

# Rodless Training?

**Our records show that you have been using a rod on your children.**

**It's my duty to inform you that you are in a violation of contemporary ignorance.**

I just hung up the phone after talking with a pastor concerning a new member in his church. This single mother had been hopelessly bound in drugs and immorality, living a life of sin and degradation. The state had removed the children from her home. For two years they were passed around from institution to temporary residence, to institution, and back again. This mother, forsaken by all but the predators who sought to consume the scared flesh that remained, was lost—alone, wasted, hopeless. “But God...(Eph. 2:4).” Then someone told her about the forgiveness that was purchased by the blood of Jesus. In a moment's time, without the aid of religious ritual or practiced instruction, she was translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear son (Col. 1:13). It is called the New Birth and is the only door to heaven (John 3). The State quickly recognized that she was not the same person whose lifestyle had necessitated removal of her children. The children were sent home to their new mother. But when she sought to begin a new life with her children she found they were as inmates released from captivity, monsters of contention and rebellion. Children that start life in a government institution often end up in one.

The Pastor related the dilemma. He had given her our book, but when she attempted to implement the things she learned, she realized that she was setting herself up to lose the children back to the state. For when she spanked them they would scream, “Please don't whip me.” She is still on probation and must receive visits from social workers. If a child were to reveal that he was being spanked, the children would be immediately removed and placed back in a soulless institution. There they would not be bruised on the outside, but they would continue to rot from the inside.

So the pastor's question was, “Is there a way to train children if you are prevented from Biblical application of the rod?” The Bible says, “*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).*”

*“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell (Proverbs 23:13-14).*”

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

This question has been asked in more than one way. It is a common situation. One parent absolutely stands against use of the rod, and so it could not be employed effectively. Can the other parent still train the children? If you are a foster parent you are forbidden from using the rod. Perhaps you are host to your grandchildren and not allowed to spank them. Maybe you are often in charge of the neighbor's kids. Likewise, you are limited if you are a worker in a daycare or if you are a schoolteacher.

The question is, “if I am in a position where I cannot use the rod, am I already doomed to failure, or is there still hope? Can children be trained without use of the rod?” Absolutely. But they cannot be absolutely trained. Proper application of the rod is indispensable to communicating the divine principle of retributive justice, but any child, military man, employee, the neighbor's kid, your dog, cat, or the birds in your yard can be trained through manipulating their relationship to their environment. Any creature that is self-motivated and has likes and dislikes can be trained if you are in a position to reward or deny any pleasure or need. Where humans are concerned you have the added tools of reason, moral persuasion, social persuasion, and conscience. Where it concerns those that are close to you, that is, they depend upon your fellowship for their mental satisfaction, you have the additional tools of persuasion and example.

If you are seeking to avoid the rod because you are an emotional coward or you are a product of contemporary philosophy, then not obeying God in this matter should not be considered an option. The Word of God teaches us the best method of child training, and proper use of the rod is a part of that program. Furthermore, if you abstain from use of the rod because you believe there is a better way, then you have

revealed a fundamental flaw in your thinking that will leave a giant hole in any method you adopt. In other words, a person who understands the value and principle of the rod, but is somehow prevented from using it, will carry those valuable principles over into rodless training and so reap some of the benefits. Whereas the person that does not believe in use of the rod is so flawed in his understanding of human nature and life in general that no technique will be entirely effective for him.

So if circumstances beyond your control prevent you from doing as God commands, you are not without tools. There are still plenty of options available to you. You can do a relatively good job of training if you are consistent and recognize the nature of your limitations. You will have to lean more heavily on alternatives that tend toward accomplishing the same end.

Here is a single mother with chaotic children whom she must train without the assistance of the ultimate force—pain. She tells them to do something, and they immediately seek to do the opposite. She invites them to the table, and they tarry or declare that they are not hungry. Thirty minutes later they are demanding something sweet. When she refuses, they begin to cry and beg. When she tells them to stop, they scream. Then they start fighting between themselves. When she tries to interfere, they turn on her in violence. Their favorite word is “No” spoken with defiance. They will say “No” even when they would actually like to comply, just to express their autonomy.

