

# *Your Children: Fun or Frenzy*

**A Family Discipleship Seminar**

# Dedication

*This volume is dedicated to my loving wife, Eleanor. Without her support, encouragement and belief, it would not be possible. It has been said that a minister's wife will either make or break him. I dedicate this to my wife, a true gift from God, which surpasses all wealth and beauty. It is she who has made my ministry possible in every way.*

## Acknowledgements

With sincere thanks to Dr. Ray Tallman, Educator, Dean and Missionary Statesman who encouraged me in this project during my Masters at Moody Bible Institute and then took me under his wing to give my project guidance and credibility that I might bring it to others. If it were not for his early confidence and his willingness to open ministry doors for me overseas, this ministry would not be possible. I would also like to recognize the faculty and staff of Moody Graduate school for showing the support and belief in me to pursue this topic. Special thanks to Dr. Wayne Hopkins, Dean of the graduate school, for his encouragement, flexibility and innovative spirit, without which this project would not have been possible. Thanks to Dr. Stanley Mukolwe of Nairobi, Kenya, for his faith and commitment in revisions and promotion on the mission field. His example and faith are a true blessing from God. Thanks to Charles and Kay Casebolt, Bob Lewis and Dr. Jack Lunsford, whose example and commitment to the Biblical principles of childraising gave me hope and inspiration during the formative years of this work. Thanks to Patsy Carver Starks, Jennifer Parks Mannar and Kathy Bridges, who worked faithfully as secretaries and editors in the initial drafts and through the Masters process contributing both their secretarial expertise and their time to this work. To Mike Daily, Russell Dawson, Richard Hampton and John and Carmen Hunter, who served sacrificially on the founding Board of Grace Community Inc., the vehicle which made possible the expansion of this ministry. It was under their guidance that this ministry took on its global aspects. I will always be indebted to their faith and vision. To John Crawford, my brother Rob Mahon, John Repass, Dr. Charles McWilliams and Rocky Hails, who encouraged me and opened their ministries to me, that I might fully develop and expand the scope of this ministry. To Dr. Charles McWilliams for his creativity in naming the seminar and Rocky Hails for graphic design of the logo. Again, to John and Helen Crawford for their advice, as mature staff members, to me on balance and seasons of life when it comes to family and the ministry. To Rob Stephens, associate staff with the Navigators, who has not only mastered and applied the material, but in using it in his ministry has helped me to think through revisions and keep it current. To Jon Bucher, of Focus on the Family without whose constant prodding and encouraging to develop this manuscript, I would not have been able to see it through to completion. I am grateful to his faith and belief in me and in this ministry.

## Illustrations

All illustrations are taken from my 25 years in the ministry. Names and situations have been altered to assure anonymity, but quotes and examples have been preserved.

## About the author

Rev. Mahon and Mrs. Mahon have been married 26 years and have four children, one in high school, two in college, and one married. All are ministering actively in areas of Christian leadership and all are actively involved in sharing their faith. Rev. Mahon graduated from the University of Texas with a B.S. in Secondary Education. After teaching for three years in Austin, he accepted the call of God from the Navigators where he has served for over 25 years. As such he has ministered in the college, community and missions arm of the Navigators. In addition Rev. Mahon has earned his Masters for ministry from Moody Graduate School in Chicago, Illinois. He has served as interim pastor, Family Discipleship Minister and pastor as well. Rev. Mahon draws on this diverse ministry to and with the family in bringing you this work.

# Before You Begin

*Before you begin, please note the suggested approach to the manual:*

## **Week One:**

- Pre-bible study
- Scripture memory verse
- Small-group discussion

## **Week Two:**

- Daily meditations
- Scripture memory verse
- Application projects
- Small-group discussion

*This workbook has been developed so that it can be approached a number of ways.*

### **As a small group discipleship tool**

In following this approach, only the small-group leader need purchase the leader's manual. Each member of the group will have a member's manual containing the pre-Bible study, a section for notes and the post-Bible study projects. Following this format, the leader will do the pre-Bible study, and then read the chapter before deciding on how best to lead the discussion. It is suggested that you spend two weeks on each chapter. First, do the study and come together to discuss the Biblical principles involved. Then, the following week, do the projects and come together to discuss applications and to learn from one another. Daily meditations for quiet times alone with God are provided in the project section to help the Bible study participants keep focused on the Word of God as they seek to apply the principles to their family and personal life. It is very important that the leader fully cover the material from the leader's guide. It is suggested that he refer to the projects that the members will be doing to make sure that they receive from him the necessary information to complete the projects. Many leaders find that they would just as soon have their Bible-study members read the chapter as well. This will be a personal decision of the group based on both time and the added cost of the leader's manual vs. the member's manual. Couples are strongly encouraged to work through the manual together instead of separately.

### **As a couple-to-couple discipleship tool**

In following this approach, both the leader and his discipleship partner would purchase the leader's manual. As in the above procedure, they again will spend two weeks on each chapter. Since the manual is designed to be done by couples together, the classic one-to-one approach is not suggested except in the case of the single parent. A couple-to-couple approach would be preferable.

### **As a discipleship tool for individual couples**

Many couples find that they would like to purchase a leader's manual and then go through chapter by chapter together. This allows the couple to develop the habit of studying and applying God's Word together. This, of course, would take place if they were in a small group. This is not always possible, and many couples have found it very satisfying to systematically work through the leader's manual together.

## Introduction:

### Preparing Our Children To Leave

Many couples who attend our seminar invariably ask two questions. The first is relatively simple. “How did this seminar come about?” The second, though, is a little bit more complicated. It usually goes something like this, “How can we insure that our children will turn out OK?” In answer to this first question, I am quick to point out that Eleanor and I both were raised in non-Christian, dysfunctional homes. We came into marriage without a clue as to how to be good, loving, Christian parents. However, God used this for good. Realizing our deficiencies, we were determined to learn everything we could about childraising.

Our approach was two-fold. First, we read everything we could get our hands on. Second, any time we came across parents, whose children impressed us, we would interview them and record their answers in a notebook. The interview process went something like this, “We are so impressed with the behavior of your children, tell us your secret.” Then they would respond, “Just love them in. You’ve just got to love the little darlings in to the kingdom.” Well, we knew parents whose little darlings were in the kingdom, were loved by their parents, and were little hellions. They were the dread of every Sunday school teacher in the Church. So we persisted, “Yes, but tell us something practical,” and they would say, “Pray, just pray like crazy.” Well, we knew many Christian parents who prayed. In fact, the worse their children were, the more they seemed to pray. We wanted something more.

*“If your child screams bloody murder whenever you leave them with a baby sitter or Sunday school class, what do you do?”*

We found that if we asked a specific question like, “If your child screams bloody murder whenever you leave them with a baby sitter or Sunday school class, what do you do?” There would be a pause, a consultation and then, “Oh, that, well that is easy, just...” And then the race was on, we tried to write as fast as they talked. Once we got through to specifics, we found a wealth of parenting information.

Eleanor and I soon realized that many parents from the generation just ahead of us could not really put their fingers on why they were such successful parents. This was because they had been raised in Christian homes and were doing what came naturally. From childhood they had been taught both the Scriptures as they related to Christian principles of child raising, as well as experiencing the methods first-hand. They never really thought about it. That’s just the way you do things. Doesn’t everyone know this?

We did not have that luxury. We had to dig for it. As we mined these nuggets, we kept them in a notebook and over the years organized and refined both their methods and ours. Realizing there were many young parents in our shoes, we began accepting opportunities to share our newfound knowledge and skills in workshops and seminars. Over the years, this grew to the present conference format of our Family Discipleship Seminar with this, the accompanying workbook.

*Bill looked me straight in the face. He was dead serious. “John, I have been thinking about home-schooling my children. When they leave high school, they will enter a pagan world. Even the best Christian colleges are filled with temptations. With the explosion of the Internet, it is now possible to home-school my children right through college and this is what I plan to do. I mean, in Biblical times, a child was a child well into his thirties.”*

My answer to this second question, “How can I assure that my children will turn out OK?” is that you cannot. You will discover as you read this book (perhaps manual is a

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better term) that it is first and foremost a volume on “Parenting” as opposed to “Childrening.” By that, I mean that it is addressed to parents. It assures not that your children will “turn out all right,” but that you, as parents, “turn out all right.” It is my conviction that true parenting is preparing children to successfully leave the home with the wisdom and life skills necessary to live a fruitful and fulfilled life apart from their parents. It is also my conviction that the Bible does not guarantee a set of methods which when employed will guarantee that children “turn out all right.” Rather, it addresses the parents in the hope of their “turning out all right.” It is my experience and seems to be the presupposition of the Bible that when the parent turns out all right, the odds of the children following suit are greatly increased.

The goal of the Family Discipleship Seminar and Manual is that you as parents would conform to the Word of God and in so doing, insure your children the opportunity of growing up and leaving home as fruitful and fulfilled disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God gives us certain injunctions or guidelines to follow in our role as parents. It is our responsibility to master these principles and incorporate them into our family life. As we do this we become disciples—followers of Christ, of God and of His pattern for our family. A follower of Christ is a disciple, thus the title of this workshop: Family Discipleship. As such, we are authority

driven, not results driven. By authority driven, I mean that we base our decisions not on visible results but on the authority of the Word of God. The latter is a precarious road indeed, while the former is the road of Family Discipleship. What this means is: if God’s Word tells us to behave a certain way—even if we do not experience this behavior as positive or profitable—that we will still conform our behavior to God’s will, using His Word as our standard, irrespective of our own personal experience or the perceived experiences of others. Contrastingly, if God’s Word tells us to refrain from certain behaviors, then, even if we experience this behavior as pleasant, as profitable, or perceive it as such in others, we will still refrain from this behavior, based on the authority of God’s Word.

Let me explain: my brother, my sister and me are all engaged in full-time Christian service. So you might ask yourself, “What methods were employed in raising three fine Christian workers?” Since both our parents were non-Christian, alcoholics in a totally dysfunctional home, the reply would be, “Get drunk nightly, beat and abuse your children, neglect them in most areas, give them total freedom and in no case restrict their hedonistic tendencies. The result

will be that they will grow up to be pastors, missionaries and full-time Christian workers.” I think not, but this is exactly what happened in our case.

