *sebet* in the poetic literature of the OT is that of a rod of discipline employed by one in authority, as in the case of a father for remedial punishment (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15), civil authorities for penal use (10:13), or God (Job 21:9; 37:13). This is perhaps the idea of Ps 2:9 as well, where God's Messiah wields a rod (*šēbet*) of iron over opposing nations, suggesting both authority and discipline" (NIDOTTE 4.28).

⁴³ "Look early, diligently" (BDB 1007; "to be on the look out for" (KB³ 4.1465). See G. R. Driver, who thinks that this word suggests the idea of "early" ("Hebrew Notes on Prophets and Proverbs," JTS 41 [1940] 174; Kidner, *Proverbs* 105; McKane, *Proverbs* 457; Murphy, *Proverbs* 94; Whybray, *Proverbs* 210). This word, used thirteen times in the OT, generally means "to seek diligently" after something.

⁴⁴ *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 80.

⁴⁵ An Aramaic document called *The Words of Ahiqar* is very similar to this proverb: "Withhold not thy son from the rod, else thou wilt not be able to save [him from wickedness]. If I smite thee, my son, thou wilt not die, but if I leave thee to thine own heart [thou wilt not live]" (ANET³ 428). Whybray states that this Aramaic document is modeled after the Book of Proverbs (*Proverbs* 336).

⁴⁶ A. Cohen, *The Proverbs* (Hindhead, Surrey: Soncino, 1945) 154; Clifford, *Proverbs* 118; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* 196; McKane, *Proverbs* 386; Murphy, *Proverbs* 175–76; Ross, *Proverbs* 1070; Toy, *Proverbs* 433; Whybray, *Proverbs* 335–36.

should only be used when previous levels have not curbed the child's misbehavior. Notice that even "the rod of discipline" should not do irreparable harm to the child—the implication is that it should not be used in an abusive or harmful way (including being used in anger or out of meanness).⁴⁷ Severe misbehavior warrants severe consequences, particularly if there is a pattern of serious sin. The word "discipline" (מִסָּר *mûsar*) is broader than simply "striking with a rod," but the context suggests that even if a loving parent has to go to that extreme, it would be better than to have a child face an untimely death.

- d. Prov 29:15: "The rod (שֶׁבֶט *šēbet*) and reproof (תּוֹכַחַת *tôkahat*) give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother."

This implies that if a child does not have his will curbed, it will become uncontrollable and bring shame on the family.⁴⁸ Instruction may need to be accompanied by corporal punishment in order to engender wisdom. While this is the only time in Proverbs that "a mother" alone is referred to, the implication is not that the mother be solely responsible to discipline (cf. 13:24).⁴⁹

While the word "rod" (שֶׁבֶט *šēbet*) undoubtedly suggests some type of corporal punishment, it is possible that the word came to signify a broader range of discipline than just "spanking." Disciplining is hard work. It is much easier to let children have their own way and wander off into sin, but parents who love their children will not allow this to happen. The hard work of discipline will deliver the child from Sheol (or death). Proverbs 29:15 makes a strong contrast between a child "getting his/her own way" and "the rod and reproof," which suggests that use of the rod and reproof can be effective in curbing a child's will.

There is little doubt that these verses describe corporal punishment. Having said this, the most important concept in this verse is that the purpose of discipline is remedial with the hope of saving the child's life from an early demise due to rebellion. Derek Kidner says, "To withhold discipline is neither a compliment nor a kindness; and the opportunity passes."⁵⁰ This level of punishment is reserved for the time when other forms of punishment have not been successful and the destructive pattern of sinful behavior (רָע *raʿ* "evil")⁵¹ still remains.

In the ancient Near East the severity of the punishment was left up to the parent's discretion. It was assumed that the parent administered the discipline in a loving, caring way that was for the benefit of the child. Today not all parents administer discipline in this manner and thus certain professionals are required by law to report suspected child abuse. It is not within

⁴⁷ Eph 6:4 helps to balance this verse.

⁴⁸ Clifford, *Proverbs* 253; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* 231; Kidner, *Proverbs* 51; McKane, *Proverbs* 634; Murphy, *Proverbs* 222; Whybray, *Proverbs* 402.