Let’s take it further so as to be relevant to a larger audience. If she were to spank them, they would react by screaming and fighting her. They would pull away, try to grab the switch, scream “No,” and go completely hysterical. She could not spank them until they yielded, unless she spanked them into physical exhaustion, which of course would be counterproductive. In short, in her attempt to build a relationship with them, at this early stage, spanking would not likely be profitable anyway. You may be thinking, “My children have always been in a secure environment and they act just like that.”

The foremost need in child training, the ground on which all positive guidance occurs, is the relationship of child to parent. Her children are doubtlessly in an adversarial frame of mind. It is not just that they seek to put forward their own agenda, but that they actually seek to sabotage hers. It is vain to make her will clear, because they have already decided to resist all control. A rebel is not so concerned with doing his own thing as he is in not doing the will of another. He dedicates himself to publicly demonstrating that he is not in subjection to any authority. It is his agenda to rebel, to prove his independence and lack of respect.

Now we who are not emotionally involved are inclined to see the situation from the child’s point of view. The poor children have been emotionally deprived and abused. It is not their fault that they were jerked up and passed around like a piece of rental equipment. They are hostile because they have never known love and security. They have never had anyone they could trust to always be there. They are products of the adults surrounding them.

However, if we now handle them under our own shadow of guilt and sympathy they will be further ruined. If our understanding of their plight causes us to sympathize, we will only authenticate their hostilities. You must remember, children raised under the best of circumstances, in a home of love and security, are nonetheless inclined to selfish domination and independent action against the rule of law. If a child is “left to himself” he does not grow up beautiful, he grows up to be a little devil and will “bring his mother to shame (Prov. 29:15).” Her children are what they are because of neglect, but they are only being themselves. It is not a matter of just bad habits, it is now a case of bad character—yes, even at two years old.

But we are not going to blame the children, we are going to train them—however difficult, without the use of the rod. We may not achieve as high results, but if we are wise and consistent, others will brag on “what good kids” we have.

In our first book on child training, we talked about “tying strings.” The first step in all child training, the foundation stone that must be continually renewed, is fellowship between parent and child. In 99% of all homes, children are in an adversarial state of mind most of the time. The first step, the step without which all other attempts are in vain, is to establish mutual ties of respect and honor. Unless the children can trust their parents with the handling of their souls they will not make themselves vulnerable. It is the same with you, is it not? Children must be brought to the place where they want to please their parents. Until children value

the approval of their parents more than the lure of any indulgence there is not foundation for training. The parents will be constantly leaving their children behind.

Fear of punishment is not sufficient to make children compliant; it will certainly not remove the adversarial mentality. When parents get to the place where they are relying on threats alone, they have totally lost fellowship and are functioning as the IRS. Threats might get outward compliance but never the heart—quite the opposite.

So there is nothing that prevents this mother from taking the first step in child training—establish a relationship of trust and respect. How is this done? Enjoy the children and cause them to enjoy you. Don't ask anything of them that is not absolutely necessary to the stability of the home, give them something they want—not selfish demands, just ignore those. Give them your time, your attention, your laugh, your approval, your touch, hugs, reading, silly funnies, rolling on the carpet or yard, pushing in the swing, or pulling in the wagon. But most of all, let them bask in your smile until they need it like they need the next breath. Cause them to feed on your fellowship, to relax until they are sure you care only for their good, that you live to enjoy their company and would not be happy without them. Do this and you will have achieved what most Christian homes are missing.

When you first begin to mend a broken relationship, or build one that never existed, you will have to do what friends do—ignore problem areas, absorb ugliness, for “they know not what they do.” If they begin to trust you, and you strike at them, physically or verbally, they will withdraw, and it will take longer to draw them into the open again. You can stand firm on issues; just make sure that you are always relaxed and calm in your responses. If you have to reject an action, never communicate rejection of them as a person. The worse thing you can do in this attempt to rebuild the relationship is to develop critical feelings toward them and to become short and abusive in your language or attitude. They will shut you out like shutting the barn door on a winter storm. You can wipe out everything by having a condemning attitude.