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*Tom took his son out for a little talk. “You are a junior in high school now, Son, and by definition, at age 17, an adult. I want you to know something: When you graduate, you are out of this house. You are in the army, you are in college, you are in an apartment, but you are out of this house. You are an adult and on your own. You graduate in May, I’ll give you ‘til August to make your arrangements. But as of September first, you are out. You are always welcome to visit, but don’t ever plan to live here again.”*

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*“I know you are teaching that divorce is wrong but that is not my experience. Based on my experience I would have to say that there are some cases where divorce is the best thing a man can do. I was unhappy in my marriage, I met my current wife at church. We immediately hit it off. We felt God was bringing us together, giving me a second chance. I divorced my former wife and married this godly woman. I have never been happier. What you are saying did not work and what we did, did indeed work. This is God’s will for us and who can argue with the results of our decision?”*

Defensive man in Sunday school class explaining that sometimes what seems to others a wrong decision, can be right for the one making it

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Similarly, I have a former high school buddy who is a drug addict and is wasting away somewhere in the merchant marines in the South Pacific. If you ask, “How do you raise such a child?” his parents would have to respond, “Be loving parents—father, a deacon in the church; mother—a Sunday School teacher and active in the Church youth council. Be active in your child’s life: disciplining the child, nurturing him and raising him in the instruction of the Word of God.” This is exactly what happened to my high school friend. He had it all and gave it all away. In both cases, the child ultimately had to decide whom he would serve. In both cases, the parents are separate from the child’s ultimate decision. My parents will not be rewarded for their children’s decision, nor will my friends be judged. Each of us made our decision as adults. Both sets of parents will be held accountable for how they responded to God’s Word and the principles set forth in His Word in terms of their role as parents. As for my siblings and me, we had to learn everything from scratch. My friend, should he turn to God, will have at his fingertips the wealth of training which his parents laid up for him in his life.

As an illustration, I was visiting in the home of a minister and, during the meal, one of his children poured salt into my coffee and then squealed with laughter. This action reflects upon the pastor and his wife. Before leaving, I shared my disappointment with both the child’s action and their reaction, which was to view it as precocious and impish behavior. They were amused. By contrast, I know a minister who is older than me and was arrested for drunken disorderliness. This action does not reflect upon his father. I would not go to the phone, call his father and rebuke him. This action rests entirely at the feet of the offending pastor.

Another example I have seen is that of non-resident Christian parents. In some cases, parents, in pursuit of their Christian ministry and ideals, neglect their children as much as any secular, two-career family. The children, while wild and unruly as children, may “turn out all right” in the end. Again, this does not justify the decision of the parent nor validate the child-raising styles used. It testifies to the Grace of God. The parent is responsible for what God says in the area of Family Discipleship, irrespective of career, gifts and callings that the parent may have, or of the ultimate lifestyle of the child. For instance, if a neighbor receives Christ, you cannot claim credit unless you have been a positive witness. You cannot say, “Gee, I never did model Christ or get around to witnessing, but isn’t it wonderful how God honored my ministry and they came to Christ anyway! I guess that you don’t have to witness to witness after all.” In the same way, you cannot say, “Gee, I never did spend a lot of time with my kids or really model what it means to be a father at home and involved in their lives, but isn’t it wonderful how God honored my ministry and they came to Christ anyway! I guess you don’t have to parent to parent after all.”

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*“I tried spanking and it just did not work. My children would go crazy, become simply frantic! It was a terrible experience. We now use time outs. What you are saying about the rod did not work for us, what we are doing does work. This is God’s will for our family and no one can argue with the results.”*

Defensive Christian woman to me during seminar break

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Ultimately, the child becomes an adult and is accountable for his decisions apart from the parent. In American society, this begins to take place at age 13 and culminates at age 18. By age 11, the child is no longer viewed as a child by society as a whole but rather as a “young person,” and by age 13, the term “teenager” or “young adult” begins to be used. By age 18, you cannot report your child as a runaway. He is simply an adult who has chosen to leave. Given the realities of this transitional period, at age 15 it is too late to say, “Oh gee, three years and my child is an adult, I guess I better begin preparing him to

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leave.” No. When the child is born, you should take a deep breath and say, “Eighteen years max, and after that he is out in the world.”

If I see an unruly, disobedient two-year-old, I think, shame on that parent. If I see an unruly, disobedient 15-year-old, I think, shame on that young man. If you, as a parent, got up right now and went out and held up a liquor store, I would not pick up the phone and rebuke your parents. The responsibility would rest with you. We, as parents, have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that the time when this will be true of our children is fast approaching, and we must be hard at work to prepare our children for that day.

That means we must prepare our children to leave. It is the goal of this volume to equip you, as a parent, to be an effective Family Discipler. Jesus Christ said to His disciples in Luke 6:40 *"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."* Now what did this look like for Jesus? Well, in Mark 3:14, the Word of God tells us, *"And He appointed twelve that they might be with Him and that they might send Him out to preach."* The goal of Christ was to train the twelve as disciples, and then send them out as fruitful, responsible, independent Apostles. In Acts 4:13, the fruit of this ministry is seen in the reaction to the Pharisees to their evangelistic ministry, *"Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus."* As Family Disciplers, our goal, from the birth of our child onward, must be to prepare him to leave. A child has 18 years with us, and then another 50 to 60 years away from us. Our emphasis must be on these 50 or 60 years. Our success is the same as Jesus, when our children are both fruitful and fulfilled in their lives, and walk with God apart from their parents.

As of this writing my daughter Becca is serving with her husband on the mission field. While in college she was been active all four years in Campus Crusade for Christ. Each summer she has dedicated to a Summer Training Program in the U.S. or on the mission field with that fine organization. Before this, as a graduating senior, she served as a summer intern for a Baptist Church and her junior summer in high school was spent at Eagle Lake Camp, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with the Navigators on their service crew. Her sophomore summer was spent at the same camp, only half the summer was spent away from home. We carefully prepared Becca to live successfully apart from us.

People ask me, “Do you miss Becca now that she is gone and so active in this Christian organization?” and I answer, “Yes, most definitely.” Then they ask, “Was it hard to let go?” To be truthful, I would have to say it is hard in the aspect of adjusting to any change. We love Becca dearly and her vibrant personality and sensitivity make her a real joy to have around, but Eleanor and I worked hard for the day when Becca would leave. We rejoice to see the skills and convictions we worked and prayed for at work in her life. We knew she would leave, and we wanted her to leave and take her place in the Body of Christ and the Will of God, and so, we rejoice in this. Our other three children have and are having similar experiences. Like their sister, we have been allowing them the life experiences which will successfully prepare them to leave home. We are not fighting this process. It is one we have been working towards. I hope all my children make the right choices and submit to Christ as Lord, leading fruitful and fulfilled lives apart from us as parents. But I know that this is *their* responsibility and not mine. *My* responsibility is to prepare them to leave by giving them the wisdom and life skills necessary to lead a fruitful and fulfilled life apart from us as parents.

This then is what I seek to set forth: A Family Discipleship Workbook and Seminar, a tool which will equip parents in the raising of their children. It is meant to empower you and to return you to your rightful position as the head of the home. No longer will you

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have to rely solely upon the so-called experts. God chose you to parent your child and gave you His Holy Word to equip you for this responsibility. The Seminar and Workbook begins with this principle, and moves to method. It is based on the premise of the authority, inerrancy and infallibility of God's Word and on the premise of the responsibility of parents to be Family Disciplers. It presupposes parents who want their children to grow up, leave home, and lead spiritually fruitful and fulfilled lives on their own, independent of their parents. It is my prayer that you will find it a blessing.

Rev. John S. Mahon

# *Your Children: Fun or Frenzy*

## **A FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP SEMINAR**

*A Ministry of Grace Community Inc.*

“Winning the World Through Heads of Households”

“Discipling The World Through Families”

Grace Community, Inc. (GCI) is a non-denominational, non-profit Christian ministry dedicated to the promotion of the great commission throughout the world by evangelism, discipling and equipping heads of households to be the spiritual leaders of their families, who will then reach others as well. GCI is dedicated to the doctrine of the multiplication of laborers in the Body of Christ. It is our conviction that the most effective means of reaching and discipling a community is through the heads of households. The most effective way of fulfilling the Great Commission in the community setting is for the head of the home to disciple the family and, then, reach others who as head of their homes will do the same. In the context of the community, children disciplined in the home become lifelong laborers and these children are the future of the church.

*Your Children: Fun of Frenzy*— A Family Discipleship Seminar is one of a battery of seminars developed to equip the heads of households within the church to evangelize and disciple, first, their family and then, through the multiplication of this ministry through their community, the world. Our focus is the church and we do not establish ministries in conflict with or alongside the church but rather offer ourselves to the church as an equipping ministry for heads of households. We are, in principle, a mission movement seeking to take these principles of the family to those countries where the principles of discipleship and the Christian family have gone unmoved by the modern evangelical movement. If you would like to have a part in this ministry through prayer or financial support, or if you are interested in hosting a seminar in your church, ministry or home group, you may contact us at:

Grace Community Inc. 20918 Harvest Hill Lane, Houston, TX 77073

*Your Children: Fun or Frenzy*  
**A Family Discipleship Seminar**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE AUTHORITY AND SUPREMACY OF GOD'S WORD

- Bible Study: pp. 2– 12
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*Scripture Memory Passage: 2 Ti 3:16*

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”*

*“Because of the combination of human and supernatural qualities which enter into the Bible, a similarity may be observed between the Bible as the written Word and the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Word. They are both supernatural in origin, presenting an inscrutable and perfect blending of that which is divine and that which is human. They both exercise a transforming power over those who believe, and are alike allowed of God to be set at naught and rejected by those who do not believe. The untainted, undiminished divine perfections are embodied in each. The revelations which they disclose are at once as simple as the mental capacity of a child, and as complex as the infinite treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, as enduring as the God whom they reveal.”*

-Lewis Sperry Chafer; Major Bible Themes; p.15; Zondervan Press

## Chapter One

### The Authority of God's Word—Bible Study

#### THE WORD OF GOD

***The phrase "God said" occurs over 570 times in the Bible; "says the Lord," over 490 times; "Word of the Lord," over 253 times, "the Lord spoke," over 130 times, while the phrase "Word of God" appears over 45 times. These are just a few of the phrases that give the authority of God to His Holy Word. How do the following passages emphasize the fact that the Bible is indeed the Word of God?***

*First, read the Passage. Then below it, answer the question, "How does this passage emphasize the fact that the Bible is indeed the Word of God?"*

**1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**

**1 Thes 4:8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.**

**Ps 119:4 Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, That we should keep them diligently.**

**Ps 119:13–16 With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.**

**Is 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.**

## INSPIRED BY GOD

**The term inspired means literally “God breathed.” It is as if we can feel the very breath of God as He speaks to us from His Word. How does each of the following passages support the claim that the Word of God is indeed inspired by God?**

*First, read the passage. Then, below it, answer the question, “How do each of the following passages support the claim that the Word of God is indeed inspired by God?”*

**2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;**

**1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**

**1 Thes 4:2,8 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.**

**1 Jn 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

## THE PROCESS OF INSPIRATION

***According to the following passages, how did the inspiration process take place?***

2 Pet 1:20, 21 **But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

2 Sam 23:2 The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.

1 Chron 28:19 **All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern.**

## THE OLD TESTAMENT IS THE WORD OF GOD

***Many people feel that the Old Testament is a collection of stories and traditions, passed down over the ages and then collected into a single volume. That it is not "inspired" in the true sense of the word. How do these passages speak to the inspiration of the Old Testament?***

Exo 31:18 **And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.**

Exo 32:16 **And the tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets.**

Exo 34:1 **Now the Lord said to Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered".**

1 Kings 2:3 **And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn.**

Lk 24:27 **And** beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, **He explained to them the things concerning Himself** in all the Scriptures.

