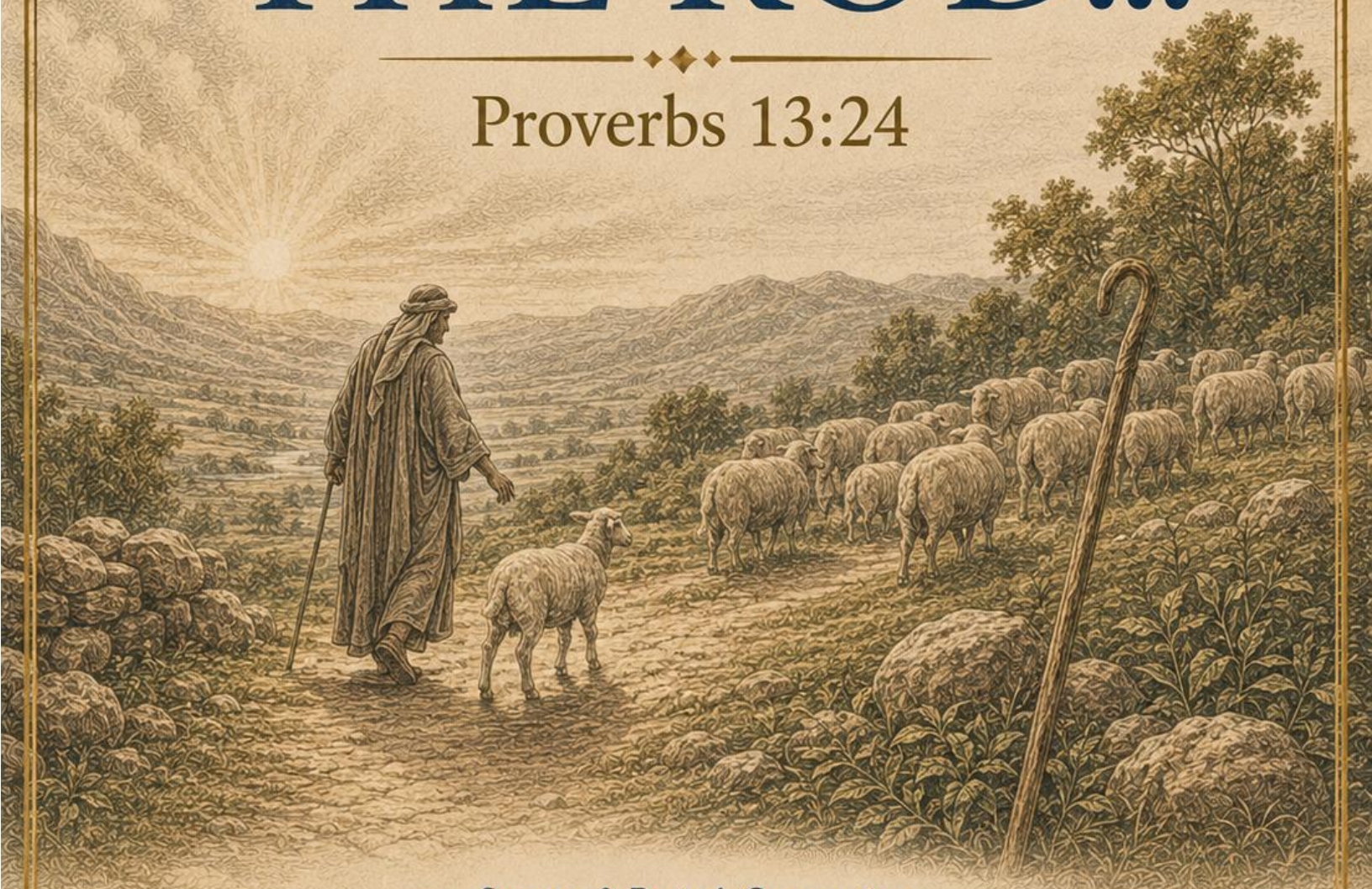




REASON TOGETHER
— CHURCH —

SPARE THE ROD...

Proverbs 13:24



— *Sermon & Pastor's Commentary* —

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

— ♦ —
Pastor & Teacher

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are here with us for the first time or you have been part of our church family for a while, I am glad you are here.

This is a place where you can bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

And let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You that we do not have to build our lives upon popular sayings, family traditions or personal opinions.

We can open the Scriptures and ask what You have actually said.

Give us humble hearts today.

Help us to be honest when Your Word challenges our assumptions.

Help us to be careful when the subject touches painful memories.

Give parents wisdom.

Give children protection.

Give families healing.

And help every one of us to see the love of Jesus Christ clearly.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Before we open our Bibles, let me mention two things briefly.

If you are visiting with us, there is a guest card available for you.

We only ask for your first name and email address.

That allows us to thank you for coming and keep you informed about what is happening at Reason Together Church.

We will not pressure you.

We are simply glad you are here.

We also do not pass an offering plate.

If you are visiting, we encourage you to support your home church.

Giving at Reason Together Church is for our members and those who consider this their church family.

Now, if you have your Bible, please open it to Proverbs chapter 23.

I want to begin with verse 12 because it establishes the setting for everything that follows.

Proverbs 23:12–14 says:

“Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”

Those are difficult words.

They are especially difficult when we hear them through modern ears.

They may be even more difficult if physical punishment was part of your childhood.

Some people hear those verses and remember parents who were calm, loving and restrained.

Others hear them and remember fear.

They remember anger.

They remember belts, switches, paddles or hands.

