

Chapter 8—Government and the Family

Who is to train children? Should the government restrict the discipline of children?

A. The Issue: Should parents or the government have the primary responsibility for training children?

B. The relevant biblical teaching

1. Promotion of bearing children: The government should encourage and give incentives for married couples to bear and raise children, for the good of society

²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:27-28).

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward (Ps. 127:3).

Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth (Mal. 2:15).

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander (1 Tim. 5:14 cf. Deut. 28:4; Hos. 1:10).

- Benefits to Society of Bearing Children

- (1) Unless each generation bears and raises at least as many children as themselves, the society will dwindle and perhaps go out of existence
 - (2) Unless a new generation of young workers comes along, the society will become top-heavy and its economy will spiral downward
 - (3) Society passes on its cultural values, moral teachings, and behavioral standards through its children
2. Education and parental rights: parents, not the government, should have the primary responsibility for educating and training their children, and should have the freedom to decide how best to do this.

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise* (Deut. 6:4-7).

Hear, my son, your *father's* instruction, and forsake not your *mother's* teaching (Prov. 1:8).

Hear, O sons, a *father's* instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight (Prov. 4:1).

My son, keep your *father's* commandment, and forsake not your *mother's* teaching (Prov. 6:20).

A wise son makes a glad *father*, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his *mother* (Prov. 10:1).

A wise son hears his *father's* instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke (Prov. 13:1).

A wise son makes a glad *father*, but a foolish man despises his *mother* (Prov. 15:20).

Listen to your *father* who gave you life, and do not despise your *mother* when she is old. (Prov. 23:22).

The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his *mother* taught him (Prov. 31:1).

¹*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ²"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

⁴*Fathers*, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

²⁰*Children, obey your parents* in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹*Fathers*, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col. 3:20-21).

- No indication that government has the responsibility for training children or for deciding what children should be taught.
- The responsibility for teaching and training children, according to the Bible, falls entirely on their parents.
- Implications:
 - (1) Parents, not the government, should have the freedom to decide how best to educate their children.
 - (2) Parents should never begin to think that the public school system is replacing the parents as the party *primarily responsible* for training of children.

3. A school voucher system should be adopted by every school district in the entire United States

- Benefits:
 - (1) It would restore much more parental influence in the training of children, a policy that would be consistent with the biblical teaching that parents have the primary responsibility for training their children.
 - (2) It would establish healthy competition in the educational system, with the result that the schools that give children the best training would gradually gain more and more students, and under-performing schools would either have to improve or they would have to close because they had no students!
 - (3) It would allow parents to send children to schools that supported their own moral and behavioral values.
 - (4) Children would be better educated.
- An objection: Parents will use vouchers to send children to church-related schools and thus the government will be supporting training in a certain religion. However:
 - (a) It is not the *government* that is supporting such church-related schools, but the *parents* of the children, because they are making the choice of where to send their children.
 - (b) The First Amendment was only intended to prohibit *the governmental establishment of one certain church* or religion as the official state church. It was never intended to prevent all government support for everything that is done by a church.
 - (c) The goal of civil government with regard to education should be to produce educated citizens for the next generation, not *to prevent children from obtaining education* in a school that also teaches religious values.

4. Discipline of children: Governments should not prohibit parents from using physical discipline (such as spanking) to train their children, but should prohibit things such as brutality, cruelty, and actual physical harm to children

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

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers *who disciplined us* and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? *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 (Heb. 12:9, 11).

Whoever *s pares the rod* (Hebrew *shebet*, here a rod or stick of wood) hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (Prov. 13:24).

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

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 (Prov. 23:13-14).

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

¹¹My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹²for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3:11-12).

Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death (Prov. 19:18).

Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart (Prov. 12:17).

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives (Heb. 12:6).

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged (Col. 3:21).

- The laws in the US are sufficient to guard against and punish genuine physical abuse of children
- Such laws should not be expanded to rule out the use of such physical discipline as spanking a child.
- When spanking is administered wisely and with restraint, it is beneficial, not harmful, in the raising of children.
- Studies seldom if ever distinguish wise, non-abusive spanking from more violent beatings, and they fail to distinguish wise, restrained parental spanking from unjustified rage and actual physical abuse from drunken or pathologically abusive parents.
- Christians should be suspicious of supposedly conclusive “expert studies” that result in telling parents that they should not do exactly what the Bible tells them to do.
- A non-Christian worldview is less likely to think that children should be disciplined for the wrong that they do.
- Opposition to spanking may arise from opposition to the very idea of *parental authority* over children, or opposition to the idea that parents can know better than children what is right and wrong

5. Education and moral standards: Should public schools teach moral values to children? Should they teach children about what constitutes right and wrong behavior in the eyes of the society in which they live?

- If simply left to themselves to decide what is right and wrong, children will often make wrong decisions.

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

“A child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (Prov. 29:15).

- As schools have abandoned teaching children about right and wrong, these children have grown up with rampant moral relativism and very little consensus at all about standards of right and wrong.
- Once any society loses an agreed-upon set of moral values and standards, and fails to transmit clear moral standards to succeeding generations, evil will continue to increase in that society

“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

- The current approach stems from a Supreme Court decision (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971), ruling that government agencies could not do anything that would support religion in general
- If the Supreme Court were to overturn *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, and subsequent rulings that followed a similar pattern:
 - School boards and individual public schools could begin to work toward determining a consensus about what kinds of moral and religious values should be taught in each local school district.
 - Support for some such basic standards could be found in most major religious traditions, as well as people in each community with no particular religious tradition
- Schools should not be *prevented* from teaching these things simply because 5% or 10% of the parents in any school district would disagree with them.
- If we say that “we will not teach moral standards in public schools,” it is simply abdicating our responsibility to train the next generation in the values that our society thinks important, in effect, it is teaching young boys and girls *that our society does not endorse any moral standards*.
- We should work toward appointing justices to the Supreme Court who will rule according to “the original intent” of the authors of the Constitution and who will therefore overturn *Lemon v. Kurtzman* and other such decisions, so that schools can once again impart crucial moral values to the children in each generation.

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