Acts 7:53 **You who received the law** as ordained by angels, **and yet did not keep it.**

Rom 15:4 **For whatever was** written in earlier times was written for our instruction, **that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

Gal 3:19 **Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions,** having been ordained through angels **by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.**

Heb 9:8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, **that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing.**

2 Pet 3:15,16 **And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul,** according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, **as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also** the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

## PAUL'S LETTERS INSPIRED BY GOD

*Still others accept the words of Christ as authoritative, but feel that Paul corrupted the true teachings of Christ and, in his zeal, added to them his own prejudices and fanaticisms. They also hold that Paul was a zealot, a woman hater, a legalist and that his teachings should not be held in the same light as the words of Christ. How do the following passages speak to the inspiration of the letters of Paul in the New Testament?*

Acts 22:14 And he said, "The God of our fathers has appointed you **to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth.**"

I Cor 14: 37, 38 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that **the things, which I write to you, are the Lord's commandment.** But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

I Cor 15:3, 4 For I delivered to you as of first importance **what I also received, that Christ died** for our sins **according to the Scriptures,** and that He was buried, **and that He was raised** on the third day **according to the Scriptures.**

Gal 1:12 **For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**

Gal 1:15–17 **But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me,** that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

Gal 2:2 And it was **because of a revelation that I went up;** and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Eph 3:3, 4 That **by revelation there was made known to me the mystery,** as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

1 Thes 2:13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when **you received from us the word of God's message,** you accepted it not as the word of men, **but for what it really is, the word of God,** which also performs its work in you who believe.

1 Thes 4:2, 8 For you know what commandments we gave you by the **authority of the Lord Jesus**. Consequently, **he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.**

2 Pet 3:15–17 As also **in all his letters**, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the **rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness.

## THE WORD OF GOD IS EQUAL IN ITS REVELATION: FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

*There are some who would say that the Word of God is interpreted by the Words of Christ. Others insist that the Word's of God the Father supercedes all other Scripture. Still others say the Words of the Holy Spirit are the true statements of authority. The classic reformation statement of faith states that the Word of God is interpreted by the Word of God. This means that all Scripture is of equal authority in the Bible. How do the following passages speak to this?*

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.**

Eph 6:17 **And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God.

1 Thes 2:13 **And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**

2 Tim 2:9 **For which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.**

Heb 4:12 **For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

1 Pt 1:23 **For you have been born again, not of seed that is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.**

1 Jn 1:4 **I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

### ETERNAL NATURE OF GOD'S WORD:

*One of the commonly held misconceptions about the Word of God is that, although it may have been initially inspired by God, over the years changes and errors were introduced into it. It has become corrupted. How do the following passages address the unchangeable, eternal aspect of the Word of God?*

**Ps 33:11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from Generation to Generation.**

**Ps 102:18 This will be written for the Generation to come; that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.**

**Ps 105:8 He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand Generations.**

**Ps 117:2 For His loving kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord!**

Ps 119:89,152 **Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Of old I have known from Thy testimonies, That Thou hast founded them forever.**

Mt 5:18 **For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.**

Mt 24:35 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away.**

Mk 13:31 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.**

Lk 16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.

Lk 21:33 **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.**

1 Pet 1:24, 25 **For "All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever." And this is the word which was preached to you.**

2 Jn 2 **For the sake of the truth, which abides in us and will be with us forever.**

## THE WORD OF GOD IS INERRANT:

*This means that the Word of God is without error, inerrant. Not only do we have the inspired Word of God as passed down to us by the Holy Spirit, but also that which is given to us is true. It is without error in theology, science, or history.*

Ps 12:6 The words of the Lord are pure words, **as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.**

Ps 18:30 **As for God, His way is blameless;** the word of the Lord is tried; **He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.**

Ps 19: 7–9 The law of the Lord is perfect, **restoring the soul;** the testimony of the Lord is sure, **making wise the simple.** The precepts of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the heart;** The commandment of the Lord is pure, **enlightening the eyes.** **The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;** The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Ps 33:4 For the word of the Lord is upright, **and all His work is done in faithfulness.**

Ps 111:7 **The works of His hands are truth and justice;** all His precepts are sure.

## THE WORD OF GOD IS DYNAMIC:

*Finally, the Word of God is dynamic. As such, it is unique from any other piece of literature. It is a document that can and should be read and reread, memorized and meditated upon, studied and restudied. Why is this so? How do the following passages reveal the Word of God as a living and dynamic document that demands such attention?*

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the command of His lips; **I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.**

Ps 105:19 Until the time that his word came to pass, **the word of the Lord tested him.**

Is 55:11 So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, **without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.**

Jer 15:16 **Thy words were found and I ate them,** and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts.

Joel 2:11 And the Lord utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, **for strong is he who carries out His word.** The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?

Jn 17:17 **Sanctify them in the truth;** Thy word is truth.

Eph 6:17 **And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

1 Tm 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly **nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine** which you have been following.

2 Tm 2:9 For which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; **but the word of God is not imprisoned.**

Heb 4:12 For the **word of God is living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and **able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that **the worlds were prepared by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

## Chapter One

# The Authority and Supremacy of The Word Of God—Lecture

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*"Yes, but doesn't he believe in spanking?"*

Comment made to a missionary supervisor by a member of his staff team while discussing whether or not my seminar should be presented in their country.

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### INTRODUCTION

I have found my introductions to the Family Discipleship Seminar evolving over the years. It began as a "How To" Workshop. In 1981, when Eleanor and I first began to give this seminar, I found my audience of young evangelical parents fully convinced of the biblical concepts of training and discipline (spanking). My introduction was merely a short history on how I came to use the methods being taught, my learning experience, and those from whom I learned. The biblical principles involved and the biblical means of accomplishing them, I could assume, were already mastered by my young audience, since they were widely accepted, taught and disseminated in evangelical homes and churches. In short, young evangelical couples wanted to know how to spank and discipline their children. The seminar at this stage was simply a methods class.

Slowly, however I noticed a change, especially in the question and answer sessions. By the late 1980's and early 1990's, I found I could no longer assume an understanding of the basic biblical principles involved. When these were clearly taught, I found a willing audience in these young evangelical parents. There was no doubt in their minds concerning the authority of Scriptures. I could not, however, assume knowledge of Scripture in this area. As a result, I had to add an introductory session devoted completely to an overview of the Scripture relating to discipline and training and establishing these firmly as biblical truths. I was continually amazed to see the shocked look on these young couples faces as they studied the Word and will of God for the first time in this area. Their faces seemed to say, "This is in the Bible?" Yet, even though shocked at times, or surprised, they were more than willing to submit to the Word of God. Thus a new chapter was born in the life of this seminar.

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*"The admonition of Paul in 1 Ti 2:12, that 'women should not teach or exercise authority over men' was written to an age and period where women were completely out of control, both in the culture and in the church. This is no longer the case in the modern evangelical church. Women, both in society and in the church, are educated and trained from an early age how to handle leadership roles and, as a result, this passage does not apply to our ministry situation."*

Director of Para-church organization explaining to me why certain policies were changing concerning women staff in the ministry.

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*"We of course hold the Word of God to be true and without question in all cases of doctrine. The Word of God was written, however, as a spiritual book and never meant to be taken as a precise guide to either science or history. Thus when we come across a passage such as this in Joshua 10:12 & 13 where the sun is commanded to "stand still" we need not take it as scientific fact. Perhaps it seemed like the sun stood still or perhaps it was an especially long day, or perhaps so much got done that it was as if the sun had stood still. Whatever the psychological explanation, we cannot expect the primitive scientific minds of early Israelites who passed this story down Generation after Generation to understand it. We need not make the Word of God into a history or science book. This, of course, includes the science of psychology when it comes to child raising. Leave it to what it does best, religion."*

Pastor of large evangelical church

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Then, as I moved into the middle and late 1990's, another shift began to occur in my audience of young evangelical parents. Suddenly, the Word of God on an issue was not

necessarily enough. Phrases like "cultural relevance," "my personal experience," and "psychological studies" began to be used with equal authority as the verses I was sharing from the Word of God. My audience was more than willing to consider the verses I shared from the Word of God, but they were not about to accept them as the final word on this subject. The Bible was not necessarily the final authority in their lives, as the Word and will of God for them personally. It was not a matter of interpretation, but rather of their authority in this area. Thus, I found myself adding a new introduction to the seminar, which did not relate to the issue directly—The Authority and Supremacy of The Word Of God In the Area Of Family Discipleship.

In a short 20 years, my audience has gone from knowing the principles and accepting them, to not knowing them but accepting them when taught, to not knowing them and questioning their authority and value to their lives, when confronted by them. Thus was born the present opening chapter—The Authority and Supremacy of the Word of God.

The cultural relevance of the entire Word of God is at the heart of the battle for the minds and souls of young evangelicals today. I am sure that each of the first three comments seemed benign in terms of their effect on the evangelical community, even if you disagreed with them. Whether a woman teaches men in a meeting or supervises them in a Christian organization, or whether we believe that the sun actually stood still, or whether we follow the injunction concerning the use of the "rod" in disciplining children, doesn't seem particularly earth-shaking an issue for the casual observer to want to divide over. The issue at hand in each, though, is not the issue that first shows itself on the surface. The true issue is not the social role of women in the church, the laws of physics, or the psychology of spanking. The central issue in each illustration is the Authority of Scripture as the Word of God. In the last case, where the very heart of Christian doctrine is ripped from the message of the Gospel, the exact same logic is used in determining what to accept as relevant in Scripture. Where the first three stopped, my Methodist friend just kept right on going. It is the same argument, the same logic and the same use of Scripture. Who is to say his subjection of Scripture to culture is any less out of line than the others? I am sure none of the first three would agree with the

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*"I asked my pastor and he said that the book of Proverbs is not doctrine but truisms and that I do not have to spank my child to love him."*

A young professional who had heard me speak once before, registered for the conference and drove 50 miles just to stand up and say this at the first question and answer time in the seminar, and then left.