⁴⁹ Koptak, *Proverbs* 641.

⁵⁰ *Proverbs* 134.

⁵¹ "Evil, distress, misery, injury, calamity": BDB 948–49. "Evil, of little worth, malicious, injurious, sinister, badly disposed": KB³ 3.1250–51; *NIDOTTE* 3.1154–58.

the parameters of this paper to determine the proper level of intervention by the government into American family life, but its purpose is to guide how to live within our culture. While the biblical text encourages the use of corporal punishment in the training of children, in the spirit of the wisdom of Proverbs it is prudent that the parent administer this discipline very carefully. At a certain point the responsibility of the parent ends and established laws and government take over. Even though Israelite parents had a significant role in the discipline of their children, at a certain point a rebellious, disobedient child was to be taken to the elders and punished (cf. Deut 21:18–21). Proverbs 19:29 seems to imply that legal institutions are to deliver some forms of discipline.

7. *Level 7. Corporal punishment that causes physical harm: The book of Proverbs does not suggest that parents use this technique for discipline, but that serious sin can lead to serious punishment.* In a moral society sin can lead to destruction and sometimes warrants drastic punishment to curb the sinful behavior. In our society, we have given government, not parents, power to punish certain destructive behaviors. Even in Israel, judges and kings were given authority to deal with similar extreme behaviors.

- a. Prov 20:30: "Stripes of wounding scour away evil and strokes (reach to) the innermost parts."

This rare verb (תמריק *tamriq* "to polish, rub, scour, shine")⁵² does not agree in number with the subject (חֲבֻרֹת פְּצַע *habburôt pesē* "stripes of wounding").⁵³ Nevertheless, it appears to be close to this meaning and is parallel with the latter unit of the verse.⁵⁴ Either way the concept of stripes and strokes suggests that severe corporal punishment is effective to curb willful rebellion; the punishment scours away the sin.⁵⁵ Notice that the verse does not specify who is to carry out the punishment. "Stripe" or "stroke" may result in any-

⁵² BDB 599c, KB³ 2 638 See NIDOTTE 2 1107 Qal "to polish" (Jer 46 4, 2 Chron 4 16), Pual "to be rubbed out, scrubbed" (Lev 6 21), Hiphil "to be clean or scoured" (Prov 20 30) William McKane translates this unit as, "Weals (blows and wounds) are a *massage* for evil" (*Proverbs* 242, 540), though it is difficult to see how this relates to the second part of the verse

⁵³ חֲבֻרֹת *habburôt* ("stripe, blow" [BDB 289a], "wound" [KB³ 1 285], Gen 4 23, Exod 21 25, Ps 38 5 [6], Prov 20 30, Isa 1 6, 53 5) and פְּצַע *pesē* ("bruise, wound" [BDB 822d], "wound" [KB³ 3 954b], Gen 4 23, Exod 21 25, Job 9 17, Prov 20 30, 23 29, 27 6, Isa 1 6) John N Oswalt distinguishes several different types of wounds in Isa 1 6 as follows "The words occurring in v 6 describe injuries received in battle slash wounds (*pesa*), lacerations (*habburâ*), and bleeding wounds (*makkâ t'riyâ*)" (*The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1–39* [NICOT, Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1986] 89) A distinction is also made in the law of *lex talionis* in Exod 21 25 which prescribes "wound for wound" (*pesa*) and "bruise for bruise" (*habburâ*)

⁵⁴ See other possible options in Whybray, *Proverbs* 304–5

⁵⁵ Whybray states, "If RSV, which represents the view of a number of scholars and also of REB, is correct, the verse presumably means that a severe beating has a salutary effect on the character of the victim" (*Proverbs* 305, cf. Kidner, *Proverbs* 141, McKane, *Proverbs* 540, Murphy, *Proverbs* 154) Duane A. Garrett believes that this verse does not refer to parental discipline, but rather to "beatings administered by the king's officers as punishment for a crime" (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* 179) It is difficult to know, however, if this proverb is part of the preceding context as he suggests

thing from a welt, bruise, or laceration (e.g. from the use of a whip)⁵⁶ and it may be equivalent to canings or floggings administered in some cultures.

