



Discipline Your Child to Save Them From Death

Proverbs 23:13-14 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.

- Yesterday our devotion encouraged parents to bring up their children in the way of the Lord. Today's message sets before us a practical application of godly parenting: the issue of discipline. To be sure no parent enjoys disciplining their child, but such correction is altogether necessary because of the sinful nature with which we are all born and the sinful world in which we live. Would any parent abdicate this sacred responsibility, they are essentially abandoning their children to the wolves—hastening their physical and even their spiritual deaths. So what does the Bible say about discipline?
- For proper discipline to take place it is of paramount importance for Christian parents to have a clear understanding of the two competing natures that dwell within the hearts of their children: the sinful nature and the new nature. These two are directly opposed to each other and have very different needs and responses. The sinful nature is rebellious, devious, and disrespectful. It responds to the law—that is to threats and punishments for bad behavior and rewards for good. When the sinful nature acts out it does not respect leniency and mercy, instead it sees these as signs of weakness and a license to do more. (How many of us parents have made the mistake of seeing our child do something mischievous, only to laugh at it or brush it off, and then the very next moment they take it way too far?) Thus, Solomon says do not withhold the rod of discipline. His point here is not that parents must physically beat their children with a stick, rather he is emphasizing that in order for discipline to be effective it needs to be truly distasteful as far as the sinful nature is concerned. Because the sinful nature is always weighing costs and benefits. If it imagines or knows from experience that its evil behavior will only get a slap on the wrist, such behavior will continue to dominate in the heart and life.
- In stark contrast the new nature in us thrives on forgiveness and love and mercy, and over time learns to accept the fact that although discipline is unpleasant, it is necessary to keep the sinful nature in check. As the writer to the Hebrews observes, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11). At the same time Paul warns parents, particularly fathers, to discipline on the basis of love with a calm and measured approach, lest they exasperate, embitter, or discourage their children (cf. Col. 3:21 and Eph. 6:4).
- Understanding these two natures and what drives each one is crucial in helping parents achieve our ultimate goal in discipline, which is the same goal that we have whenever anyone sins: to bring the sinner to repentance. When our children disobey or misbehave they need to be made to see and confess that what they did was inexcusably wrong, unloving, and harmful, and as such it can't be repeated and has consequences, but once they come to that realization and express regret for what the sinful nature in them has done, we need to immediately communicate that they are still and always will be loved and forgiven by God, by us, and by the one they've wronged. They must be reassured that although they have lost this particular battle against the sinful nature, by his cross and empty tomb Jesus won the war. It is the power of Christ's victory and his ceaseless grace that motivates our children to get back up, to learn from their

mistakes, and to keep on fighting so that after all is said and done they will stand in the winner's circle with their Savior (Eph. 6:13).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for making me your child through the waters of Holy Baptism. When sin rises up and deceives me, do whatever it takes to correct me to keep me in your grace. Give all Christian parents the love and the fortitude needed to properly discipline their children so that they may be strengthened in faith, guided in holiness, and kept eternally safe in your Son. Amen.