They remember being told that the pain was required by God.

Some parents hear these verses and wonder whether they have failed God because they did not spank their children.

Other parents hear them and wonder how a loving God could command anyone to strike a child.

So this is not merely an academic question.

It touches our homes.

It touches our memories.

It touches the way some people understand God.

And it raises the question before us today:

When Proverbs speaks of “the rod,” what kind of discipline does God require parents to give their children?

Most of us have heard the expression:

“Spare the rod and spoil the child.”

It is often quoted as though it came directly from the Bible.

But it does not appear anywhere in the Bible in those exact words.

The familiar wording appeared in a seventeenth-century poem titled *Hudibras*, written by Samuel Butler.

That is historically interesting.

But it does not settle our Biblical question.

Sometimes people discover that the exact expression is not in the Bible and conclude that the entire idea is unBiblical.

That would be too easy.

Samuel Butler may have supplied the familiar wording, but the expression clearly echoes the Book of Proverbs.

So we cannot dismiss the subject by saying, “That sentence is not in the Bible.”

We must still examine what the Bible actually says.

Please turn back to Proverbs chapter 13.

Verse 24 says:

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

That is the verse people usually have in mind when they quote the familiar saying.

Notice the contrast.

One parent spares the rod.

The other parent loves the child enough to discipline him.

And the proverb uses very strong language.

It says that the parent who withholds discipline hates his son.

Does that mean the parent feels hostility toward the child or possesses no affection for him?

Not necessarily.

In the Bible, the word “hate” can sometimes describe loving one person less than another.

Genesis tells us that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

Then the next verse describes Leah as hated.

She was not necessarily loved with no affection at all.

She was loved less.

Jesus used similar language when He said that a disciple must hate father and mother.

Matthew explains the comparison by saying that anyone who loves father or mother more than Christ is not worthy of Him.

So Proverbs 13:24 may be asking us to consider what the neglectful parent loves more than the child’s long-term good.

Perhaps the parent loves personal comfort more.

Perhaps the parent loves avoiding conflict more.

Perhaps the parent loves being liked more.

Perhaps the parent loves the temporary quiet that comes from allowing the child to do whatever he wants.

The parent may feel genuine affection.

But by refusing necessary correction, the parent is loving something else more than the child's future.

Biblical love does not merely allow someone to do whatever feels good at the moment.

Love cares about what that person is becoming.

That is the first truth we must preserve.

The Bible does not permit parents to abandon discipline.

But what does the rod mean?

The Hebrew word is *shebet*.

It can describe a rod, a staff or a club.

It can also describe a ruler's scepter.

Because a scepter represents authority, the word can carry the idea of authority.

It is also used for a tribe, probably because a tribal staff represented the people under its authority.

That range of meanings has created two very different arguments.

One group says, "The word can mean a scepter, so the rod is only a symbol of parental authority."

Another group says, “The word can mean a striking instrument, so every use of the rod requires physical punishment.”

Both arguments make the same mistake.

They select one possible meaning and carry it into every passage.

Words do not work that way.

Consider the English word “hand.”

A hand may be part of your body.

A hand may be someone who works on a ranch.

The hands of a clock tell time.

A person may give you a hand by helping you.

An audience may give someone a hand by applauding.

You do not decide what “hand” means by choosing your favorite definition.

You examine the sentence.

Context determines meaning.

The same is true of the Hebrew word translated “rod.”

Sometimes it represents authority.

Sometimes it is a literal object.

Sometimes it may carry both ideas.

That means we must examine each passage honestly.

Proverbs 13:24 alone may leave room for the rod to represent the parent's corrective authority.

But Proverbs 23 makes the physical dimension much more difficult to deny.

Listen again:

“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.”

The Hebrew verb translated “beatest” means to strike.

The rod is mentioned twice.

Whatever else we eventually conclude, we cannot honestly claim that this passage merely describes a shepherd gently placing a staff in front of a wandering sheep.

The ancient reader would have understood physical correction.

We should not change the meaning simply because the words make us uncomfortable.

If we only believe the Bible when it already agrees with us, we are not allowing Scripture to teach us.

We are using Scripture to hear our own opinions repeated back to us.

So let us state the difficult truth plainly.

Physical correction was an accepted part of discipline in the ancient world represented by Proverbs.

That does not end the study.

It gives us an honest place to begin.

Now let us ask what the passage actually says and what people sometimes make it say.

It says not to withhold discipline from a child or youth.

The Hebrew word translated “child” can refer to someone across a broad range of ages, from a small child to a young adult.

The passage does not tell us the age at which physical correction should begin.

It does not say how old is too old.

It does not tell us what kind of rod should be used.

It does not prescribe a number of strokes.

It does not identify which offenses require it.

It does not explain how often it should happen.

It does not provide instructions for a parent to follow.

Those details are simply not there.

Anyone who claims to have discovered a complete Biblical spanking procedure has added information that Scripture does not provide.

We must also understand what “he shall not die” means.

Some people read it as though the Bible were saying:

“Do not worry about striking him because it will not kill him.”

That is one possible understanding of the immediate statement.

But the next verse shows a larger concern.

The purpose of discipline is to deliver the young person from death.

In Proverbs, wisdom leads toward life.

Foolishness leads toward destruction.

A child who never learns self-control, honesty, respect or responsibility may eventually walk into consequences far more painful than parental correction.

The proverb is not promising that spanking will save a child's eternal soul.

The Hebrew word translated "hell" in the KJV is *Sheol*.

It refers to the grave or the realm of the dead.