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*"But these Scriptures were written in a very violent time when little was known of the modern science and psychology of child raising. Surely you are not expecting us to apply them in this modern era?"*

Young Evangelical Professional at seminar question and answer time.

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*"I am very excited about my Easter Sermon. I have completely rid it of the violence usually associated with this story. Of course, when Christianity first emerged, it was a violent world. The Jews had blood sacrifices, the Romans had blood sacrifices, and the Greeks had blood sacrifices. Everything that was anything had a blood sacrifice. The early Christians thus took to emphasizing the crucifixion of Jesus to help make the message of Christianity culturally relevant. We live in a different age now and this initial emphasis, though good, is now so culturally irrelevant as to be counter productive. I am redoing my Easter sermon to rid it of all references to blood so as to make it relevant to the modern congregation."*

Methodist minister commenting to me on his Easter Sermon plans at a meeting of the Association of University Ministers

Methodist minister, but by what authority? The very arguments used to assert their stand, are used to assert his. The very reasons they would give to me to justify their stand, he would repeat to them in justifying his. The earth-shaking issue that should cause divisions and stirrings within the Body of Christ is the issue of the Authority of Scripture as the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. If this is accepted, all other issues fall into place.

Now if in each of the first three situations, the participants had said something like, “I know that in (biblical reference) that the Word of God says \_\_\_\_\_, but it is also true that the principle found in this verse is further developed in the following passages, and because of the weight of these other passages, I believe...” In this case there is room for discussion, for growth. We begin to search out the entire mind of God from the entire Scriptural revelation. We are not arguing culture, science or psychology; we are seeking out the mind of God from the Word of God. In this case, there is room for gray area. Godly men differ as to their understanding and application of the Word of God due to their own finiteness and sin. Solomon, the wisest man in the Bible, states in Proverbs 10:19, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” The Apostle Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.” As long as the Scripture is being referred to in integrity and in authority, then pursue patience, study and prayer for the sake of unity. But once the door has been opened to the subjection of Scripture to any other authority than Scripture itself, then man and man alone decides the counsels of God. This must always be an unacceptable position and on this high ground, the Authority of Scripture as the inerrant, infallible Word of God, we take our stand and, if necessary, divide.

This is why it is so important for us to address the issue of the authority of the Word of God. Not only must we substantiate the Bible's overriding authority on the subject of disciplining children, but its authority over all we believe. It is one of the foundation stones of our Faith, and one of the uncompromising convictions of the Christian.

## I. The Nature Of The Word Of God

I would not be too hard on the young immature Christian who made the above statement. He was sincere, just sincerely wrong. I should know, because it was me, in my junior year of high school, shortly after I became a Christian. The Church staff member I said this to set me straight in short order, but as I think back on it he did so out of force of argument and personality, not by helping me see the truth for myself from the Word of God. As time passed, I began to find out for myself what the Word of God actually claims about itself and to my wonder; the Word of God makes some remarkable claims concerning its authority. If these things are true, which I firmly believe with all my heart, then we *truly do* have the Word of God.

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*“God’s Word is inspired. I believe that, but many things are inspired. A composer is inspired to write a great piece of music, an author is inspired to produce a great novel, and a minister is even inspired to write a great sermon. Inspiration is inspiration, so what is the big deal?”*

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## A. THE WORD OF GOD

There is no doubt that the Word of God claims to be just that, the Word Of God. A quick look at few phrases in the Word of God confirms this beyond any doubt. In reference to itself, the Word of God uses the phrase "The Word of God" 47 times. In addition to this, on twelve different occasions the phrase "God spoke" is used. In referring to itself, the Word of God uses the phrase, "the Lord said" 231 times and employs the sister term "the Lord spoke" another 233 times. The phrase, "Word of the Lord" occurs over 253 times, while the phrase "Thus says the Lord" occurs 416 times in the Holy Word of God. The phrase "God said" occurs 570 times in the Bible. I believe the most significant figure, though, is the use of the Word of God in referring to itself as "The Word of the Lord." The question should be rightfully asked, "Does the Word of God really view itself as the Word of the Lord or is it just recording instances of God's Word intermixed with that of man?" This question is completely laid to rest by the fact that the Word of God employs this phrase, "The Word of The Lord" when speaking of itself over two hundred and fifty three times. The Word of God clearly presents itself as just that, "The Word of God." We may decide we do not believe this but we cannot decide that the claim is not made.

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*"In hundreds of passages, the Bible declares or assumes itself to be the Word of God. Because of the combination of human and supernatural qualities, which enter into the Bible, a similarity may be observed between the Bible as the written Word and the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Word. They are both supernatural in origin, presenting an inscrutable and perfect blending of that which is divine and that which is human. They both exercise a transforming power over those who believe, and are alike allowed of God to be set at naught and rejected by those who do not believe. The untainted, undiminished divine perfections are embodied in each. The revelations which they disclose are at once as simple as the mental capacity of a child, and as complex as the infinite treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge, as enduring as the God whom they reveal."*

Major Bible Themes, Chafer/Walvoord,  
Zondervan Press; pp. 11,15

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## B. INSPIRED

But what does this mean, "The Word of God?" First, and foremost, it means that God's Word is inspired, God-breathed. 1 Ti 3:16 states, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." There are three key words here. The first is "all." The Word of God is claiming that every single word contained in it is inspired by God. The second is "Scripture." This claim is not made of individual books, statements or phrases within the Scripture, but speaks to it en toto. Lastly, we have the term "inspired." This literally means "God-breathed." This means that the Word of God is just that, the very Word of God. It is as if in reading you could feel the breath of the living, speaking God against your face. It is first and last given to us as the Word of God with men as the instruments, but the Word of God nevertheless. What was the dynamic of this inspiration? The Word of God itself gives us a little peek into its own inspirational process in II Pt 1:21 where it states, "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." Note that the giving of Scriptures was not a matter of human will. This is key. The will of man was not pivotal, but rather the Will Of God. The Word of God is the Will of God. The Holy Spirit, moving men,

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*"It is as if you can feel the breath of God against your face."*

J. Dwight Pentecost, to Campus Crusade For Christ  
Training Institute

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*"The Scriptures in their original writings are the inerrant Word of God"*

Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, Vol. VI, p. 29

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allowed God to speak through them, not vice versa. It was not men moving to speak the Word of God in each of their unique ways. It was God moving men in a variety of unique ways to record His Words. Unique, yes, but always His Words, not man's.

## C. INERRANT

As such, the Word of God is without error. It is as true and pure and perfect as the Word of God is and must be. In Psalm 119:140 the Word of God says, "Thy word is very pure, Therefore Thy servant loves it." God's Word is pure, without blemish, without error. This is again stated in Psalm 12:6, "The words of the Lord are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times." God has watched over His Word, He has tried it; He has allowed no blemish to enter in. The argument is often made that over a period of thousands of years, errors or changes surely must have entered into the Word of God. To that I quote the ancient Japanese proverb, "Hogawashee."

First, although much has been made of these supposed changes and they have been even supposedly codified and numbered, e.g. Text A, B, C on so on, no comparative texts with these changes have ever been found. That's right. Even though we have literally thousands and thousands of manuscripts and texts dating back thousands of years, there is no Text A which states one thing, and Text B which states another. Modern liberal critics refuse to accept the fact of the integrity of the Scripture. An astounding event has occurred in the last twenty years. Every book of the Old Testament but Esther has been translated from the Qum Ran texts, which predate the birth of Christ by over 500 years and not one difference has been found from the Bible you hold in your hand today. 2,500 years of historically proven inerrancy. As a result critics of the Word of God are forced to simply make up these supposed texts in their minds and try to pass it off as proof.

But this is nothing compared with what the Word of God says of itself. It never claimed that the teachings of the Word of God were compiled by men who collected and codified traditions passed down to them. Rather, the Bible states clearly that they were given by God to man. Moses did not compile the history of Israel. It was given him by God in written form. And so it was down through the ages, "men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God." There was no compilation; there was only divine revelation. This revelation was given by God, in inerrant form, and has been preserved by God in inerrant form.

## D. ETERNAL

Of course it can be argued that the Word of God was given in pure divine, inerrant form, but over the years the changes were made. Again, keep in mind that this argument is made without any scientific method employed. It would be as if I said, "Sure the preamble to the Constitution was originally a good document but over the last two hundred or so years it has been changed many times. In fact we do not know for sure what the original preamble said!"

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*"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."*

Jesus Christ, Lk 21:33

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"Do we have copies dating from the earliest history of our country?"

"Yes."

"Do we have copies interspersed throughout time since then?"

"Yes."

"Do any of these show evidence of change or deviation over a period of time?"

"No."

"Then why, for the love of Mike, do you keep rambling on about these changes without any tangible proof of their existence?"

**The same line of thought can be used for the Scriptures...**

"Do we have copies dating from the earliest history of the Word of God?"

"Yes."

"Do we have copies interspersed throughout time since then, covering a time span of thousands of years?"

"Yes."

"Do any of these show evidence of change or deviation over that period of time?"

"No."

"Then why, for the love of Mike, do you keep rambling on about these changes without any tangible proof of their existence?"

"Because if we admit that there is no change then we have to admit that it is the Word of God, and then we will have to obey and we don't want to. So there!"

Throughout the Word of God, the claim of the eternal nature of the Word of God is made. It says in 1 Pt 1:24, 25, *"All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, And the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you."* Jesus Christ Himself stated in Mt 5:18 *"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished."* Again in Mt 24:35 *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away."*

God has committed Himself to personally watch over His Word. The Word of God could no more change than He could. If the Word of God is changed or lost, then God has changed or lost. God's Word carries with it the mark, the guarantee of God for its divine preservation. It can no more change or fail than can God. Do you really want to go round and round on this, or do you want to get on with it so we can talk about child raising? Let's just accept that the Word of God is divinely eternal and without change and leave it at that, okay?

## E. WITHOUT CONTRADICTION

It goes without saying that if the Word of God is the inspired, inerrant, eternal Word of God, that it is without contradiction. Nevertheless, some will say, "But what about all the contradictions in the Word of God?" Never mind that when asked to point them out you get an offended stare at the very nerve to ask such a question. In addition to this, the Word of God makes it clear that it is the Word of God and, as such, is without contradiction. In James 1:17–18, God says, *"Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures."* With God, there are no contradictions, no variation, and no shifting shadow. This means that if there seems to be a contradiction in the Word of God, the problem is with man, not with God's Holy Word.