- b. Prov 10:31: "The mouth of the righteous bears the fruit of wisdom,⁵⁷ but the perverted tongue will be cut out."

It is not entirely certain what this punishment refers to—suggestions range from maiming the body (similar to what some Arab countries do today when they cut off a hand for stealing⁵⁸) all the way to death. R. Norman Whybray explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

This verse can only be understood if it is realized that the phrases **The mouth of the righteous** and **the perverse tongue** are examples of the device, frequent in biblical poetry, by which relevant parts of the body stand for whole persons in particular activities (for example, when Yahweh is addressed in Isa. 51:9 with the words "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of Yahweh"). Thus these phrases here stand for the *persons* whose speech is "righteous" or "perverse."⁵⁹

Several commentators point out an interesting parallel between a tree that produces good fruit and the fruit of a righteous mouth in the first unit compared to the cutting down of a tree that produces bad fruit and the perverted tongue in the latter unit.⁶⁰ This parallel suggests that the person will be cut off, not simply in a metaphoric (Garrett)⁶¹ or hyperbolic (Ross) sense.⁶² However, there is very little evidence to suggest the image of a tree in this verse and at least some cultures seem to have taken this type of speech much more literally. The verse does not say who is to administer the judgment, but this type of severe punishment in most societies is outside the authority of a parent to administer.

8. *Level 8. Death: The book of Proverbs also does not include this in the realm of parental discipline, but in the realm of consequences meted out by government (or society's leaders).* A child who has never been disciplined will not know the boundaries of his society. With our sinful nature we will

⁵⁶ According to Dr. Larzelere, a cult exists that misuses Prov 20:30 to advise parents that a spanking when administered must be hard enough to bruise or wound a child. This is certainly not the intent of the book of Proverbs. This verse in particular may be using heightened language to describe spanking a child.

⁵⁷ "Bear fruit" (BDB 626b); "to prosper, cause to prosper" (KB³ 2.677); "grow, prosper, flourish" (NIDOTTE 3.52). See also Ps 62:10 (11); 92:14 (15); Prov 10:31; Zech 9:17.

⁵⁸ Ron Kurtus, "The Advantages of Stealing," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.school-for-champions.com/character/stealing.htm>.

⁵⁹ Proverbs 174.

⁶⁰ Clifford, Proverbs 118; Koptak, Proverbs 298; Murphy, Proverbs 76; Whybray, Proverbs 174.

⁶¹ Garrett states: "The penalty of having the tongue cut out (v. 31) is metaphoric. It describes either the community's rejection of the perverse speaker or divine punishment" (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs 123). While Garrett may be correct, we do not believe a literal understanding of this punishment is beyond the realm of the ancient Near Eastern context (cf. Clifford, Proverbs 118). J. Greenfield suggests that the background of vv. 31–32 is a legal context ("The Background and Parallel to a Proverb of Ahiqar," in *Hommages à Dupont-Sommer* [Paris: Librairie d'amérique et d'orient adrien-maisonneuve, 1971] 58).

⁶² Ross, Proverbs 5.958

push the boundaries as far as possible for as long as we can get away with it. As a result, God initiated capital punishment in Gen 9:6 as a societal response to certain behaviors. "Death" as mentioned in Prov 19:18, ("Discipline your child while there is hope and do not desire his death") probably refers to the guidelines of Deut 21:18–21 where a parent is instructed to take an unruly, corrupt son to the elders of the city to have him stoned. But why would God require that a stubborn and rebellious son be stoned? Verse 21 gives the answer: so that this kind of sin will be purged from Israel and all Israel will hear of it and fear. A stubborn, rebellious son will not be a productive, moral member of society. Rather than allowing this type of dissipation to spread further in Israel, the command was to stone such an individual.

