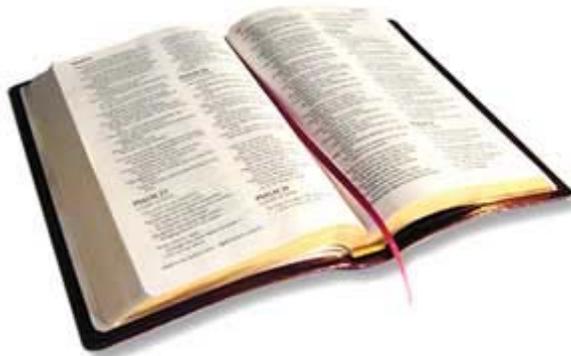


Family Integrity

THE  
CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS  
OF THE INSTITUTION OF  
CORPORAL CORRECTION

*By Craig Smith, Family Integrity, 2005 ©*



**What does the Bible have to say about...**

- Why we need to smack
- What we use to smack
- What we are trying to achieve
  - How we do it
- The tongue-lashing alternative

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## *Biblical Christian Worldview*

### **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight.” — Proverbs 3:5**

There are two very different world views giving opposing advice regarding the rearing of children. One world view is found in the Bible: the world view originating in the mind of God, the Creator. The other is found in the literature of humans: the world view originating in the mind of man, the created.

### **“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” — Proverbs 22:15**

This is a foundational statement about the nature of the child. Jeremiah 17:9 expands on this: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” All humans have this sinful nature which is a result of our Fall in Adam (Genesis 3:1-24). Children are *not* blank tapes who learn evil from elders, an idea championed by John Locke in the late 1600s. Evil is *not* picked up from the environment, as behaviourists such as B.F. Skinner would advise: it is already in their hearts (and in our adult hearts even still) from conception. Children are *not* little bundles of innocence: they are little bundles of depravity (see Psalm 51:5) and can develop into unrestrained agents of evil (Nero, Caligula, Lenin, Stalin, Charles Manson, Pol Pot to name a very few) unless trained and disciplined. Selfishness, violence, lying, cheating, stealing and other such manifestations of rebellion, are just the child unpacking some of this sinful foolishness from the vast store in his heart.

The text further says, “but the rod of correction drives it far from him.” Three things are immediately apparent: First, a rod is to be used for smacking. Second, it is to be used as correction. Third, it is to drive the foolishness out.

The “rod” here may have some reference to ancient symbols of authority or guidance, such as a shepherd’s rod or a ruler’s scepter. Both are very applicable to this situation, for a shepherd’s rod, like a proper smack, is to keep one on the right path and out of the inevitable future trouble lying in wait down the wrong path. And parents, like rulers, must exercise over their children the authority delegated to them by God or else be found guilty of abdication, neglect, irresponsibility, etc. A rod is probably not your hand. Your children

should intimately know your hand as the minister of love, care, affection, assistance, training and guidance.

A smack is to correct the child, not punish the child. Punishment, retribution and vengeance are God's domain: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19b). Our culture does use the term "corporal punishment" mostly as a result of how the Biblical use of the rod of correction was necessarily misapplied once public schools came into existence. The teachers, many of whom had no commitment to the Bible, and being agents of the government's secular schools, could not wield the Biblical rod of correction according to Biblical standards lest they break the secular (no religion) clause of Section 77 of the Education Act. Consequently, they simply punished...usually with a cane or a strap...and sadly did so far too often for personal arbitrary reasons: for the most trivial of offenses or to save face or in anger or to get back at an unruly child or mostly to maintain control over the class. These reasons are all completely antithetical to the Biblical guidelines for corporal correction.

Section 59 of the New Zealand Crimes Act says parents are "justified in using force by way of correction towards the child". This is a legal recognition of a parent's Biblical duty as spelled out in the Biblical text. On the other hand, Section 139A of the Education Act now prohibits anyone from using force "by way of correction or punishment" in any school. This recognises that punishment is what used to take place in schools.

Smacking is meant to drive the foolishness, the sinful manifestations, out of the child's personality so that they do not become permanent fixtures. If the foolishness is simply left to simmer inside, the child matures in foolishness and becomes a fool. Read the book of Proverbs for sober warnings against such a thing. It is no wonder the Scriptures declare: "He who spares his rod hates his son." (Proverbs 13:24).

## *The Tongue-Lashing Alternative*

**"A servant will not be corrected by mere words; for though he understands, he will not respond." — Proverbs 29:19**

Do we really need to smack at all? What's wrong with a good tongue-lashing? Surely we can appeal to the child's sense of duty, reason, sense of fair play?

Well, no, we cannot. We are talking about children, little ones up to around 6 or 8. They do not think straight. They simply haven't got the experience of years to have a sufficiently developed sense of reason and fair play and duty. In addition, a child who has just manifested rebellion is exhibiting a life currently directed by foolishness, not reason. Mere words, you see, do not dislodge the foolishness and sin from the heart, whereas a smack will. At this point, while in the grip of this outburst of foolishness, children are unable to grasp your words of wisdom anyway. However, they will be particularly receptive immediately after the smacking has dislodged the foolishness.

In addition, tongue lashings tend to be character assassinations, going deep, doing much damage. "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." (Proverbs 12:18 RSV). Our words need to follow the same pattern as God's words: we should use them to teach, reprove, correct, train in righteousness, edify and impart grace (II Timothy. 3:16, Ephesians. 4:29), but not to humiliate, hurt, shame or manipulate into compliance.