The concern is a life of foolishness ending in ruin and premature death.

The parent is supposed to intervene before the child's path becomes destructive.

That is the heart of the passage.

Rescue the child from foolishness.

Do not permit temporary comfort to become permanent destruction.

Now turn to Proverbs 22:15.

It says:

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

This verse tells us something about children that our culture sometimes forgets.

Children are precious.

Children bear the image of God.

Children are worthy of dignity, protection and love.

But children are not born with mature judgment.

They do not automatically possess self-control.

They do not naturally understand every danger.

They do not always know the difference between what they want and what is good.

And like every other human being, children possess a fallen nature.

That does not mean we should view them as tiny criminals.

It does not mean every childish mistake is deliberate rebellion.

Sometimes a child disobeys because of willfulness.

Sometimes a child fails because of immaturity.

Sometimes a child is overwhelmed.

Sometimes a child does not understand.

Sometimes a child is frightened, tired or unable to regulate an emotion.

Sometimes adults label behavior sinful because it interrupts what the adult wanted to do.

Wisdom asks what is actually happening before deciding how to respond.

Biblical discipline is not merely reacting to whatever annoys the parent.

It is helping a child grow from foolishness toward wisdom.

Now look at Proverbs 29:15:

“The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.”

Notice those two words:

“The rod and reproof.”

Consequences and words.

Correction and explanation.

Authority and instruction.

The Bible does not present discipline as silently inflicting pain.

Reproof requires communication.

A child must learn what was wrong.

The child must learn why it was wrong.

The child must learn what should have been done instead.

Then verse 17 says:

“Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.”

The objective is not control for the parent’s convenience.

The objective is wisdom within the child.

The desired result is a peaceful relationship in which the child has learned how to live rightly.

At this point, someone may say:

“Pastor, if the rod was physical, doesn’t that mean God commands Christian parents to spank?”

That is where we must ask what kind of book we are reading.

Proverbs is inspired Scripture.

It is God’s Word.

But Proverbs is wisdom literature.

It is not a collection of statutes written like the laws in Leviticus or Deuteronomy.

A proverb gathers wisdom into a short, memorable statement.

It describes the way life generally works.

It does not necessarily mention every qualification or exception.

For example, Proverbs 26:4 says:

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.”

The next verse says:

“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.”

One verse says not to answer a fool.

The next verse says to answer him.

Is that a contradiction?

No.

It is wisdom.

Sometimes answering a fool pulls you into his foolishness.

Sometimes refusing to answer allows him to think he has won.

Wisdom knows which response fits the situation.

A law might say, “Always do this.”

Wisdom asks, “What does faithfulness require here?”

Consider Proverbs 22:6:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

That is a true statement of wisdom.

Faithful training ordinarily shapes a person for life.

But it is not a mechanical guarantee that every child raised in a Christian home will always make righteous choices.

Children eventually make decisions of their own.

Job and Ecclesiastes remind us that life includes exceptions to the ordinary patterns described in Proverbs.

Therefore, we should not read every proverb as though it were a statute requiring identical implementation in every family, culture and generation.

The physical rod was real within the ancient proverb.

But that does not automatically produce a universal command that every Christian parent must strike every child.

The Bible never says:

“Thou shalt spank thy child.”

It commands discipline.

It warns against neglect.

It commends correction.

But it does not give every parent one mandatory physical technique.

That distinction is important.

We do not have to pretend that the ancient rod was imaginary.

Neither do we have to make it the center of Biblical parenting.

Perhaps our greatest misunderstanding comes from treating discipline as another word for punishment.

Punishment looks backward and asks:

“What penalty does this offense deserve?”

Discipline looks forward and asks:

“What will help this person become wise?”

Sometimes discipline includes consequences.

But consequences are part of a much larger process.

Biblical discipline begins long before a child does something wrong.

Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Beginning in verse 4, Moses says:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

That is the normal atmosphere of Biblical parenting.

Teaching while sitting in the house.

Teaching while walking along the way.

Teaching at bedtime.

Teaching when the family rises in the morning.

It is not a parent who ignores a child all week and suddenly appears with a rod when something goes wrong.

It is a relationship filled with conversation, example, instruction, correction and prayer.

The child sees the parent love God.

The child hears why truth matters.

The child watches how the parent handles anger.

The child sees whether the parent apologizes after behaving wrongly.

The child learns not only from what the parent demands but from what the parent demonstrates.

A parent who tells a child not to lie and then lies to other people is providing instruction.

It is simply the wrong instruction.

A parent who demands self-control while screaming in rage is teaching something.

The lesson is that the person with greater power does not need self-control.

A parent who commands respect while humiliating the child is teaching that respect only moves upward.

Biblical discipline requires parents to examine themselves.

We cannot correct foolishness in a child while protecting foolishness in ourselves.

Now let us move into the New Testament.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 6.

Beginning in verse 1, Paul writes:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.

Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Children are told to obey.

Parental authority is real.

The New Testament does not create a home in which children establish every rule and parents are afraid to correct them.

But notice what Paul does next.

He places a boundary around the parent.

“Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.”

That does not mean a child will never become angry when corrected.

A child may become angry simply because the parent said no.

Paul is warning against parenting that produces anger through injustice, inconsistency, humiliation, impossible demands or uncontrolled severity.

Then he says:

“Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Nurture includes training and discipline.

Admonition includes instruction and warning.

But whose nurture is it?

Whose admonition?

It is “of the Lord.”

Christian discipline should reflect the character of Christ.

Now listen to Colossians 3:20–21:

“Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.”