III. CONCLUSION

The book of Proverbs teaches the following principles about discipline, some explicitly and some implicitly:

- (1) Prov 22:15 states: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him." This general principle suggests that all children need some form of discipline (though not all children may need corporal punishment). Wise parents use the least amount of punishment necessary to curb improper behavior.
- (2) The word "discipline" (מִסָּר *mûsar*) covers a wide range of disciplinary techniques from "instruction" to "spanking." Wise parents use a variety of levels of discipline when encountering improper behavior and they use them in increasing severity until the behavior is curbed. Both reasoning and disciplinary techniques can be used to encourage proper behavior from a child. Wise parents start early with age-appropriate disciplinary techniques and are consistent and diligent in their follow-through.
- (3) Wise parents encourage proper behavior by a variety of methods (e.g. relating negative examples of the consequences of sin; explaining, with examples, proper guidelines of behavior). This is to be done early in a child's life, preferably in a neutral context before the improper behavior is demonstrated. Wise parents are also cognizant of demonstrating proper behavior in their own everyday lives, realizing that this is probably one of the strongest means of conveying their message.
- (4) Wise parents always discipline in love, never in anger, with the purpose of helping the child. Even God disciplines those whom he loves (Prov 3:12).
- (5) Wise parents realize that they are not allowed to administer certain forms of discipline; instead, they leave these forms to the appropriate branch of society.

It is interesting that several modern child psychologists espouse conclusions similar to the book of Proverbs. Robert E. Larzelere, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, summarizes a recent paper presented at the Conference on Parenthood in America in Madison, Wisconsin, as follows:

This paper outlines a conditional sequence model of optimal disciplinary responses and shows its consistency with a wide range of research. The model suggests that optimal disciplinary responses begin with less severe tactics, such as reasoning, but proceed to firmer disciplinary tactics when the initial tactics achieve neither compliance nor an acceptable compromise. The firmer tactics can be nonphysical punishment initially with nonabusive physical punishment reserved as a back-up for the nonphysical punishment. This is consistent with many studies showing that a combination of reasoning and punishment is more effective than either one alone and with new evidence that this sequence enhances the effectiveness of milder disciplinary tactics with preschoolers.⁶³

However, this goes against many child psychologists and pediatricians who have argued that corporal punishment (spanking, slapping, etc.) is: ineffective;⁶⁴ may trigger criminal, anti-social, violent, aggressive behavior later in life;⁶⁵ has been linked to many adult problems;⁶⁶ results in lower IQ as

⁶³ Robert E. Lazelere, "Combining Love and Limits in Authoritative Parenting: A Conditional Sequence Model of Disciplinary Responses," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://parenthood.library.wisc.edu/larzelere.larzelere.html>.

⁶⁴ Psychologist H. Stephen Glenn says, "Corporal punishment is the least effective method [of discipline]. Punishment reinforces a failure identity. It reinforces rebellion, resistance, revenge and resentment. And, what people who spank children will learn is that it teaches more about you than it does about them that the whole goal is to crush the child. It's not dignified, and it's not respectful" (J. K. Nii, "Spanking denounced as ineffective, harmful—Expert at 'Families Alive' urges positive discipline," *Deseret News*, May 9, 1998, n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://nospank.net/n-c31.htm>).

⁶⁵ B. A. Robinson summarizes the research as follows:

Terri Moffitt of King's College London in the UK, and the University of Wisconsin in the U.S. helped lead an international team of investigators in a longitudinal study of 1,037 children. Their subjects were all born in Dunedin, New Zealand during 1972. Included were 442 boys. The study followed the children from the age of four in 1976 until adulthood. The team studied the genetic makeup of the children, concentrating on a gene that controls the production of an enzyme called monoamine oxidase A (MAOA). This chemical breaks down a key neurotransmitter in the brain which is linked to a person's mood, aggression and pleasure. The gene comes in two alleles (varieties). One allele is found in about one third of the male subjects tested. It causes their brains to produce too little of the enzyme. For these males, 85% of the boys who were abused during childhood turned to criminal or antisocial behavior as adults. They were nine times more likely to become antisocial. Moffitt explained that the allele's "relation to aggression only emerged when we considered whether the children had been maltreated." They defined maltreatment as: frequent changes in the primary caregiver, rejection by the mother, or physical or sexual abuse. She said: "This suggests that the best strategy for preventing violence is to prevent child abuse." Two out of every three boys have inherited the other allele which produces higher levels of MAOA. They were unlikely to develop behavior problems. The allele that they possess "may promote trauma resistance" (B. A. Robinson, "2002: Linking childhood abuse with violence in adults," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spankin5.htm>).