## F. AUTHORITATIVE

If man would relate to God's Word as intended, as the Word of God, then all these so-called problems would take care of themselves. God says of His Word in Heb 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* As you can see, the Word of God is dynamic. It is a living instrument, and a spiritual document. It is meant to get a hold of our lives. It is not meant to be judged by us, rather, it judges man. It is the authority, not man. It passes judgment, not man. It defines truth, what is and is not from God. It is the Word of God. We must submit to its authority as we would to God's authority. It is His Word and His Will. If you were in the place of Moses in Exodus 33:11, and God were speaking to you "face to face," would you interrupt Him? Would you question Him? Would you try to interject worldly authorities, customs or cultures? Well, God's Word, the Bible, is just that. It is God speaking to you, face to face. What is your response when God speaks to you from His Word? God's Word is, above all, the final authority in the lives of all men.

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*"My conscience is captive to the Word of God"*

Martin Luther

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*"God said it, I believe it, that settles it."*

Dawson Trotman

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## G. SPIRITUAL FOOD

The Word of God is not like other books, to be read one time and set aside. Nor is it to be studied until the information is mastered, before going on to other works. Rather, it is our spiritual food. Just as we never grow out of eating physical food, so we never grow out of eating our spiritual food—the Word of God. 1 Ti 4:6 speaks of our being, *"constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."* In Jeremiah 15:16, *"Thy words were found and I ate them, And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts."*

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*"In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."*

The Apostle Paul, 1 Tim 4:6

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As you approach this study, let me encourage you to approach the Word of God as spiritual food. Stop and meditate upon the passages. Memorize key passages. Make them your own. What is God saying about Discipleship and the Family? What does the Word of God say about spanking, about raising children, about the role of the father in the home? Accept God's Word for what it is. Study it, and then embrace it as the Word and Will of God. Be as the Bereans in Acts 17:11 *"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so."* Embrace the Word of God as the spiritual food of your Christian life. As a disciple, feed daily upon it. As you master these concepts, accept the Word of God eagerly as you would a banquet laid before you by the Lord.

## II. Basic Questions We Ask Ourselves When Reading the Word of God

As we read the Word of God, we will be spared a lot of grief if we will just ask ourselves a few simple questions. In fact, I have come to believe that if man would just ask these five simple questions when approaching the Word of God, much of the division and misunderstanding that now exists in the body of Christ could be avoided.

### A. DOCTRINE VS. HISTORICAL REVELATION / NARRATIVE

The first question we should ask ourselves when reading the Scripture is, "Is this passage doctrine or historical revelation, in nature?" Reflect on the preceding quotes, both are experientially based. We live in an age of experience. Experience is everything. To many, experience is truth. What these men are saying is that they want the same experiences that they see men in the Bible having. Unfortunately, doctrine, not experience, is universalized in the Scripture. The fact is that many times the experiences men have in the Bible are unique to them. When reading a passage, first we must ask ourselves, "Is the passage we are reading a doctrinal passage or is it a historical revelation?" In other words, "Is God telling me and everyone else to experience this for themselves, or is He simply telling us what someone else has experienced?"

By "doctrinal passage," I mean Scripture which speaks to you as if God were preaching a sermon right at you. It is pure truth being taught by God. It is universally applicable, transcending both time and culture. It is for all times, for all peoples, for all places. It is for the Rawandan tribal leader in his mud hut, as well as the corporate executive in his office overlooking the skyline of New York City. It is doctrine. Jn 14 is an example. In this passage, in verse 15, Jesus teaches, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Anybody, from a semiliterate Jewish fisherman in AD 30 to an executive in a London financial institution, can relate to and is expected to apply this verse. It is the Word of God speaking directly to man as if God were looking you in the face and telling you something.

This is contrasted with "historical revelation." If we say that doctrine is like listening to a sermon by God, then historical revelation is like watching God's television set. I refrain from using the term story or Bible story because that carries a juvenile connotation, as well as an unstated implication that it may not be true. Rather, I use the term historical revelation, which carries the weight of historical truth with it, yet defines it as a revelation of an event rather than a direct teaching or sermon from God to the reader. It is the historical revelation by God of events which transpired and which He has decided to reveal to us.

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*"What we want to do is experience the same miracles and power as the Old Testament Prophets and the Apostles of the early church experienced!"*

TV Minister

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*"I want a New Testament Church, a church like the one in the book of Acts."*

Pastor at Church Planting Conference

Though absolutely true, these revelations are not universally applicable. When Moses parted the Red Sea in Exodus, this event most certainly happened. That does not mean however, that if we were to travel to Egypt, on the power of that passage, we could expect to part the Red Sea. It was a historical event recorded by God, but not a doctrinal teaching meant to be universally obeyed. In contrast, the passage in Jn 14:15 is universally true, both for the disciples in Jerusalem during the time of Christ, and for us today wherever we may live. In fact, if I were to travel to Jerusalem, I could preach Jn 14:15 with the same confidence that Jesus did 2,000 years ago, and expect it to be understood and obeyed.

This distinction is true even in the face of recurring historical themes in the Scriptures. A good example of this is the theme in the Scriptures of power over water. In Genesis, the Spirit of the Lord moves upon the face of the water; Moses parts the Red Sea; Joshua, his disciple, parts the Jordan; we find Elijah parting the Jordan, and when Elisha receives a double portion of the Spirit, he, too, parts the Jordan. The storms of the sea are miraculously quelled when Jonah is pitched overboard at his own request. In the New Testament, Christ walks on the water and his disciple Peter, by faith walks on the water as well. Not only this, but at His command, the storm at sea is quelled and the water becomes like glass.

One could look at this theme of historical events and shared experiences and say, "Look, a theme throughout Scripture, which goes from Genesis to the time of Christ, which forms a golden thread throughout the Word of God, clearly points to the fact that if you are truly a man of faith, truly spirit-filled, truly a disciple of Christ, then you will have power over water as well." But you would be wrong in saying so. These passages tell us specifically what God did in certain historical situations. They are inspired accounts of events which actually happened. They are historical revelation, narrative in nature. God is telling us what He did in this particular case, and in no way universalizes it for all times and for all people. There are many other historical revelation / narrative themes of a historical nature that we could develop, such as raising the dead; power over the weather; calling down fire from heaven, or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. All of these though developed throughout both the Old and New Testaments as miraculous events experienced by men through the ages, cannot be universalized as a doctrinal teaching that should be experienced by all Christians.

In our times the most common mistake which is made in universalizing a historical revelation / narrative theme, comes in the use of historical passages dealing with either miracles or the Holy Spirit. You can no more universalize these biblical historical revelation / narrative passages, than you can Moses parting the Red Sea, Elisha raising the dead, or Christ stilling the storm. In child raising, we are fortunate that almost all the passages dealing with this issue are doctrinal in nature. Nevertheless, as you read the Word of God, ask yourself, "Is this a doctrinal passage speaking to all men, in all cultures, for all times or is this a historical revelation of an event which God chose to record to illustrate what He was doing at this particular point in time?"

## B. NEW COVENANT VS. OLD COVENANT

The second question we want to ask ourselves when reading the Word of God is, “Is this a New Covenant or Old Covenant passage?” The term “covenant” occurs nearly 300 times in the Scriptures, so it is obviously a term that warrants our attention.

In Heb 8: 6–8, 13 the Word of God states, “*But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, When I will effect a new covenant With the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.*”

With the coming of Christ, God instituted a New Covenant—the Covenant of Grace. This both fulfilled and replaced the Old Covenant of the Law made with the Jews. Much of the Old Covenant was symbolic of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant. They were pictures meant to prepare the readers and observers for the coming Messiah. When Jesus came and fulfilled these symbols or pictures, they were no longer needed. Not all of the Old Testament though was Covenant symbolism. A great deal of it still stands for us today and requires our strict attention. The question then is, how do we know what made it through into the New Covenant and what did not? The answer is found in three ways: First, anything that was a picture of Christ did not make it through. Second, anything that Christ fulfilled did not make it through. Finally, anything that the New Covenant negates did not make it through. We do not have time to do an exhaustive list at this stage, as I am sure you want to get into raising your little darlings and so, I will offer you three examples and then leave it to you for further study.

“Why don’t we do animal sacrifices?” The answer is found in Hebrews, chapter nine. A careful reading brings us to the conclusion that the whole temple scene— sacrifices, priests, temple, the whole shebang, was a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ for salvation. Once this had occurred, there was no need for the picture, as it was fulfilled in Christ and it was done away with.

“Why don’t we fast and pray, covering ourselves with sack cloth and ashes?” According to Christ in Mt 6:16–18 when we fast we are supposed to dress and look like any other Joe on the street so that people will not even know we are fasting. Thus, on the command of Christ, sackcloth and ashes are left behind, while fasting makes it in to the New Covenant.

“What about the Sabbath—am I in sin if I don’t go to church on Sunday?” Actually you are asking two questions here. First you should understand that the Sabbath is on Saturday, not Sunday. If you were to keep the Sabbath you would need to go to church on

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*The same God who says “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” in the same list of commands says, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” The Sabbath is Saturday and I say to you that if you are not keeping the Sabbath day then you are guilty of breaking one of the Ten Commandments of God and stand guilty and judged by His Holy Word.*

Seventh Day Adventist minister

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*“Of course we cannot have ashtrays in the fellowship hall for our outreach events. I don’t care if non-Christians do smoke, even Jesus Himself cleansed the Temple of God and we should do the same.”*

Music Minister in church board discussion on how to accommodate non-Christians during outreach fellowships.

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Saturday like groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists. Secondly, you should understand that in Colossians 2:16–17, the Holy Spirit does away with the observance of special days, festivals etc. under the Law *and* includes the Sabbath in this list. This is replaced with Heb 10:24, where we are enjoined, “*not to neglect to meet together as is the habit of some...*” Thus the Sabbath Saturday observance is replaced by faithfulness to your particular Church’s meeting times.

Many harsh injunctions placed undeservedly upon the backs of conscientious Christians would be lifted if the teachers in the church would pay more attention to this issue of Old vs. New Covenant teachings.

It is important to keep in mind that we are talking here about Old Covenant and New Covenant and **not** Old Testament and New Testament. In Is 53:6, we have a New Covenant teaching—the substitutionary death of Christ—in the Old Testament. In Lk 3, we have the teachings of the last Old Covenant prophet as he seeks to prepare the way for the New Covenant of Christ. This is a subject that must be pursued by the Christian. The question, “Is this an Old Covenant Passage or a New Covenant Passage?” is not just splitting theological hairs. It is a very crucial issue in studying the Scriptures. It requires a careful reading of the Word of God and a familiarity with the whole Word of God. That is why it is so important to have a daily reading program where you are reading through the entire Word of God on a regular basis.