Your reach as a disciplinarian cannot exceed the limits of your fellowship with the child. Rebuke must be delivered in an atmosphere of trust and respect. If you have lost the child's heart, then the child will have lost the heart to please you. If the child is not in agreement to pull with you, it is vain to try to harness him to your rules. The occasional rebuke must be the exception to a constant sharing of positive experiences. When rebuke and chastisement are strung along on a thread of long silences, punctuated by beads of unpleasanties, it will only strangle the relationship, not beautify the child's soul.

The other day my daughters took in a younger girl that was a product of the Federal School, a working mother, and an insensitive father—in that order. She was at that age just before puberty when it is easy to be misunderstood and confused. The child had been swept along in the sexless society of the federal system. She was not feminine or lovely in demeanor. My girls spent the day treating her as another “lady.” Toward the end of the day when it was near time for her father to pick her up, they got her dressed in a long flowing dress. You could tell that at first it was an embarrassment to her to appear so vulnerable, so feminine, but she soon began to enjoy it. She started carrying herself differently. The affected gawkiness disappeared. She smiled with a blush and gracefully swept around the room. Soon her father came into the room. You could tell that she was pleased with herself and was expecting his approval. My daughters presented her to him as if she were a newly dressed bride, exclaiming how nice she looked in a dress. He blurted, “Yea, I been telling her she would look better in dresses. She just wears those old pants. The kids these days...” Her countenance fell and her shoulders hardened into the reserved condition she had displayed hours earlier. It was obvious to her that rather than her father being pleased with her, he was pleased with himself that she had justified what he “had been saying all along.” On such small threads do our children hang. She had attempted to take a new course, one that could have made a great difference in her life, but his preoccupation with himself had shut the door in her face. He was not mean or cruel or angry—just insensitive, absorbed with his own performance, perhaps carrying latent irritation at having been ignored so long. He had a chance to join hearts with her, but he missed it.

Can you see that in such simple, day to day matters hangs all of child training. Until we tie strings of fellowship all else is vain, even harmful. If you would train your children and you are prevented from using the

rod, you still have at your disposal a tool that most of my readers have never effectively employed—continuous fellowship with their child. If you can create an atmosphere of trust and good will, you will greatly reduce the need to spank the small child, and nearly eliminate the need in children 8 or older.

After you have established fellowship with your children, next step in training is to gain their respect as a person of principle. Your children must know that you answer to, and act as representative of, a rule of law that is higher than your own personal preference. You have boundaries that you adhere to and expect them to do likewise. By reverencing boundaries in your own life you communicate that there is a Lawgiver higher than your own feelings and impulses. If the child is made to feel that he or she must obey you only because you are bigger or tougher, or because you have control of the resources, then your influence will extend only until they are big enough to rebel without severe consequences. But if the child treasures your fellowship and wants to please you, and on top of that the child wants to please the God that you please, then you have a solid foundation for training. The only battle left is the child's flesh.

Many parents have found, all too late, that religious instruction given in the context of permissiveness works to produce atheists and infidels rather than Christians. I personally know many families that took their children to church and talked spirituality while indulging the flesh in food and pleasure and indulging the soul in irritability and pettiness, with the result that their children grew up to resemble sons and daughters of Baal rather than children of a holy God. Children dragged through that kind of confusion are far harder to reach with the truth of Christ than are the abused and abusing sons and daughters of prostitutes and dope peddlers. I know whereof I speak. Besides dealing with hundreds of such cases, some of my own relatives serve as the best examples.