He further explains: "If physical abuse during childhood almost inevitably produces anti-social violent behavior among the one third of adult males who are genetically predisposed to produce low levels of MAOA, then one wonders what level of corporal punishment is safe. Perhaps conventional levels of spanking could trigger violence many years later when the child has grown up" (ibid.).

⁶⁶ Harriet McMillan and others say that their research shows a correlation between spanking during childhood and higher levels of adult depression, psychiatric problems, and addictions

compared with children whose parents used other methods of discipline and control;⁶⁷ can lead to abuse;⁶⁸ can unintentionally cause serious physical damage;⁶⁹ trains a child to use violence;⁷⁰ and creates fear in the child.⁷¹

What is interesting is that research has not shown a direct connection between reasonable and appropriate discipline and any of the problems mentioned above. Lazelere points out some of the weaknesses of recent research:

This strange situation is reflected in research questions and methods, which often assume the correctness of the author's implicit beliefs. For example, few studies investigate differences between effective and counterproductive use of a particular disciplinary tactic, whether reasoning or punishment. Instead, the

(Harriet McMillan *et al.*, "Slapping and spanking in childhood and its association with lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders in a general population sample," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 161 [Oct. 5, 1999] 805–9. See also M. A. Straus, "Corporal Punishment of Children and Adult Depression and Suicidal Ideation," in *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families and Its Effects on Children* (New Brunswick, 2000) 60–77.

⁶⁷ A study of 960 children undertaken at the University of New Hampshire, released in July 1998, connected the spanking of children with the slowing down of their intellectual development. The study found an average IQ of 102 among children who had not been spanked compared to an average of 98 for those who had. Jane Gadd claimed that a 4-point reduction in IQ "is enough to have a significant negative functional effect on the students" (Jane Gadd, "Spanked Children Suffer Intellectually," *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, ON, July 30, 1998). See also online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spankin5.htm>.

⁶⁸ Some scholars argue that because spanking curbs behavior for a while, parents often spank whenever the child misbehaves; it thereby can become a standard response to any misbehavior. The danger is that spanking can lead to increasingly frequent, harsher spanking that exceeds "reasonable force" and is abusive (B. A. Robinson, "The case against spanking," n.p. [accessed 10 February 2005]. Online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spankin4.htm>).

⁶⁹ B. A. Robinson summarizes the possible injuries as follows: "**Boxing on the ear** can burst an eardrum; **shaking** can cause a concussion, whiplash, blindness, serious brain damage, or even death; **spanking** can injure muscles, the sciatic nerve, pelvis, coccyx (tail bone), genitals or spine; **hitting a child's hands** can injure bones, blood vessels, joints and ligaments; it can induce premature osteoarthritis; and **a child who is hit** can accidentally fall and seriously injure themselves" [bold added] (*ibid.*).

⁷⁰ B. A. Robinson summarizes these problems as follows: "Spanking can teach children that it is acceptable for the strong to use force against the weak—the concept 'might makes right' is regularly reinforced. They have an increased likelihood of becoming more aggressive towards their siblings, their fellow students, and (later in life) against their spouses and their own children. Violence as a way of behaving is a learned response. Slapping or any other type of force used on the buttocks is a sexual violation: The buttocks are an erogenous zone of the human body. Their nerve system is connected to the body's sexual nerve centers. Slapping them can involuntarily trigger feelings of sexual pleasure which become mixed with the pain. This can lead to confusion in the child's mind which influences the way in which they express their sexuality as adults" (*ibid.*).