## C. PARABLES AND SYMBOLS

The third question we should ask ourselves when reading the Word of God, or hearing it taught to us by others, is “Is this passage one which employs the use of parables or symbols?” It is important to understand that in the Scripture, many symbols are used. We may have an opinion of what these symbols refer to, but if they are not explained then we must remember that we are only sharing our opinion. In Luke, chapter eight, when Jesus presents the parable of the Sower, He is for the most part not understood. Later, He explains this parable to the disciples and after revealing the meaning of the parable He goes on to teach, (Lk 8:10) *“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.”* We must realize that if God does not explain a parable or symbol, then God does not explain it, and many are not. In Mk 4:3–33, Jesus presents the parable of the mustard seed without explanation. We are then left with no explanation. We may make conjectures, but they will be only that—our best guess. Again in Mk 4:13–20, the parable of the Sower is explained. From this explanation we are told in verse 14 that *“The Sower sows the Word.”* Thus we can speak with confidence that in the parable the seed represents the Word of God. But what about the vessel that the sower carries the seed in? What about the hand that holds the seed? What about the seed being sown? What does its sailing through the air represent? The Bible is silent and we should therefore be very careful about developing any type of teaching on these subjects in light of this silence. Many parables are given without explanation of the meaning or the terms. We can give them our best guess, but a best guess should never be taught with the same force as something that is explained by Scripture. Our best guess should never be put on equal footing with the revealed Word of God’s explanation of a parable. In fact, preferable to our best guess would be the statement, “The Bible doesn’t say, so quite

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*“In Mt 13:31 we are given the parable of the Mustard Seed which is a picture of what can happen to the Church if it is allowed to become a grotesque aberration of its original purpose.”*

Bible Church Pastor

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frankly there is really no way of knowing. Now we know how the disciples felt and why they were continually asking Christ to explain these parables to them.”

## D. PROPHETIC AND/OR HIDDEN

The fourth key question we should ask ourselves when reading the Word of God or hearing it preached is, “Does this passage pertain to prophetic or hidden truths?” The Word of God clearly states that there are some things we just don’t know. It bothers people a great deal to read something in the Word of God and not be able to know what it says. It does not bother God at all when this happens. This is especially true of prophetic Scripture. In II Pt 1:20 God says, “*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,*” I don’t know what could be much clearer.

A good rule of thumb is that if God does not interpret the prophecy, then you will not be able to. To help us see the danger of taking it upon ourselves to interpret prophecy without the aid of divine interpretation from the Scripture, it is often good to look at just how difficult interpretation of prophecy is for the finite mind of man.

In Jeremiah 31:15, the prophet Jeremiah states, “*Thus says the Lord, ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She*

*refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.’”*

Now I would like you to interpret this prophecy for me. Be truthful! If you were a Jewish student of the Bible, reading this passage 100 years before the coming of Christ, would you read this passage and say, “Oh yeah, it is perfectly clear, a Messiah is going to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem, wise men will come looking for him, alerting the Jewish king to his whereabouts so that he can kill him. His parents will be warned by an angel to flee to Egypt, and then King Herod will order all the baby boys under the age of two to be killed. No problem, it is perfectly obvious.” I can safely say, that from reading the Jeremiah passage, no one, not even the greatest scholar in the world, would have been able to predict that it applied to the above scenario found in Mt 2:13–23.

This is just one of many, many prophecies which are quoted in the book of Matthew. Look a few of them up, and you will give up the job of prophetic sleuth and stick to the biblical revelation of the Holy Spirit. This brings us to an important point: many times God is completely satisfied with limiting us by what the Word of God does not say or does not explain. It does not bother God a bit to have certain things revealed and certain things hidden. Dt 29:29 states, “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...*” There are secret things, and this list includes but is not limited to, what God did before creation; why He creates; why He loves; the early days of Jesus; much of the life of Jesus

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“Eighty-Eight Reasons Why Christ Will Return in 1988.”

Popular book making the evangelical circuit in 1987 and 1988.

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“*On the basis of the prophetic writings of Scripture, I can assure you with all confidence that Christ will not only come in our life time, but before that, the Great Tribulation. There are then only two kinds of Christians, those who are prepared to pass through it and meet their Savior and those who are not.*”

Popular Collegiate Conference Speaker

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“*God gave this promise to Dawson Trotman that He would bless him and multiply him and it is important for all Navigators to be good stewards of the promises of God to this great man.*”

National Navigator Leader at staff conference

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“*The problem with the Navigators today is that they have forgotten the promises that God gave to Dawson Trotman*”

Navigator Missionary

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and the disciples; the meaning of most prophetic Scripture concerning His return, and much more is simply not revealed. It is secret. If it doesn't bother God, it shouldn't bother us. You only look foolish trying to do something the Holy Spirit has decided not to do, so give it a rest.

## E. DEVOTIONAL VS. UNIVERSAL

Word of God saying in this passage to all men throughout all ages? The other though is devotional. What is God seeking to say to you at this particular place in time?

Sometimes God will speak uniquely to us through His Word, even though this passage has little to do with the direct situation you are in. I remember in 1975, I was struggling with whether or not to join the Navigator Staff team. In my quiet time I read Is 60:20–22 and knew that God was speaking to me about my decision. I have fallen back upon that passage many times throughout my career. God spoke devotionally to me and you will never convince me that He did not.

This introduces a new issue. Do I teach this as a universal experience? NO. Would I exposit this verse from the pulpit as a promise for fruitful ministry? NO. Would I teach this passage in seminary as a key passage to study when considering the call of God? NO. God spoke devotionally *to me*. This was neither a doctrinal or historical revelation / narrative, nor a prophetic or symbolic passage concerning the call to the ministry. Therefore, it must, like my call, remain a deeply personal experience. I may share it but I may not universalize it. Neither the passage nor the experience of God speaking devotionally from the passage can be universalized.

As we look at Scripture concerning Family Discipleship, we will range throughout the Word of God. No doubt you have heard many opinions on many verses. It is important as you read the Word of God on this subject to be continually asking yourself these strategic questions, "Doctrine or historical revelation?" "New Covenant or Old Covenant?" "Are these symbols, parables and prophetic statements interpreted by the Word of God, or is this just a man's opinion?" "Is what is being shared a universal truth which applies to me, or simply a devotional thought which God has impressed upon an individual?" "Is this a secret thing or a thing revealed?"

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*"When my pastor shares something I think that we should respond to it as if it was the Word of God. He is God's man, in God's place and he is giving us God's Word, we should accept it without question."*

Church member at business meeting discussing budget for the new building program.

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*Lastly, when reading or being taught the Word of God it is important to ask yourself the question, "Is the application being made a personal devotional thought or a universal application for all people and all times?" What about historical revelation passages? What about Old Covenant passages? What about unexplained symbols, parables and prophecy? Are they of any value to us? The answer is a resounding yes! First, they help us to see the mind and work of God throughout the ages. Beyond this, though, there are two approaches to Scripture. One is universal. What is the "Chapter and Verse, please..." Early in my Christian life, when I read a Christian book, I read it just like it was the Word of God. It was only later, under the guidance of my Navigator team leader in college, that I began viewing all writings as subject to the Word of God. I began thinking of them critically in the light of the Word of God. I was taught to always ask, when a dogmatic statement was made, "Chapter and Verse, please." The verse that was drummed into my head was Acts 17:11. "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so." Over and over, it was reinforced to me that if Paul wanted his words checked with Scripture, then this was to be true of all men. This simple phrase saved me from many errors and extremes in my future walk with God and ministry, "Chapter and Verse, please."*

The Author

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It is important to be thinkers when it comes to God's Word. As you read this book or any book, think about what is being said. Think about what the Word of God says. Think about the types of Scripture being used. Above all, think, "What is God saying about Family Discipleship?"

### III. Basic Rules to Follow When Interpreting the Word of God

Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, probably did more than any other modern man to take the authority of the Word of God out of the staid halls of Bible Colleges and Seminaries and put it into the trained hands of laymen. His concepts of ministry, personal discipleship, disciple making and lay ministers equipping others for the spread of the Kingdom of God revolutionized the modern evangelical church, its Sunday Schools and its whole approach to personal Bible Study and devotional life. Dawson was unrelenting in his zeal for studying God's Word; for Scripture Memory, for Daily Quiet Time, and especially quality personal Bible Study. In my college days at the University of Texas, the simple rules of Bible Study would be taught and mastered by all good Navigators. I present them to you as follows since these rules have served me well over the last 25 years.

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*God says it, I believe it, that settles it."*

Dawson Trotman

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#### A. THE RULE OF LANGUAGE

One of the first things I was taught as a young student in my Navigator Bible Study was that whether you liked the meaning of a word or not, it was the word being used and you had to define it, understand it, master it and then to live with it. In all my early Bible studies, we were expected to have the definitions of key words from two secular sources, from a Bible Dictionary and from a Greek and Hebrew Dictionary. God used the language and picked the word. Thus, we were taught that words were important and could not be suppressed based on personal prejudice.

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*"That's not what the word 'Grace' means. The word 'Grace' means 'a willingness to respond in obedience to the commands of God as opposed to the self works of your former life.' Thus, the injunction in Eph 2:8-9, 'saved by Grace and not by works...' means saved by obeying God not by obeying the ordinances contrived by man. It does not mean to be saved apart from works, but by the works of God. A simple understanding of the definition of the word 'Grace' clears up the misunderstandings surrounding this verse."*

Pastor of Independent Bible Church to men's Bible study group.

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The value for me came out in two ways early in my Christian life. First, were the words, "elect" and "predestined." Being a good Baptist, I hated both words and just skipped over them when reading the Word of God and came up with my own definitions of these terms to avoid thinking of them. It was in a college Navigator Bible Study that I was forced to deal with the terms, come to an understanding of their meaning, and accept the Word of God in this area. It was difficult to give up my self-made definitions of these words but it was the right and best thing to do.

It was later in my evangelism experience that I came across groups such as The Mormons, The Jehovah Witnesses, The Local Church, to name a few, who wrote their own Greek reference works and Bible Dictionaries and, in doing so, changed freely the meaning of both English and Greek definitions of words to suit their personal theologies. If I had not been willing to submit my own biases to the rule of language I would not have been able to minister with authority and compassion to those I came across in

movements such as these. As it was, I was able to share my own testimony in this area and how I repented, and then to share with them the danger of this area. All of us must be willing to submit to the meanings of the words that God chose to use in the Word of God.