There is another boundary.

Do not discourage them.

Do not crush their willingness to keep trying.

Do not create the belief that they can never please you.

Do not make correction so unpredictable that the child lives in fear.

Do not move the standard every time the child approaches it.

Do not punish honesty more severely than deception.

If a child finally tells the truth and receives an explosion of anger, that child may learn that honesty is dangerous.

Correction should make the path clearer.

It should not make hope disappear.

Jesus also tells us something about the value of children.

In Matthew 18:5–6, He says:

“And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Later, in verse 10, Jesus says:

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.”

Then verse 14 says:

“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

These passages are not instructions about spanking.

They establish something deeper.

A child is not an object for an adult to control.

A child is a person whom God sees.

A child is a person whom Jesus receives.

A child is someone the stronger person is responsible to protect.

Biblical authority is never authority without accountability.

Parents will answer to God for how they use the power entrusted to them.

Now we should address another argument sometimes made about this subject.

Some people say:

“Jesus was punished for our sins, so parents should never punish children.”

That confuses two different matters.

Jesus bore God’s judicial judgment against sin.

No parent can add to the cross.

No child can pay for sin before God through pain, penalties or good behavior.

Salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone.

But the cross does not eliminate every earthly consequence.

Christians still experience church discipline.

Governments still administer justice.

Schools still enforce rules.

Employers still respond to misconduct.

Parents still correct their children.

A consequence is not an attempt to complete the atonement.

The question is whether the consequence is being used to form wisdom or merely to release the adult's anger.

Hebrews chapter 12 compares God's work in believers with a father disciplining a child.

The passage says that the Lord disciplines those He loves.

But Hebrews is not giving parents a procedure for corporal punishment.

It is explaining how God uses hardship to form holiness within His people.

Verse 10 says that He disciplines us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Verse 11 says:

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Notice the purpose.

Our profit.

His holiness.

The peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Discipline is measured by the fruit it is intended to produce.

That brings us to a question ancient parents could not have investigated as fully as we can today.

What methods actually help children develop wisdom, responsibility and self-control?

Medical and child-development research cannot change what the Hebrew text meant.

We should never use modern research to erase an uncomfortable Bible passage.

But neither should we use a Hebrew word to ignore reliable information about children.

Major pediatric and public-health organizations now advise parents against physical punishment.

Research has associated spanking and other physical punishment with increased aggression, behavioral problems and other harmful outcomes.

That does not mean every adult who was spanked has been psychologically destroyed.

It does not mean every parent who spanked a child was abusive.

It does not mean we should place previous generations on trial using information they may not have possessed.

But it does mean that recognized risks exist.

It means safer and effective alternatives are available.

And if the Biblical objective is wisdom rather than pain, parents should choose methods most likely to produce the intended fruit.

Nonviolent discipline is not the absence of discipline.

It is not allowing children to control the home.

It is not pretending that wrongdoing does not matter.

In many cases, nonviolent discipline requires more work from the parent.

Striking may take a moment.

Teaching takes time.

Consistency takes attention.

Following through with a consequence may inconvenience the parent as much as the child.

But discipline was never supposed to be whatever ends the immediate conflict fastest.

The objective is formation.

What might nonviolent discipline look like?

It begins with clear expectations.

A child cannot consistently follow a rule that changes according to the parent's mood.

Expectations should be understandable and appropriate for the child's maturity.

Discipline includes predictable consequences.

If a child deliberately misuses a privilege, that privilege may be temporarily removed.

If a child creates a mess through disobedience, cleaning that mess may become part of the correction.

If a child damages something belonging to another person, restitution may be appropriate.

If two children are escalating toward violence, separating them protects both children and creates space for calm.

If a child acts irresponsibly, additional supervision may be necessary until responsibility is demonstrated.

Discipline includes requiring the child to acknowledge what happened.

Not a forced apology spoken without thought.

A genuine understanding of who was affected and what should be done differently.

Discipline includes restoration.

Once correction has accomplished its purpose, the parent should not continue using the offense as a weapon.

Forgiveness should be real.

Discipline includes encouragement.

Parents should notice growth, honesty, kindness and self-control.

If the only time a child receives focused attention is when something goes wrong, misbehavior may become the child's most dependable way of obtaining attention.

Discipline also includes allowing natural consequences when those consequences are safe.

A parent does not have to rescue a child from every uncomfortable result of irresponsibility.

Sometimes wisdom develops when a child experiences the connection between choices and consequences.

But every method must remain connected to instruction.

The child should know:

What happened?

Why was it wrong?

Who was affected?

What consequence follows?

What should happen next time?

How can the relationship be restored?

That is discipline.

And discipline requires calm.

If a parent is losing control, that is not the moment to impose a consequence.

The parent should stop.

Create distance.

Make certain the child is safe.

Pray.

Regain self-control.

Then address what happened.

Waiting until anger subsides is not weakness.

It is the parent demonstrating the very self-control the child is supposed to learn.

No parent has Biblical authority to injure a child.

No parent has Biblical authority to terrorize a child.

No parent has Biblical authority to humiliate, degrade or threaten a child.

The words “spare the rod” cannot transform abuse into obedience.

Calling something discipline does not make it discipline.

If the purpose is retaliation, it is not Biblical discipline.

If the adult is out of control, it is not Biblical discipline.

If the child is injured, it is not Biblical discipline.

If the child is made to believe that God wants the child to suffer because the parent is angry, it is not Biblical discipline.

And if you know a child is being harmed, protecting that child is not interfering with Biblical parental authority.