⁷¹ Robinson further asserts, "The message a toddler gets from a slap or spanking is that a parent or other loved and trusted adult is prepared to induce pain and even do physical harm to force unquestioning obedience. That's terrifying to a little kid. . . . However well-intentioned, a slap registers as the shattering of the whole deal between parent and child. Young children are left awash in feelings of fear, shame, rage, hostility, self-destructiveness and betrayal that they can't yet resolve or manage." Irvin Wolkoff, "Spanked Child Can Become Self-loathing Adult," *The Toronto Star*, Nov. 26, 1999, F4 (see also: Online: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/spankin4.htm>).

preferred disciplinary tactic is assumed to be invariably effective and the other one invariably ineffective, regardless how either one is used.⁷²

On the other hand, Diana Baumrind, research psychologist at University of California–Berkeley's Institute of Human Development, said in an address to the 2004 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in San Francisco: "We found no evidence for unique detrimental effects of normative physical punishment. . . . I am not an advocate of spanking, but a blanket injunction against its use is not warranted by the evidence. It is reliance on physical punishment, not whether or not it is used at all, that is associated with harm to the child."⁷³ Baumrind, in her work with Elizabeth Owens on parenting styles reported the results of their longitudinal study on corporal punishment in over 100 middle-class, white families. The data were extracted from a data base that had studied the children from 1968, when the children were preschoolers, to 1980, when the children were early adolescents. The data indicate that the children of authoritative parents (described as loving, firm, and communicate well with the child) generally showed more individual initiative and social responsibility.⁷⁴ Baumrind's conclusions were:

Studies of verbal punishment yielded similar results, in that researchers found correlations just as high, and sometimes higher, for total verbal punishment and harm to the child, as for total physical punishment and harm. . . . What really matters . . . is the child rearing context. When parents are loving and firm and communicate well with the child [a pattern Baumrind calls authoritative] the children are exceptionally competent and well adjusted, whether or not their parents spanked them as preschoolers."⁷⁵

What we have found from the biblical passages and recent psychological studies is that the area of discipline entails a comprehensive structure of multiple layers that should be framed in a loving, structured family relationship. The Family Research Council, in their careful and well-researched analysis of spanking, suggests the following guidelines:

- (1) Differentiate between "abusive hitting and non-abusive spanking."
- (2) Verbal corrections, time-outs, and logical consequences should be the disciplinary methods of choice.
- (3) Spanking should be reserved for instances where non-compliance persists, and only if non-physical disciplinary methods have failed. "For very compliant children, milder forms of correction will suffice and spanking may never be necessary."

⁷² R. E. Larzelere, "Combining Love and Limits" 82. See also: Larzelere, "A review of the outcomes of parental use of nonabusive or customary physical punishment," *Pediatrics* 98 (1996) 824–31.

⁷³ Patricia McBroom, "UC Berkeley study finds no lasting harm among adolescents from moderate spanking earlier in childhood," n.p. [accessed 24 August 2001]. Online: http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2001/08/24_spank.html.

⁷⁴ D. Baumrind, "Child Care Practices Antecedent Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior," *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75 (1967) 43–88.

⁷⁵ McBroom, "UC Berkeley study."

- (4) The child should receive "at least as much encouragement and praise for good behavior as correction for problem behavior."
- (5) "To avoid public humiliation or embarrassment," spanking should always be done in private.
- (6) Spanking "is inappropriate before 15 months of age and is usually not necessary until after 18 months. It should be less necessary after 6 years, and rarely, if ever, used after 10 years of age."
- (7) If spanking does not appear to work, a parent should never increase the severity of hitting. Professional help should be sought, and/or other disciplinary techniques tried.
- (8) A single slap to the hand of a young child, and one or two spanks to the buttocks for older children are recommended amounts.
- (9) Hugging the child afterwards is recommended.⁷⁶

Scriptures tell us that God is a perfect Father and that he sometimes disciplines his children, even as adults (Prov 3:11–12; Heb 12:5–11). It would be consistent for God to discipline according to the wise guidelines and levels of discipline laid out in the book of Proverbs.

⁷⁶ The Family Research Council by S. DuBose Ravenel and Den A. Trumbull, "Spare the Rod? New Research Challenges Spanking Critics," Family Policy Publication, Oct. 1996. For another good discussion on parental discipline see also Andreas J. Köstenberger with David W. Jones, *God, Marriage and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004) 157–62.