Words have meaning. This is a very important concept. The meaning of a word is not subject to our feelings. A word has a definition. To understand a word, we must understand its meaning. It is not up to us to brainstorm over the meaning of a word. The definition

already exists. It is up to us to learn the definition. Words have meaning. God initiates His communication with man in Genesis with Words. He uses specific words that have specific meaning and expects man to receive them as such and communicate back with Him in the same way. The words of God to Adam had very specific meaning.

Satan deceived Eve by obscuring the meaning of specific words of God. Satan's ploy is still the same; to get us away from the meaning of the Word of God into a discussion of concepts and contextualization, "Has God said...?" is still his most successful tool against the Christian. Thus we often find the statement, "Well that is your interpretation... but has God really said this? Maybe He is saying...." It is very important for us not to confuse the right of interpretation with that of definition. We should always try to interpret God's Word to the best of our ability, when it is not clearly understood. But, in so doing, we are not free to define what words mean.

Interpretation is subject to definition. Before we are free to ask, "What is your interpretation of this verse?" we must first ask, "What are the definitions of the key words in this verse?" The interpretation of a verse can neither add to nor take away from the definition of the key words in the verse. Words have meaning. The meaning of the word is found in its definition. Therefore, definition precedes interpretation and interpretation is subject to definition. Words have meaning.

Words have specific definitions. We cannot redefine adultery as having a love affair with another woman, thereby freeing ourselves to be sexually promiscuous as long as we do not "love" her. The injunction, "You shall not commit adultery" means a married man may not have sexual intimacy with another woman. A man is not free to say, "Well, that is your interpretation of that verse. What I feel it means is that you should not love another woman. If you are on a business trip and are experiencing natural physical urges, it is all right to relieve those urges with the use of an escort service as long as it does not mean anything, as long as your heart is not unfaithful."

That statement goes beyond interpretation to definition. We are not free to redefine the word adultery to suit our needs. We are subject to the word and its definition. Adultery means any type of sexual intimacy with a woman other than your wife, and it is sin. In

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*"Hell is so hard to understand and so troubling, when I come across it in the Word of God I just skip over it. I figure it is the absence of God, you know, being really lonely, and besides, I don't really think God will keep people there forever. Can you really imagine it going on for a million years without God letting them out? I just don't like to think about it."*

Comment in Bible study

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*"The word 'rod' does not have to connote spanking a child. The rod was also a shepherd's tool to Gently guide the sheep where they are meant to go. A good shepherd would never beat his little lambs and we should not beat our children. The Bible says, 'Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me' in the Shepherd's Psalm. Any application by us of the word 'rod' must be in the context of gently comforting and directing our children like little lambs of God."*

Parent in question-and-answer time during seminar.

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most of my discussions with people concerning Family Discipleship, what the Word of God has to say about the role of the wife in the home, the use of the rod in disciplining and the role of the father in the spiritual leadership of the family, in most discussions, where the word interpretation is used, the word definition is the real issue. When we say that the word “rod” in the phrase “you shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol” can be interpreted as “time out,” we are dealing with the definitions, not interpretation. If the word “rod” has a definition, which it does, we are not free to interpret it outside of the definition of the word. Words have meaning, and interpretation both follows and is subject to definition. The words here have specific meaning and we are not free to redefine these words.

Definition subjugates us to the Word of God, while interpretation subjugates the word of God to man. Definition lends itself to specific truth, while interpretation lends itself to generalized truth. Definition emphasizes the Word of God, while interpretation emphasizes generalized concepts and applications of man.

This is especially true when discussing issues of Family Discipleship. I find many couples who, when faced with the Word of God as it pertains to spanking, or the roles of the husband and wife in the home, or the father's role in the spiritual training of children, prefer to either not think about the passages or to redefine the terms. It is important, therefore, before we get into this study, to all agree that if the Word of God says something, we will all agree that that is what the Word of God says.

## B. THE RULE OF FIRST MEANING

The rule of first meaning is very important. This rule states that the first clear meaning of the passage is the one that takes precedence over our own feelings of propriety. Thus we cannot take the passage where Jesus tells His disciples to “Let the little children come unto me” and, because of our own distaste for the exclusive claims of Christ concerning salvation, interpret this passage which is talking about children coming to Him to mean instead that all religions are of equal value. Similarly, we cannot take a passage where Jesus is assuring His disciples that even though the masses are believing in Him, there are plenty of room for everybody, to mean that all religions are equal. Especially since, in the same paragraph, He makes the exact opposite claim. Again, because of distaste on our part for spanking, we cannot reinterpret the clear

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*“Sure that’s your interpretation of the Word of God, that’s not my interpretation. You have your reality and I have mine. I just don’t happen to read the Word of God like you do. I feel it is a much broader book and leaves open the possibility of all good people going to heaven whether they are Christians or not. I mean after all, doesn’t Jesus say, ‘Let the little children come unto me?’”*

Unitarian Pastor

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*“I don’t ‘spank.’ I don’t feel like the verses that talk about the ‘rod’ are really talking about the rod, I think they are talking about the principle of correcting a child. My daughter, when corrected, will always cry, so I don’t have to use the rod. The issue is crying and repenting, not the rod. The verse in Prv 13:24 which says, ‘He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently,’ is really talking about the principle of discipline. Where we read ‘rod,’ it is perfectly acceptable to read ‘discipline of any form’ and the verse can be read as ‘He who spares discipline of what ever kind is best for his son, hates his son.’”*

Missionary discussing my  
Family Discipleship Seminar  
during coffee break.

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*On the wall of the high school English class was a poster of clouds and on each cloud was a different castle. The castles were all of differing styles and designs, each one unique. On each castle was a different religious symbol. On one the Christian cross, on another the Islamic crescent, on another the Jewish Star of David and so on. Underneath was the quote, “In my Fathers house there are many mansions.” with the inscription JESUS.*

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meaning of a passage to mean something else. After the first meaning rule is applied, it is perfectly acceptable to look “deeper” for additional principles or devotional thoughts, but these do not supplant the first-meaning rule. What the Word of God says, it means. Remember: we are to be judged by the Word of God, the Word of God is not to be judged by us.

## C. THE RULE OF THE CLEAR VS. THE OBSCURE

The rule of the clear versus the obscure is simple. We understand that which is obscure in the Word of God by interpreting it according to that which is clear. We don't take the fifty or so verses on a subject that are perfectly clear and cast them aside because of one verse that we think maybe says something else. We are not free to interpret a difficult passage in such a way as to contradict clear teachings found in other passages in the Word of God.

God has said in Dt 29:29 that “the secret things belong to God but the things revealed belong to man and all his generations.” There are secret things that we just do not understand. Many times we are left with what a passage doesn't mean, not what it does.

Take the passage on angels and entertaining them unaware. From this passage we know that when we do it, we will be “unaware”; thus, the first meaning rule means we will not know it. That brings into question the whole angel quest.

Then we box this in with verses speaking of stewardship, discretion, financial responsibility, responsibility to home and family, and although we may never understand the full implications of this verse, we can limit what we do not understand with what we do. The same can be said to the doctor concerning the life of Hosea. Are we to throw out the abundance of clear injunctions of marriage, purity, and Christian oneness on the basis of God's difficult instructions to one man? I don't think so. We may never fully understand what God is saying to Hosea. The first meaning rule lends no clarity. We genuinely do not understand; thus, we guide our thoughts with what we do know in terms of what the Word of God clearly teaches on an area. The clear vs. obscure rule does not allow us to brainstorm about a Bible verse as if our thoughts were equal to God's. It requires us to go to the Word of God to understand the Word of God.

This is equally true in pursuing the mind of God in the area of Family Discipleship. If we read a passage that says, “He who spares his rod hates his son but he who disciplines him diligently loves him.” We must be willing to ask ourselves what the passage means according to the rule of the clear vs. the obscure? What is the first meaning of this passage? What is it clearly saying?

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*“I once tried reading the Bible through, but there were so many things I didn't understand that I just quit.”*

Businessman in our first one-on-one discipleship time.

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*“I am on an angel hunt. If anyone asks me for anything I always give it to them and then try to figure out if they are angels or not. After all the Word of God says we might be ministering to angels ‘unaware’.”*

University Student in Bible Study

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*“If we are just to marry Christians then why did God have Hosea marry a prostitute?”*

Christian Doctor contemplating his second marriage.

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## D. THE RULE OF SUBJECTION

By the rule of subjection we mean that God's Word is authoritative and absolute. It is not subject to any authority other than itself. It reigns supreme over any personal experience. The Word of God says in Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This last phrase, "and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." is a key rule of Scripture. When reading the Word of God, the Word of God judges us—we do not judge it. The Word of God judges our thoughts, we do not judge its thoughts; the Word of God judges our intentions, we do not judge its intentions; the Word of God judges our heart, we do not judge the heart of the Word of God. This must be nailed down.

### 1. MAN'S EXPERIENCE IS SUBJECTED TO SCRIPTURE

I don't know how many times I have heard this said, "I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!" I used to keep track, for the sake of illustrations, of the different situations in which this statement was made to justify disobedience to the Word of God, but my file became so thick I simply abandoned it. This is the supreme biblical-interpretation law of the land whenever an action needs to be justified. Be it the Holy Spirit, spanking, principles of financial management, rejection of Scripture memory, rejection of personal evangelism, or personal purity. For some reason, Christians seem to think that their personal experience justifies just about any teaching or action under the sun.

The only statement that comes even as close to "I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced." in terms of authority in the modern evangelical movement is its sister statement which is basically the same thing only in the negative—"I tried it but it doesn't work!"

Again, for some reason, the whole of Christendom seems to think that the truths in the Word of God are meant to be tested by man before they can be fully accepted. The truths of Scripture are like items on a buffet table. We sample this and that, rejecting one and accepting the other based on how they affect us. By our experience, the Word of God is proved to be worthy or unworthy of our consideration. Our experience defines the applicability of the Word of God to our particular circumstances.

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*"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"*

Woman in Doctrine of the Holy Spirit study

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*"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"*

Man explaining extramarital affair that led to divorce and a second and much happier marriage.

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*"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"*

Businessman I was witnessing to on plane explaining to me his conversion to Mormonism.

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*"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"*

Christian businessman who has rejected religious training for his children based on his own experience in a strict parochial school and subsequent rebellion as a teen.

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*"I don't know what the Word of God says, but I know what I experienced!"*

Campus minister explaining his rejection of the biblical injunctions on the rod in child raising for those of modern psychology.

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In 2 Cor 5:7 the Word of God states, "for we walk by faith, not by sight..." This means that...

1. If we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.
2. If we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.
3. Our decisions in life are not based on personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word that is subject to no other authority.

