

"THE PLEASURE AND PAIN OF FATHERHOOD, II."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Texts for the Sermon: Mark 1:1-5 and Galatians 6:1

Introduction.

A few weeks ago I started a sermon with the intention of preaching about two aspects of fatherhood, called the Pleasure and Pain of Fatherhood. I had one key Scripture text for each aspect, but it didn't take me long to figure out that if I was going to do either text any justice at all I was going to have to devote a sermon to each text. So last time I preached I spoke on what Scripture teaches about the pleasure and delight of fatherhood from the words of God the Father to God the Son at the Son's baptism.

Mark 1:9-11 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. [10] And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. [11] And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (ESV)

I spoke of God's pleasure and delight in His Son and how He expressed that pleasure and delight by showing up, by being present, by being engaged, by speaking and expressing out loud His love, pleasure and delight in His Son. I commend to all of you fathers that sermon and invite you to listen to it again or read it on our church's website or by asking me for a copy.

As I said in that sermon, the Bible is the most supremely practical book. It contains God's wisdom for doing life.

Scripture teaches us everything we need to know about fathering and mothering. When you boil it down to the basics, fathering and mothering is love and correction, tender and tough, grace and guidance, delight and discipline.

This morning I want to address the question of how we love our children when they sin. What about when they disobey and cause us much displeasure? What does Scripture say about discipline and how do we do it in the context of love and pleasure and delight? Many of us discipline the way our parents did, what we need to do is learn to discipline the way God does.

What I want to do again this morning is say some things I wish I had heard 30 years ago and not just heard but taken to heart and put into practice.

Scripture shows us how to discipline; it gives us guidance in giving guidance.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (ESV)

What does Scripture tell us to do? Do something and not nothing. Don't ignore sin, don't think sin is cute, don't avoid conflict but don't over react either.

Who does Scripture say should do it? We hear “You who are spiritual” and we think we are all disqualified. It just means you who are more mature. As parents there’s always room for improvement, but we are the ones God calls and uses to discipline our children.

How does Scripture say it should be done? One of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is gentleness, another is self-control. The gentleness comes not from a wimpiness, but from a clear understanding of our own weaknesses and failings. (See Galatians 5:24-26 for more context of what gentleness and spiritual means.)

If someone sins, then you who are spiritual correct in a spirit of gentleness. There’s a qualification or a quality needed.

If someone sins in your house and you’re mad and angry and ticked off big time, then you’re not spiritually qualified to correct in that moment.

Don’t add evil to evil. Don’t pile sin on top of sin. Much that’s called discipline is actually just venting anger, it’s excessive and severe and does more harm than good. Correction loses its effectiveness when it’s delivered with wrath.

Too much discipline is more punishment than correction, making the parent feel better rather than bettering the child. In the heat of the moment it’s easy exceed healthy limits. You can’t repair much of anything if you are in a fit of rage, whether it’s a lawn mower, a milking machine or a child.

Discipline done with gentleness has the most chance of communicating love. As Calvin says “the vinegar must be tempered with oil” (Galatians, p. 108).

Why does Scripture say discipline should be done? Scripture teaches us there must be a clear purpose to discipline and that purpose is to restore, to make sound or whole again. This is not accomplished by violence or fierce anger or yelling, but rather with a calm and gentle and kind spirit with an intention to heal and help.

A child who hears fierce anger will not get that their sin is about them, but that somehow it’s about the parent. He may learn that a particular sin or disobedience makes his dad really, really upset, rather than that his sin is a sin against God and God’s Word and the command to obey those in authority.

Only those who are in a sound and sane and self-controlled frame of mind are fit and able to discipline in a way that leads to correction and restoration. Before we can discipline others, we must show that we can discipline ourselves.

I don’t ever remember being disciplined by my father. That’s not because I never was. I know I was because I have been reminded of stories of how dad had to spank me when I was little. And I well remember that there hung in his closet the feared Yellowstone Belt. A big leather belt he bought on a family vacation to Yellowstone.

The reason I don’t remember being disciplined by my father was because he started it very early and it was finished early. I grew up knowing not to disobey him. By disciplining me early he took care of later. We didn’t have teenage wars.

Proverbs 19:18 says, “Discipline your son *while there is hope*, and do not desire his death.” How early should you discipline? That’s not hard to figure out. If a child is old enough to willfully disobey or display a rebellious attitude or make a connection between your “no” and his action, then he’s old enough to understand the connection between his action and the painful consequences.

Why do kids only start to obey when parents start to yell? Because that’s when we have taught them to start obeying. Why do kids argue with their parents? Because they can. Because they get away with it. Because they haven’t been disciplined to take no for an answer. Parents should only have to calmly speak one time.

Scripture teaches us how to do this. How does God discipline sin?

Genesis 2 and 3. God created Adam and put him in a beautiful garden, and God gave him one rule. Calmly, clearly God told Adam, “This is all yours, I have given you all of this and you can have more if you ask. But, there’s one rule, don’t touch that one tree, don’t eat its fruit.”

What did Adam do? He broke the only rule. He did the one thing his Father told him not to do.

And what did the Father do?

“Adam, put down that apple.” “OK, I’m going to tell you one more time.” “Ok, that’s once, now I really mean it.” “Adam, let’s try this again, best two out of three.” “Adam, I’m going to count to 10.”