**“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” — Hebrews 12:11**

Smacking does so much good for the child and for you. It deals with all the issues. Ancient wisdom says the same: "Nip it in the bud," "A stitch in time saves nine." It focuses your attention on an area where your input is essential for the child's growth in maturity, self-awareness and understanding. It means another measure of foolishness has been driven from the child's heart. It restores the ruptured relationship which sin always causes. The air is cleared of the anger, guilt, mistrust, frustration and disappointment generated by the sin. A smack completely settles the issue, for once administered, and counseling and cuddling and prayer have followed, the offense need never again be mentioned. Grounding, giving them "time-out", making them stand in the corner, forfeiting pocket money, etc., do not deal with the problem of sin in the heart, are hard to police, cause the offence to be remembered for far too long and can cause resentment to build up alongside of the original foolishness which was not driven out by the rod (the smack) in the first place. Who needs these extra complications? A smack leaves the offense forever in the past and allows everyone to get on with life.

I am not saying there is no place for sending a child to his room for a period of time out or for grounding or some other restriction. These can be great training tools in a parent's hand for heading trouble off at the pass, but the foolishness of rebellion is usually best met with the rod of correction.

## *The Four D's of Discipline*

The question arises, “When should one smack, and when should one use some other tactic?” Smack when the child manifests the foolishness of sinful rebellion. We’re not talking about childishness, immaturity, accidents, errors of judgment, hyperactivity or being boisterous.

Virtually all rebellion falls under one of the four Ds: Disobedience, Disrespect, Dishonesty, Destructiveness. Thoroughly explain each of the Ds to the children. Show what they mean and give examples. On occasion you will need to take a child aside who has just been (for example) disrespectful and explain to him his sin. This first explanation may not need a smack for the child may have had no idea he was being disrespectful.

## *Love is the Key*

**“If they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail.” — Psalms 89:31-33**

Love means total, long-term commitment, and smacking is a demonstration of our love: “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (Proverbs 13:24 RSV). It also mirrors the love of our Heavenly Father: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of His reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Proverbs 3:11-12 RSV).

To further demonstrate your loving commitment to your child’s upbringing, there are some practical tips. Smacking with infants and toddlers is different than smacking with

children who are old enough to speak and follow your verbal instructions. With infants and toddlers: A wee smack to the forearm or leg or just a flick to the hand accompanied by a firm (not loud and angry) “No” is effective for stopping a forbidden behaviour in progress. Used immediately afterwards it warns them not to do it again.

With older children (from perhaps 18 months or 2 years onwards): Some things are just plain humiliating and unnecessary: chastisement in public or the idea of pulling pants down to smack. Smacking may be a 10-15 minute process. Go to a private place, collect the smacking rod, then fully discuss the crime. Ask the child to identify which of the four Ds was broken and to explain why he now needs a smack rather than a tongue lashing or isolation. Always give an opportunity to plead extenuating circumstances; be prepared to call in witnesses for cross examination; and if appropriate, do not smack. The child must comply with your direction to hold still while you administer the smacking to the clothed bottom, not the back or legs. Do not be tempted to restrain a struggling child. Their admission of guilt, their agreement that a smack is necessary and the need to master self-discipline together make it important that the child voluntarily submits to the discipline of smacking.

I freely admit that I do not understand the connection between a physical smack on the bottom and a rebellious spiritual condition of the heart, nor how the first drives out the latter. But the Scripture declares it is so, therefore I am obliged to believe and practice it. In addition there is the verifying testimony of untold generations who have gone before,



*My son, hear the instruction of your father,  
And do not forsake the law of your mother;*

*My son, if you receive my words,  
And treasure my commands within you,  
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,  
And apply your heart to understanding;...  
Then you will understand righteousness  
And justice, equity and every good path.*

*Proverbs 1v8; 2v1-2,9*

my own memory of how it worked with me, my observation of smacking's cleansing effect on my own natural and adopted and even fostered children, plus the positive testimony in favour of even more diligent and consistent smacking from my adult children!

If the child is angry after the smack (slamming doors, pouting, etc.), you have not smacked hard enough, for the foolish rebellion is still there manifesting itself: it has not yet been dislodged from the heart. Point this out to the child and give him or her the opportunity to get rid of the rest of the rebelliousness himself, for other wise you will have to administer another smack. After the smack there are cuddles and prayer, at which time the child is very open, teachable and receptive. Here is the time to reason with words of instruction and encouragement.

As a parent you must lead in discipline by being yourself disciplined. Be consistent: do not smack for an offense one day and ignore it the next. This is devastating to your credibility in your child's eyes and can ruin your relationship, for you have shown yourself to be unfaithful. Being consistent is the number one, most difficult part of being disciplined. Anger toward your child must never be allowed to express itself in either word or deed. This can hardly be overstressed. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20 NKJV).

When children challenge defiantly, you must win conclusively. And you need to win the challenge **now**, no matter how inconvenient, for it will be even less convenient a few hours later. "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" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). If you put off the discipline of rebellion until later, it usually happens that by then, in the child's mind, the issue has already been settled....in his favour. Just excuse yourself to whom-ever you are with, saying you must deal with a very critical issue. "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction." (Proverbs 19:18).

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You therefore, beloved...take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

(II Peter 3:17-18)