Protection is a Biblical responsibility.

Some listening today may be thinking about the way they disciplined their children years ago.

Perhaps you used spanking because you sincerely believed it was required by Scripture.

This message is not an invitation to live beneath endless guilt.

You acted with the understanding you possessed at that time.

If you now believe you caused harm, you may still be able to acknowledge it.

You may be able to apologize without defending yourself.

You may be able to tell your adult child:

“I believed I was doing what was right, but I now understand that some of what I did hurt you.

I am sorry.

I do not expect you to pretend that it did not happen.”

A sincere apology does not erase history.

But it may open a door that defensiveness has kept closed.

Some listening today may be carrying the wounds of childhood punishment.

You may have been told that God required what happened to you.

You may have learned to picture God as an angry parent waiting for a reason to strike.

Please hear me carefully.

Human beings can misuse Scripture.

A parent can place God’s name upon something God never authorized.

The anger of an earthly parent is not a reliable picture of your Heavenly Father.

God’s discipline is never uncontrolled.

It is never selfish.

It is never an emotional explosion.

He does not lose His temper.

He does not forget His purpose.

He does not enjoy humiliating His children.

His discipline is directed toward holiness and restoration.

And at the cross, Jesus Christ bore the judgment of sin completely.

Romans 8:1 says:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

The believer may be corrected.

The believer may be formed.

The believer may experience consequences.

But the believer is not living beneath divine condemnation.

Some parents may worry that rejecting physical punishment will produce undisciplined children.

It will if physical punishment is removed and nothing replaces it.

A child left entirely without boundaries is not being loved well.

Permissiveness is not grace.

Grace does not pretend sin is harmless.

Grace tells the truth and provides a path toward restoration.

Christian parents must still say no.

They must establish limits.

They must correct dishonesty.

They must respond to cruelty.

They must require respect.

They must teach responsibility.

They must follow through.

But they can do those things without striking.

They can be firm without being frightening.

They can be authoritative without being authoritarian.

They can correct the child without crushing the child.

And parents will sometimes fail.

You will become impatient.

You will say something poorly.

You will impose a consequence that was not wise.

You will misunderstand what happened.

Biblical parenting does not require parents to pretend they are infallible.

One of the strongest lessons a parent can teach is how a Christian responds after doing something wrong.

Confess it.

Apologize.

Correct it if possible.

Ask forgiveness.

Then choose a wiser response.

Your child is not weakened by seeing genuine repentance.

Your child is learning what repentance looks like.

So let us return to the question with which we began.

When Proverbs speaks of “the rod,” what kind of discipline does God require parents to give their children?

The rod in Proverbs was not imaginary.

Physical correction was part of the ancient setting.

We should be honest about that.

But neither is the rod the center of Biblical parenting.

The center is love that refuses to neglect instruction.

Love that cares about character.

Love that establishes boundaries.

Love that corrects foolishness.

Love that protects the child from danger.

Love that refuses to provoke, embitter or discourage.

Scripture requires parents to provide loving, timely and effective discipline.

It does not require every parent to strike every child.

A Christian parent can fulfill the Biblical command through firm, consistent and nonviolent correction.

Perhaps we have been asking the wrong question.

The question is not merely:

“Should I spare the rod?”

The deeper question is:

“Am I willing to do the patient work of discipline?”

Will I teach before the crisis?

Will I model what I require?

Will I establish understandable boundaries?

Will I follow through consistently?

Will I correct without humiliating?

Will I restore after correction?

Will I control my own anger?

Will I care more about the child’s wisdom than my immediate convenience?

The Bible does not permit us to spare discipline.

But neither does it permit us to spoil discipline by separating it from love.

Maybe you are a parent who has avoided necessary correction because conflict is uncomfortable.

God may be asking you to become more consistent.

Maybe you have confused anger with authority.

God may be asking you to surrender that anger.

Maybe you were harmed as a child and still struggle to believe that God is good.

Jesus invites you to know the Father as He truly is.

Maybe you have never trusted Jesus Christ.

The gospel begins with the truth that all of us have sinned.

Parents have sinned.

Children have sinned.

Pastors have sinned.

None of us can correct ourselves into salvation.

Jesus Christ died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

And He offers forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who places faith in Him.

You do not become God's child by enduring punishment.

You become His child through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for loving us enough to teach us and correct us.

Forgive us when we neglect the people You have entrusted to us.

Forgive us when anger controls our words or actions.

Give parents wisdom that is patient, courageous and consistent.

Help them establish boundaries without cruelty.

Help them correct without humiliating.

Help them protect without becoming controlling.

Help them model the obedience they want their children to learn.

Bring healing to adults who still carry the wounds of childhood.

Separate Your character from the failures of those who misused Your name.

Protect children who are in danger.

Give believers courage to act when protection is needed.

And lead every family toward the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

For those who have never trusted Christ, open their hearts to the good news of forgiveness and eternal life.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

After the service, I hope you will join us at the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free.

The refills on conversations are also free.

And if today's question raised something you would like to discuss privately, I would be glad to talk with you.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

And let's Reason Together the Word of God.

To those visiting with us for the first time, Aloha Nui Loa.

And to our entire church family, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Aloha.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

SPARE THE ROD...

Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:12–14; 29:15–17

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. **Proverbs 13:24**

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Proverbs does not permit parents to abandon discipline, but it does not establish one mandatory physical procedure for every Christian parent and child. The ancient rod passages include a real physical dimension. Their enduring command is loving, timely and effective correction directed toward wisdom, protection and restoration.