So, on a foundation of fellowship and respect for God the lawgiver, you are ready to deal with that indomitable enemy of all the sons of Adam—the flesh. Even when your child wants to please you and wants to please God, he/she is going to feel the constant pull of the desires of the flesh. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other so that [your child] cannot do the things that he would.” Here is where the mechanics of training are inaugurated. Your young child is composed of two opposing elements—elements that were in harmony before the fall of Adam—the flesh and the spirit. The spirit is that inner man, the soulish self. The flesh is that nonmaterial biological conglomerate of tissue, bone, and blood that is endowed with passion and drives.

The spirit can receive instruction and make decision based on values, whereas the flesh is indifferent to good and evil. Like any animal or plant, the flesh seeks survival and propagation. It battles within seeking to maintain a stability that promotes health, and it strives without seeking zones of comfort and pleasure. The body has no built in governor that predetermines moderation or sets limits. It would eat what tastes good, and it would eat it now. It would rest rather than work and take rather than give. The body cares not how it affects others or what might be the long-range consequences. The body neither knows nor cares that present actions will result in cavities, obesity, colon cancer, heart disease, or venereal disease; it just pursues the line of immediate pleasure. Where there is not an active, mature, trained, and disciplined mind exercising control, the body is a self-destructive fungus.

The bottom line you must recognize is that the infant is born with all of the passions of body but with no capacity for self-restraint. Your three-year-old has active bodily drives but no understanding or will to moderation and self-restraint. The child will be in his early to middle teens before he can function so as to be self-motivated to the point of subjecting the body to the spirit. You can have a child with a submissive heart, but he cannot exercise his mind to self-restraint.

Herein is the parental responsibility: While your child is in the process of maturing, before he can govern himself, it is your responsibility to function as his spirit, as his governor. You will act as his conscience, his sensor, advisor, instructor, chastiser, rebuker. You will say no to his flesh when he cannot. You will be ever alert, vigilant, on guard to detect any uprising of flesh. You will strengthen his resolve to stand by the rule of law and deny the flesh. You will spot laziness and lead him in an attack against it. You will spot selfishness and see that it is not gratified. In short, you will never allow it to be a pleasing experience to indulge the flesh. He will be caused to find rest and peace in one path only—the path of holiness and self-discipline. Your job is to

make all evil counterproductive and unrewarding and to make all righteousness and discipline to be delightful and joyous.

At this point the parent would have the rod as an enforcer against the monster of flesh. When the flesh runs away with the spirit and captivates the will, when the child turns on you like an angry dog and refuses to give ground, the rod can restore his respect for your authority. It is your final tool against the power of the body to commit mutiny and take the will captive.

But our subject is: "What can you do if you are denied that ultimate power to subdue the flesh?" You can fully apply all of the above measures so that you do not come to that place where the rod is necessary. Yet, we must face the obvious truth that no parent is going to create a net of training so tight that the kids don't occasionally slip through. There will be times when a spanking is appropriate. But you are prevented! Then use your power as the caretaker and dispenser of all privileges and responsibilities to make his actions totally counterproductive. If you can't spank the flesh, starve it with an embargo. Stand your ground and do not let the little fellow find satisfaction in his pursuits. Stay on duty, demanding obedience until he surrenders his will to your persistence. If there is a way to deny him access to some means of indulgence that relates to the offense, then by all means as governor of the island on which he lives deny him normal privileges until he complies.

The one—most important— principle is to never allow his rebellion to be successful. Always win the contest. You can do this because of your position as banker, cook, house cleaner, play time supervisor, work detail manager, etc. Stand your ground. If you develop a reputation as winner of conflicts, you will be home free. If you develop a reputation as a vacillating wimp that whines and complains about how you are treated, they will run over you like a discarded aluminum can. The key is to win. Always win. Stand by your demands. Be just. Be reasonable. Be consistent. Be tough. Be there all the time ever in his face, loving, laughing smiling, and demanding compliance as foreman of the home.

Without use of the rod, you will be handicapped but not crippled. You won't do as good of job as you could have done, but with determination and vigilance you can do a better job than 999 of the other Christian parents who have full freedom to use the rod.