What did God do? He told Adam once. And God told Adam what would happen if he disobeyed. And when Adam disobeyed, God disciplined Him. God followed through, God did what He said He would do. He put down the newspaper, got up from His chair or whatever else He was busy doing and He did it completely in control and under control.

Notice His discipline was *judicial*. God listened to Adam’s side of the story, He let Adam try to make His case which was very weak, no case at all actually. Then He disciplined.

Finally, notice after the discipline was over, there was a word of grace and love. God made plans to restore (Genesis 3:15), He would defeat and destroy Satan and all his work.

What do we learn from all this? When you discipline, do seven things.

Dads are to reflect something of the character and nature of God to our children. We learn about what kind of father God is from our earthly fathers.

First, keep rules simple and easy. In the garden there were lots of yes’s and one no. That’s a good guide for our homes, lots of yes’s, as few no’s as possible.

I John 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” God has two rules, love God and love your neighbor.

Basically we only need three rules in our homes:

No dishonesty or lying. Win the character battle, and win it early.

No disobedience, do what you are told. Learn submission.

No disrespect to mom and authorities. Learn respect and you learn to honor others, especially those in authority.

Second, no dishonest warnings, follow through. Yes, be judicial, listen quietly and calmly to their case which 7 out of 10 times will be pretty lame, and then discipline. Don't yell, follow through. Don't say what you won't do. Don't count.

I heard a pastor say our counting doesn't teach our kids obedience, it teaches them fractions. You know, nine, nine and a half, nine and three quarters ..." Don't do that, it says you can keep sinning from one to nine and three quarters.

Third, make clear what the sin was. Call sin sin. Make a connection to God and the Bible. Keep discipline spiritual, a matter of the heart. The point of discipline is not perfectly behaved kids, the point is a fear of the Lord that leads to wisdom and love for God and His Word. Sin is folly and the purpose of discipline is to remove folly from the heart of a child and replace it with wisdom.

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

Discipline for sin and willful disobedience, not for errors or mistakes or childish irresponsibility. Don't discipline a child for being human.

Fourth, remind what you said the discipline would be for disobedience. Let your discipline be instructive. Teach obedience and the consequences of disobedience. Make that connection early so they will learn to apply it to all of God's laws and understand that disobedience against God also has consequences.

Fifth, calmly administer the discipline in private. Just the act of removing yourself from the immediate scene and going to a back bedroom calms you down. Don't shame your child in front of his siblings or friends. Treat him the way you would want to be treated.

Sixth, the discipline should be painful. It certainly was for Adam and Eve.

There's a reason why God commands spanking, so there would be an association between disobedience and pain.

Of course we are not talking about child abuse here or spanking that does permanent physical damage. We are talking about loving, self-controlled discipline by a parent. Like many things in our culture, people are over reacting and throwing out the baby with the bath water. Should we stop eating food because some people over do it? Should we end marriage because some get divorced? Should we outlaw spanking because some people abuse children? Spanking is as important to life as food and marriage, they are all fundamental to life.

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

Spanking establishes authority and clarifies who is to obey whom. A disobedient or rebellious child is saying, "You can't tell me what to do, I'll do what I want to do." He's challenging your authority. The earlier he learns submission and obedience the less trouble you and he will have

later. The sooner he learns the lesson of submitting to your will, the easier it will be for him to learn to submit to his heavenly Father's will.

Proverbs 20:30 says, "Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts."

Finally, discipline should show our love.

Proverbs 13:24 "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently."

Let your discipline be from affection and be followed with affection. After the spanking and some tears, remind the child that you love him and you care about him and that you want the very best for him and obedience is the very best path for all of life. Give him a hug and a kiss and an "I love you." Pray with him a short prayer. All of this communicates that the discipline and displeasure is over and that he's restored. That's the goal, remember.

The best discipline is short, so that the restoration is quick. I don't recommend long time outs or groundings for days. This drags everything out and is not a model of how God deals with our sin and our repentance. And it doesn't restore peace quickly.

Application and conclusion.

This is godly discipline or God-like discipline. God disciplines us out of His Fatherly love for us. This is the Gospel: sin, discipline, repentance (turning around from folly to wisdom), forgiveness, love, reconciliation.

Much of what I have said has application to parents, grandparents, relatives, church school leaders and elders. But it applies most specifically to fathers. As fathers we have the primary responsibility for godly discipline in our homes and what we do at home will spill over into the church and the community.

Dads, I know we come home from work tired and we don't want to do more heavy lifting at home. I know we have lots of stresses and lots on our minds, but our failure to take leadership in the discipline of our children and to set the pace will lead to disastrous results.

Our heavenly Father is our example. He is very busy running the entire universe and He is very actively involved in the discipline of every one of His millions of children.

Dads, don't leave all the discipline to mom. That will create even greater disrespect for mom and will discourage her and make her life harder. It's lack of love on your part for both your wife and your children.

Fathers, don't deny your children the gift of godly discipline, of respect for authority, of loving obedience to the Law of God and the laws of man. Don't deprive your children, don't send them handicapped into this world.

Hebrews 12:11 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.

Proverbs 29:17 Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.