“Spare the rod and spoil the child” is one of the most familiar sentences associated with parenting and the Bible. It is also one of the easiest sentences to repeat without asking what Scripture actually says. The exact wording is not a Bible verse. It comes from Samuel Butler’s seventeenth-century poem *Hudibras*, though it plainly echoes Proverbs 13:24.

That discovery should make us more careful, not less serious. The Proverbs behind the saying use strong language. They condemn parental neglect, connect correction with love and speak of striking a young person with a rod. A faithful interpretation cannot erase the physical force of Proverbs 23 merely because modern readers find it difficult.

Neither can a faithful interpretation turn wisdom sayings into a complete disciplinary statute. Proverbs does not identify an age, implement, offense list, number of strokes, frequency or universal procedure. It gives parents an obligation and a goal: do not surrender a child to foolishness. Teach, correct, protect and form the child toward wisdom and life.

This commentary expands the reasoning behind the sermon. It begins with the words of Scripture, considers the ancient rod honestly, explains the severe love-and-hate contrast in Proverbs 13:24 and places parental authority beneath the boundaries of the New Testament. It then asks how present evidence can help Christian parents choose methods that serve the Biblical purpose without confusing firm discipline with violence or permissiveness.

1. Begin with What Scripture Actually Says

The Four Principal Passages

The sermon is governed by Proverbs 13:24, 22:15, 23:12–14 and 29:15, 17. These passages do not all make the same statement. They form a pattern.

- Proverbs 13:24 contrasts sparing the rod with loving, diligent correction.
- Proverbs 22:15 joins the rod of correction to the foolishness bound in a child’s heart.
- Proverbs 23:12–14 begins with instruction and then speaks directly of striking with the rod.
- Proverbs 29:15 joins the rod with reproof and names wisdom, rest and delight as the desired fruit.

Read together, the passages refuse two opposite conclusions. They do not support parental indifference, because love accepts responsibility for correction. They also do not reduce formation to inflicting pain, because instruction, reproof, wisdom, rescue, rest and relationship surround the rod language.

Correction Is the Subject

The controlling subject is not an instrument. It is correction. The rod serves the moral work of moving a young person away from foolishness and toward wisdom. When the method becomes more important than the fruit, the interpreter has reversed the emphasis of Proverbs.

READING PRINCIPLE Ask first what the text requires parents to accomplish. Ask second what form correction took in its ancient setting. Ask third which present methods faithfully serve the stated purpose beneath the whole counsel of Scripture.

2. The Saying Behind the Study

Not a Direct Bible Quotation

The exact sentence “spare the rod and spoil the child” appears in Part II, Canto I of *Hudibras*, first published in the 1660s. Butler’s poem is satirical. In the immediate setting, Love is personified as a boy in a discussion of lovers and whipping. The line became proverbial and eventually sounded Biblical to generations who heard it repeated.

Its literary origin does not make every idea associated with it unBiblical. Butler’s words echo the contrast in Proverbs 13:24. The historical point is narrower: an English aphorism must not control the meaning of Hebrew Scripture. We should interpret the proverb first and then decide how accurately the popular saying expresses it.

What the Popular Wording Adds

The word spoil can suggest that the child becomes unpleasant because a parent failed to punish. Proverbs says something deeper. The danger is not merely poor manners or an embarrassed parent. Foolishness is a path toward destructive consequences. Discipline is presented as rescue, formation and the patient work of teaching a child to live wisely before God.

NECESSARY DISTINCTION The familiar sentence may introduce the subject, but it does not have the authority of inspired Scripture and it should never replace the actual words, context and purpose of Proverbs.

3. What Does the Rod Mean?

The Range of Shevet

The Hebrew noun shevet can refer to a rod, staff or club. It can also refer to a ruler's scepter and therefore to authority. By association with a tribal staff, it can even mean a tribe. That range explains why the word cannot be translated by one mental picture in every passage.

Some readers emphasize the shepherd's staff as an instrument of guidance and protection. That imagery is Biblically important. Psalm 23 joins the rod and staff with the Shepherd's comforting presence. Yet a shepherd-staff explanation cannot remove the verb strike from Proverbs 23. Context, not preference, determines which part of a word's range is active.

A Real Physical Dimension

Proverbs 23:13–14 uses the verb nakah, commonly translated strike, smite or beat. The rod is named twice. An ancient reader would have recognized bodily correction. To describe the passage as nothing more than a parent placing a staff across a child's path is not adequate.

Acknowledging that physical dimension is not the same as establishing a universal Christian mandate. The text tells us what existed in the world of the proverb. Whether that ancient form is required in every culture, generation and developmental circumstance is a separate question that must be answered through genre, the wider canon, purpose and prudent application.

THE HONEST MIDDLE The rod was not imaginary in the ancient setting. The detailed modern spanking procedure often attributed to these verses is not present in the text either.

4. “Hateth His Son” and Comparative Love

The Severity Must Remain

Proverbs 13:24 uses morally severe language: the parent who spares the rod hates his son, while the parent who loves him disciplines him diligently. The proverb is not accusing every hesitant parent of an emotion of hostility. It exposes the moral character of neglect. Love that never accepts the burden of correction fails to behave as love.

When Hate Describes Loving Less

Scripture sometimes uses love-and-hate language comparatively. Genesis 29:30 says that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah and the next verse describes Leah as hated. Deuteronomy 21:15–17 places a loved wife and a hated wife in contrast. Jesus says that a disciple must hate father and mother in Luke 14:26, while Matthew 10:37 clarifies the priority by speaking of loving family more than Christ.

