



How Would Jesus Spank a Child?

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...with a flexible switch made from an olive branch, across the fleshy part of the buttocks or upper thigh.

While this answer is only a semi-serious one – I would never presume to speak for the Lord when it comes to precisely how He would mete out His perfect justice – there is nothing facetious about the central truth behind it. To suggest, as some have of late, that the Son of God would never use any form of corporal

punishment to discipline a child is to present, as the Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, “another Jesus.” (2 Cor. 11:3,4) Such seems more and more to characterize our present age.

I am specifically referencing here a bill that is being considered by the Massachusetts’s legislature that would make it illegal for parents to spank their children. One of the prime movers behind it is Dr. Teresa Whitehurst, a clinical psychologist, co-founder of Christ-Centered Christians for Nonviolent Parenting (CCNP) and the author of the book *How Would Jesus Raise a Child?* (Revell, 2007). In both her testimony before the state house and in her writings she claims that Jesus did away with the harsh laws and sanctions of the Old Testament (where, of course, verses like “he who spares the rod hates his son” (Pro. 13:24) are found) and has ushered in an new era of peace, love and non-violence where spanking a child is wrong, even evil.

For example, she writes:

“The ministry of Jesus Christ initiated a new beginning for mankind and a higher law for human interaction, children included. ‘As I have loved you, love one another.’ (John 13:34) In Luke 17:2, Jesus taught that it would be better to ‘tie a millstone around your neck, and be cast into the sea, than to offend one of these little ones.’ Inflicting physical pain or threatening to do so, is not only unnecessary, but is contrary to the way Jesus treated people. By sparing the rod and

guiding your child, you can help them mature into self-disciplined, spiritually centered men and women.”¹

She also argues her position by not-so-subtly using the tragic tendency of our age to set the Old Testament against the New, suggesting that the older revelation was a harsh and “un-Christ-like” one and now that Jesus has come we can, and should, ignore the laws found in the Pentateuch. She writes:

“The interpretation of certain Old Testament verses causes further confusion, namely verses that seem to advocate striking children, leaving parents feeling torn between the merciful teachings of Jesus and the harsh instruction that accompanied the Mosaic Law.”²

I don’t have time here to respond in depth to the many fallacies of her position, but here are just a few quick observations:

1. The Bible is clear that “all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable” for teaching.” (2 Tim. 3:16) To suggest that the Old Testament (the primary scriptures that Timothy would have had when Paul wrote this to him) is somehow “harsh” in sections and is to now be ignored is wrong to the point of being evil. Marcion was among the first and most-famous advocates of this view back in the days of the early church and was roundly condemned as an arch-heretic.

2. The context of the famous “millstone” passage Dr. Whitehurst quotes from in Luke 17 is further amplified by the parallel passages in Matthew 18 and Mark 9. Jesus was talking here about the temptation to sin and encourage sin in others. It is a grotesque misapplication to apply this passage to loving parental discipline. In fact, God’s word clearly states that the rod of discipline – which can include but is not limited to spanking when it is practiced in a loving, Biblical way – can help restrain the foolishness that is bound-up in the heart of a child. (Prov. 22:15) (There’s another rub: I’ll bet you a donut that the good doctor doesn’t believe that children are “born bad.” (Ps. 51:5)) By trying to deny parents a Biblically approved method of restraining sin and retraining a child to behave righteously, she may well be making herself a candidate for the very millstone she wants us to avoid.

3. There is no question that we should ever strive to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. (1 Pet. 2:21) But we also need to keep in mind that Jesus did not pop into existence in a manger in Bethlehem and then jump off the blueprint He left for us when He ascended into heaven. Our great triune God (and let us never pit One against

Another) is the same “yesterday, today and forever.” (Heb. 3:18) And how does He wield the rod as He shepherds His sheep on their journey to the true green pastures of the New Jerusalem? (Ps. 23)

Ask Korah and company as they met with Him in the nascent promised land. (Num. 16) Inquire of Israel after the umpteenth time that God sent a “polished sword” against them (Eze. 21), using any number of pagan armies to bring death, captivity and suffering in such magnitude that people’s heart melted and their ears quivered. (Eze. 21:8-15; 2 Kin. 21:12) Prefer the New Testament? What was the one thing the Bible records that Jesus made by hand? (John 2:15) A whip...which He then proceeded to use on the backs of people who had defiled His Father’s house. (Take that Dr. Whitehurst!) Check out Ananias and Sapphira as they worshipped in the “church of their choice.” (Acts 5:1-11) Or ask the citizens of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24:1-2 was fulfilled.

The fact is that our great God (of Whom Jesus is the eternal Son) has, does, and until the scroll of this present age/cosmos is rolled up, always will wield the rod of His chastisement in ways that result in untold human pain and suffering. Our “precious moments” theology may want to ignore or even deny this, perhaps blaming all the bad stuff on the devil (talk to Job about that), but there is no way to biblically deny it: our Great Shepherd’s first choice is the staff. But when sheep rebel, He loves them enough – and the Bride that they will become – to break out the rod.

And so should we.

¹ “The Nonviolent Christian Parent,” <http://www.nospank.net/ncp.pdf>. Technically Dr. Whitehurst co-wrote this with two other colleagues.

² Ibid. Here we have a re-hash of the second century heretic, Marcion’s, worldview: that the god of the Old Testament was not the true God but rather that the true and higher God had been revealed only with Jesus Christ.