

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Introduction

Corporal punishment is defined as intentional or purposeful infliction of pain as punishment for misbehavior or other wrongs. The term is usually associated with hitting a person receiving the punishment, either with a hand or an instrument such as a ruler, paddle, cane, or some other device, but could be administered in other ways. *Corporal* punishment is different from *capital* punishment where death is the end result. The Bible cites numerous examples of corporal punishment, all harsh and unjust, doled out by the Roman Empire.

The apostle Paul shared in one of his letters that he personally received at the hands of the Roman Empire or religious leaders – floggings with a whip, beatings with rods, stoning, and withholding of food (**2 Corinthians 11:21-28**).

Before his crucifixion, Jesus was slapped in the face (**Matthew 26:67**), struck in the face with fists (**Mark 14:65**), flogged (**Mark 15:15**), and had a crown of thorns jammed on his head (**John 19:2**). It should be noted that some flogging in the Roman Empire utilized pieces of sharp metal on the ends of the whips, also known as scourging, a common practice before crucifixion. These and similar measures are *torture*, not punishment.

Today, various forms of corporal punishment are still utilized in many countries. Caning is used in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Sumatra, Botswana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. Other forms of corporal punishment are used in government systems, schools, and in homes throughout the world. The form most often used in homes is spanking by hand, paddle, ruler, or some other instrument. Only 50 or so nation states have totally banned all forms of corporal punishment.

School Systems and Governments

Most forms of corporal punishment in school systems have been outlawed, though the practice still remains in some districts in this country and localities throughout the world. Much the same can be said of judicial corporal punishment administered by

governmental bodies, such as prison systems or ordered by a court. In systems that have eliminated the practice, corporal punishment was deemed *physical abuse*.

Followers of Jesus are prompted to submit to the laws of government, including, presumably, corporal punishment. Though he was specifically addressing the issue of paying taxes, Jesus said, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (**Mark 12:17**). One can assume that Jesus was validating a place for government authority, yet a higher authority in the realm of faith. Paul gave similar guidance, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (**Romans 13:1-2**). See also **1 Peter 2:13-14**.

This lays a heavy burden on politicians and government leaders to get it right. Sometimes (some would say *often*), they do not. Subservience to the government is becoming increasingly challenging as the government looks the other way for crimes that harm society – arson, looting, shoplifting, assault, even more serious crimes. Regardless, unless what we are called to do by governing authorities is sinful or totally out of the will of God, we should submit to their authority, even facing the consequences when we disobey. This biblical guidance seems to be aimed at order in society and good citizenry, something that benefits us all.

In the Home

Parents throughout history have used corporal punishment in the home, usually spankings of some form. The wisdom of Solomon in the Old Testament promotes it repeatedly:

Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (**Proverbs 13:24**).

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol (**Proverbs 23:13-14**).

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him (**Proverbs 22:15**).

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother (**Proverbs 29:15**).

New Testament writings also provide guidance on child rearing and discipline, but with less specificity on how:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (**Ephesians 6:4**).

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (**Hebrews 12:11**).

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.” For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives (**Hebrews 12:5-6**).

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive (**1 Timothy 3:4**).

We believe that discipline by parents is an absolute must for children in every home. The love of God needs to be applied for this to happen effectively. Just as God disciplines each of us, His children, in love (**Hebrews 12:6**), we need to lovingly discipline our children. That could happen in a number of ways, including spanking.

Closing Thoughts

The challenge for parents is disciplining in love. If the discipline is done at the wrong time in the wrong way and applied without love, the discipline is likely to be harsh and possibly abusive. Measured discipline, regardless of the method, is the key. Taking away privileges like Internet, social media, or TV time, when applied in love for the right duration, can be loving and highly effective. Spanking children of the proper age group without abusing them can also be loving and highly effective. We urge parents to consider a possible range of discipline measures for various offenses *before* they occur, then apply them consistently in love.

This is an introduction on the subject of **Corporal Punishment**. Here are some other resources you may wish to explore:

[What does the Bible say about corporal punishment as practiced by governments? | GotQuestions.org](#)

[Spanking and Corporal Punishment is Christian, Biblical and Necessary \(trusaint.com\)](#)

[Growing In Goodness - Common Sense Ethics](#)

[What is Corporal Punishment? \(with pictures\) \(mylawquestions.com\)](#)