That Biblical pattern helps explain Proverbs 13:24. A parent may feel genuine affection while repeatedly loving something else more than the child's long-term good. The competing love may be comfort, quiet, approval, popularity, convenience or avoidance of conflict. The proverb asks whether parental affection becomes faithful action.

The explanation must remain qualified. The Hebrew verb *sane* genuinely means hate in many contexts. "Love less" is not a replacement definition that can be inserted mechanically wherever the word appears. Here it is a relational explanation supported by the proverb's antithesis and the wider Biblical pattern.

PASTORAL QUESTION When I avoid necessary correction, what am I loving more than this child's future: my comfort, my image, immediate quiet or freedom from a difficult conversation?

5. The Difficult Words of Proverbs 23

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. Proverbs 23:13–14

Instruction Comes First

The paragraph begins in verse 12: "Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge." The physical wording is therefore set inside a call to teach and learn. Correction separated from explanation is already thinner than the passage itself.

"He Shall Not Die"

The assurance may tell the ancient hearer that measured correction is not intended to kill. It must never be used as permission to approach the edge of injury. Scripture does not authorize a parent to terrorize a child and then defend the conduct by saying the child survived.

Rescue from Sheol

The King James Version renders Sheol as hell in verse 14. In this wisdom context, the term points to the grave or realm of the dead. Proverbs repeatedly contrasts the path of wisdom leading toward life with the path of foolishness leading toward ruin. The parent's responsibility is preventive rescue.

The verse does not promise that physical punishment saves a child's eternal soul. Salvation is not produced by pain, obedience or a parent's disciplinary technique. The wisdom saying addresses the life-and-death consequences of a moral path. Eternal salvation rests in the grace of God received through faith in Jesus Christ.

WHAT THE PASSAGE DOES NOT SUPPLY No age, body location, implement, offense schedule, number of blows or frequency is named. Any complete corporal-punishment protocol presented as the explicit content of Proverbs includes details the passage does not give.

6. Proverbs Is Wisdom, Not a Procedure Manual

Wisdom Forms Judgment

A proverb condenses revealed and observed wisdom into memorable language. It ordinarily describes a path and its fitting outcome. It does not list every exception or every implementation detail. This is why Proverbs can command diligent correction without becoming a case law that specifies actors, offenses, procedures and penalties.

Calling Proverbs wisdom literature does not make its moral instruction optional. It tells us how to judge and live faithfully. It does mean that wisdom must be applied to the actual child. Maturity, comprehension, disability, trauma, temperament, exhaustion and fear may affect what conduct means and what response is fitting.

The Young Person Is Not Precisely Aged

The Hebrew words translated child or youth can cover a broad age range. Vocabulary alone does not tell us when a disciplinary method begins or ends. A rigid age chart cannot honestly be claimed from these terms. Wise correction distinguishes inability from defiance and immaturity from deliberate rebellion.

The Fruit Tests the Method

Proverbs 29:15 says that “the rod and reproof give wisdom.” Reproof requires communication. Verse 17 promises rest and delight. The aim is not parental convenience, public compliance or victory in a contest of wills. The aim is a child growing in wisdom, responsibility and a peaceful relationship with those who love him.

7. Parental Authority Beneath the Whole Bible

Parents Must Teach and Correct

Deuteronomy 6 places formation inside the ordinary rhythms of home: parents speak of God’s words while sitting, walking, lying down and rising. Ephesians 6 commands children to obey and commands parents to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The Bible does not permit passive parenting.

Parents Must Not Provoke or Discourage

The same New Testament that affirms obedience limits the exercise of parental power. Fathers must not provoke their children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4) or provoke them until they become discouraged (Colossians 3:21). Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:19–20). Authority and accountability cannot be separated.

Children Possess Dignity Before Christ

Matthew 18 receives children and little ones with unusual seriousness. Jesus warns against causing them to stumble and forbids despising them. A doctrine of parental authority that silences protection or treats a child as property has moved outside the character of Christ.

Divine Discipline Is Purposeful

Hebrews 12 describes God's discipline as an expression of fatherly love directed toward our profit, holiness and the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The passage supplies purpose and analogy. It does not give parents a detailed physical procedure. Earthly discipline should reflect God's control, wisdom and restorative purpose rather than an adult's rage.

CANONICAL BOUNDARY Christian discipline must not provoke, embitter, discourage, humiliate, terrorize or injure a child. A parent's anger cannot be baptized as Biblical correction.

8. Discipline Is Broader Than Punishment

The Hebrew vocabulary of *musar* and *yasar* includes instruction, correction, training and chastening. Proverbs introduces itself as a book for receiving instruction. Discipline is therefore a way of forming a life, not a moment in which a parent imposes pain after misbehavior.

- Teaching gives the child the reason for a command before conflict occurs.
- Example shows that the parent also lives beneath God's authority.
- Warning identifies the path and its likely consequences.
- Reproof names what was wrong and what should be done instead.
- Supervision changes the environment when a child is not ready to manage it.
- Consequences connect choices with responsibility and repair.
- Encouragement recognizes growth and strengthens wise conduct.
- Restoration rebuilds relationship after correction.

A family can reject physical punishment and still practice serious discipline. Nonviolence is not permissiveness. Permissiveness abandons limits, follow-through and formation. Faithful nonviolent discipline establishes clear expectations, responds predictably and remains engaged until the child has understood and repaired what can be repaired.

9. What Present Evidence Contributes

Research Does Not Rewrite Hebrew

Modern research cannot change the ancient meaning of shevet or nakah. Exegesis must answer what the passage meant before present evidence is used. Research can, however, inform a question of wisdom: which available methods are most likely to produce the fruit Scripture names?

A Converging Caution

Major pediatric and public-health organizations advise against physical punishment. Meta-analyses and prospective studies report associations between physical punishment and increased risks of aggression, behavior problems, poorer mental health and damaged parent-child relationships. The evidence supplies no persuasive reason to believe spanking produces superior long-term outcomes.

The language must remain disciplined. Much of the evidence is observational because it would be unethical to assign children randomly to be hit. Individual studies have methodological limits. The research does not prove that every person who was spanked experiences every reported harm, nor does it prove that every parent who has ever spanked was abusive.

The convergence still matters. Repeated findings, longitudinal evidence, professional guidance and the absence of demonstrated superior long-term benefit support a prudent conclusion. Christian parents can choose firm, consistent and nonviolent methods without disobeying the enduring command of Proverbs.

CLAIMS DISCIPLINE Say associated risks rather than inevitable damage. Say safer alternatives rather than guaranteed outcomes. Present evidence as guidance for prudent application, not as authority over Scripture.

10. Practical Nonviolent Discipline

Before the Crisis

- State a small number of clear, age-appropriate expectations.
- Explain the moral or practical reason for each important limit.
- Arrange routines, sleep, food and supervision so preventable conflict is reduced.
- Decide likely consequences while calm rather than inventing them in anger.

During the Conflict

- Stop conduct that creates immediate danger and separate people when necessary.
- Use few words, a calm voice and a consequence the child can understand.
- Pause when the parent is angry. Correction can wait until self-control returns.
- Distinguish defiance from fear, confusion, disability, immaturity or exhaustion.

Consequences That Teach

A useful consequence is connected, proportionate, predictable and capable of being completed. A child who misuses an object may lose access to it for a fitting period. A child who causes a mess may help clean it. A child who harms another person may be separated for safety, make restitution where possible and practice a better response. Natural consequences may be allowed when they are not dangerous.

After Correction

The parent should explain what happened, listen to the child, affirm continuing love and restore ordinary relationship. Forgiveness does not always remove every consequence, but correction should not become emotional exile. The goal is not a defeated child. It is a wiser child who remains securely loved.

FAITHFUL PATTERN Teach before the crisis. Correct with self-control. Follow through consistently. Require repair where possible. Restore the relationship after correction.

11. Guilt, Wounds, Repentance and Protection

Parents Who Regret the Past

This study is not an invitation for older parents to live beneath endless condemnation. It is an invitation to truth. A parent may recognize that a method caused fear or harm, confess it plainly and apologize without defending the conduct with Proverbs. Repentance asks what repair remains possible and accepts that an injured person may need time.

Adults Carrying Childhood Wounds

A harmed adult should never be required to call cruelty good because a parent quoted Scripture. Human beings can misuse the Bible. An earthly parent's rage is not a reliable picture of the Heavenly Father. God's discipline is controlled, purposeful, holy and directed toward peaceable righteousness.

When Protection Is Required

Where injury, threats, terror, degradation or escalating violence is present, the church's duty is not to preserve appearances. It is to protect the child and involve qualified authorities and professionals as current safeguarding requirements direct. Respect for legitimate parental authority never requires silence about abuse.

REPENTANCE AND REPAIR An apology may open a door to healing, but it does not erase history or guarantee immediate reconciliation. Faithful repentance tells the truth, accepts responsibility and does not demand that the injured person manage the offender's guilt.

12. Discipline, Consequences and the Gospel

Earthly consequences and divine condemnation are not the same. Parents may impose fitting consequences to teach responsibility and protect others. No child pays for sin before God by suffering pain, losing a privilege or achieving better behavior. Parental discipline does not complete the atonement.

Jesus Christ bore divine condemnation for sin. He died, was buried and rose again. Romans 8:1 declares that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Forgiveness and eternal life are received through faith in Him, not earned through punishment or obedience.

The gospel changes the atmosphere of a Christian home. Parents can confess when they are wrong because their hope does not rest in appearing perfect. Children can learn responsibility without being told that one failure defines them. Correction can be serious without becoming condemnation because grace tells the truth and opens the way toward repentance and restoration.

Conclusion: Do Not Spare or Spoil Discipline

The rod passages must be allowed to speak before they are applied. Their language is strong. They condemn neglect and call parents to intervene when foolishness threatens a child's path. Proverbs 23 includes a real physical dimension. An interpretation that removes that fact is not honest with the difficult text.

The passages must also be allowed to remain wisdom. They do not establish a universal physical procedure. Their enduring command is loving, diligent correction aimed at wisdom, life, rest and restored relationship. The whole Bible places parental authority beneath accountability, self-control and the character of Christ.

The comparative use of love and hate helps us hear Proverbs 13:24 personally. A parent can possess affection and still love comfort or avoidance more than the child's long-term good. Faithful love accepts the patient work of teaching, correcting, protecting and following through.

Present evidence does not rewrite Scripture. It helps parents choose among methods that can serve Scripture's purpose. The convergence of evidence and professional guidance supports firm, consistent and nonviolent discipline. Parents do not have to choose between striking a child and surrendering authority.

THE ENDURING COUNSEL The Bible does not permit us to spare discipline. Neither does it permit us to spoil discipline by separating it from love. Be firm without frightening. Correct without crushing. Care more about the child's wisdom than your immediate convenience.

Selected Sources

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