As such, we submit our life's experience to the Word of God and then evaluate it as good or bad, as from God or not from God, as righteous or sinful, as worthy of consideration or unworthy by what the Word of God says and not by what we experience.

In this value system, if we experience or perceive yes, yet God's Word says no, then we deem no to be true. If we experience or perceive no, and God's Word says yes, then we deem yes to be true. In other words, if Christ says yes, He is returning soon, yet we perceive that He is not returning soon, and then we reject our framework of perception and experience and accept God's Word as true. God has said yes, He is coming quickly, and we deem that to be true.

By contrast, if God says no, "you shall not commit adultery," yet we experience the desire for an adulterous relationship as good, as something that can be done without sacrificing our position in society or the Church, as something that will by our perception, improve our life, we still do not do this thing. We regard it as sin. God has said no, and even though we perceive it as having been beneficial for others, even though we may have experienced it as beneficial, we reject both perception and experience and cling to God's Holy Word. We subject all values and all experiences to the Word of God.

This is very important as it concerns the biblical principles of Family Discipleship. In the evangelical community you will come across a thousand and one horror stories which supposedly substantiate the rejection of certain biblical teachings on discipline on the basis of the narrator's first-, second-, and often, third-hand experience. "If you follow the Word of God strictly in this area, you sure are going to be sorry because..." and then the historical revelation begins as they relate to you the well-worn horror stories of rebellious preachers' kids, wayward missionary children, impish deacon daughters, the Sunday school teacher whose child was seen at the after-game beer bust, and the list goes on.

We, as parents, have to accept the authority of the Word of God in our lives in terms of obedience to God and accept equally that our children must also choose whether or not to obey both God and us. Our children's decisions in this area do not determine ours. We must obey God in the area of what the Word of God says about Family Discipleship whether or not our children choose to. A child's behavior no more validates the Word of God than it validates your role as parents. A parent is judged by the Word of God, on his or her submission to the Word of God. Results do not validate doctrine.

My parents were both alcoholics and all three children went in to full-time Christian service. Were you to adapt a methodological approach to Family Discipleship, you would

*"I tried it but it doesn't work!"*

Woman concerning Scripture memory

*"I tried it but it doesn't work!"*

Businessman concerning personal evangelism

*"I tried it but it doesn't work!"*

Pastor's wife concerning prayer

*"I tried it but it doesn't work!"*

Staff wife concerning spanking

conclude that being a drop-dead drunk, abusive, negligent nonresident parent, and hosting drunken parties on a regular basis was the key to insuring your children grew up to be strong Christian leaders in the Church. Similarly I have friends who did everything right but when their children became old enough to make decisions for themselves some chose to rebel and not follow God. Will you say then that if you want to have rebellious children bring them up in the church, and if you want to have spiritual children bring them up with drunks?

All things are subject to the Word of God in child raising. No one's experience supersedes it, not mine, not yours and not the person who warns you against following the Word of God on any area based on experiences—and that includes biblical principles of Family Discipleship.

If our experience or perception creates in us a prejudice against the strict application of the Word of God to our lives and families, we subject ourselves to the Word of God and not vice versa.

## 2. CULTURE IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE

Each of these statements has been made to the author at one time or another. Each is equally false. The problem with subjecting Scripture to culture is that it opens up a Pandora's box of doctrinal heresy. The well-meaning ministers who made the first three statements were doing so on the basis of a strong doctrinal belief in the blood sacrifice of Jesus for the remission of sins. They could pass any inquiry on the Reformation doctrines of faith. They were just embarrassed at some of the social injunctions of Scripture and could see no harm in adjusting them to make them more palatable to their congregations or ministries. What they did not realize is that the same appeal to culture that can set aside the role of women in the home and church, or the injunction concerning the physical discipline of children,

can just as easily be used to set aside the blood of Christ from Scripture. There is no basic difference in the first three arguments from the last. All four appeal to culture as the defining point of Scripture. What in the first generation is a simple deviation from Scripture, quickly degenerates in the next two or three spiritual generations. Where the first had a strong feeling of biblical authority and just wanted to make some adjustments, the subsequent generations will come up, not making adjustments on the basis of strong biblical authority, but rather with a worldview that Scripture is subject to culture. If so in one area, why not another?

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*It is true that the Bible says that wives are to be subject to their husbands, but that was another era, another time. Nowadays women are educated and can function on their own. They do not, and should not live in subjection to their husbands.*

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*It is true that the Bible says that women should not teach or exercise authority over men, but that was in another time and era. Women back then were not educated; they were illiterate and protected from the world. The Bible was justified in its prohibition. But we live in another age now. Women are the intellectual and social equals of men and should be able to teach and hold positions of authority in the church.*

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*It is true that the Bible says that we should beat our children with the rod. But that was a different time, a more primitive time, a violent time. People did not know better. The science in all fields, not just psychology, but medicine, astronomy, in all fields was extremely limited and people did the best they could. Today, in our modern culture, we have many insights into science that our forefathers did not have. One of these areas is the psychology of child raising. We have learned that in a more progressive, civilized culture, it is just not necessary to beat children.*

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People often make the mistake of viewing culture as neutral. This is not true. Culture is made up of the sum total of the people or group, which it encompasses. The Bible says in Rom 3:12 "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." Astronomy is the study of stars; this is morally neutral. Geology is the study of rocks; this is morally neutral. Chemistry is the study of the elements; this is morally neutral. Culture, however, is made up not of elements, but rather of people. It exists only on the basis of the beliefs and actions of people, who are fallen and sinful. It is not morally neutral, but depraved.

Remember, the Bible makes three important claims about itself:

1. It is eternal. It transcends both time and culture: 1 Pt 1:25, "*But the word of the Lord abides forever. And this is the word which was preached to you.*"
2. It is authoritative. We do not judge the Word of God; the Word of God judges our thoughts and intentions: Heb 4:12, "*For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*"
3. It is of value in all areas of life, being inspired in every area, including science and history: 2 Ti 3:16, "*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...*"

As such, the Word of God has total authority over Scripture. It transcends both time and culture. It is equally applicable to the semi-literate Hebrew fisherman and the business executive in New York City, to the tribal herdsman in Yemen and the Ph.D. in psychology at Cambridge, to the subsistence farmer in Guatemala and the anthropologist at Yale or Harvard. When there is conflict, culture is wrong, Scripture is right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority and is redeemed by Scripture.

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*It is true that the Bible says that Jesus' blood paid for our sins. But that was a different time, a more primitive and violent time. People were used to blood. The Romans practiced public animal sacrifice; the Greeks did the same; the Jews were all too familiar with the practice. Public executions of men, bloody events from the Temple to the market place were common. Today, however, modern man in his modern culture cannot relate to blood. Food in the market is prepared blood-free and given to us in a sanitized form. Public executions are banned and the executions themselves are bloodless. Animal sacrifice is unheard of and there is no public butchering of animals. We live in a bloodless culture and as a result the blood of Christ is no longer relevant.*

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### 3. FEELINGS ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE

Our feelings are subject to Scripture. When our feelings collide with Scripture then our feelings are judged to be wrong, not the Word of God. The way we can tell if feelings are right or not is to subject them to the harsh light of Scripture. If we

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*I don't know... I just can't accept it. It grates against all my emotions. How could a loving God send anyone to Hell?*

*It grates against all my emotions. How could a loving God command that women, children and even animals be slaughtered in His name?*

*I don't know; I just can't accept it; it grates against all my emotions. How can I spank my child? It just doesn't feel right.*

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read a passage and it feels like God is in the wrong on an area, then that is an area of repentance and submission in our lives. The Word of God says clearly in Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God judges our feelings and not vice

versa. When we question God, it is important that this question should be informative in nature and not one which questions His moral integrity and will. The question “Why” can be an act of submission or rebellion, depending on how it is asked. It can be a request for further information to insure more complete submission or it can be a response of rebellion, bringing into question the moral fiber of the authority. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, they are wrong and the Word of God is right.

#### 4. MINISTRY SUCCESS IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (MINISTRY SUCCESS AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Samson principle. In Samson we had a man of terrible character performing great works of God. We praise God for working through Samson, but we submit his lifestyle to the Word of God for scrutiny before emulating it.

It is true that a rebellious adult child does not invalidate the scriptural injunctions of the family. It is also true that a successful ministry does not free us from obedience to any passage of Scripture. I always respond with pity towards adults who, as children, chose to rebel against their scriptural upbringing. What opportunities and joys were lost by this fateful decision? I must confess, though, that I tend to respond with more anger than pity toward successful ministers who choose to neglect their responsibility toward their children and family for the glory of the ministry. What chance did these kids have? Of all kids, theirs should have had the brightest future and yet now they are angry and resentful at both God and man. They of all people have reason for resentment, if indeed any do.

An elderly missionary friend of mine recounts an experience he had. One of the great Bible teachers and ministers of his generation had died. There was a beautiful funeral with the masses in attendance. Later, missing the man's three boys, he returned to the gravesite, where they were urinating on his grave, thinking no one was around. They recounted in tears the neglect, the anger, the abuse and the fear that terrorized their home and family while this great man was alive. They felt nothing but relief. A successful ministry does not justify a lifestyle. It does not justify doctrines of the Holy Spirit, and it does not justify principles of family discipleship. Only the Word of God does, and it is our only authority.

In the same vein, I have known men who gave themselves to their jobs or ministries, neglecting both wife and

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*“No one ever thought of questioning his life or his ministry methods. I mean, he had one of the most successful community ministries in the U.S. Who would think of arguing with that kind of success?”*

Supervisor explaining why a staff member was able to go so long in marital infidelity and financial mismanagement without being caught.

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*“He had one of the greatest teaching ministries going. No one ever questioned his family. Sure there were indications, but God was blessing his ministry so greatly. How could a man with a ministry like that possibly be out of God's will? It was only later that we realized all of the biblical principles in his life that were being overlooked or violated for the sake of the ministry.”*

Missionary staff supervisor explaining why a missionary on his team was allowed to get to the point where his child attempted suicide and his wife left him

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*“It is often necessary for us as ministers to lay our families on the altar for the ministry.”*

National leader and speaker to young staff

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children. The wife remained faithful and the children, though out of control in their early years, turned to God later in life. These men justify their actions by the fact that they have loving wives and children who love God and are active in the faith. They will give an account to God on the basis of their conformity to the Word of God as fathers and husbands, not their wives and children's conformity to the Word of God despite their neglect. They will give an account to God for their own actions.

You do not put obedience on the altar for God. This may seem absurd but it is a frequently taught doctrine at pastor and staff conference. Time and again we, as ministers, are exhorted to put obedience to God on the altar. To bring this point home I often take pastors and staff to 1 Ti 3:1-7, in which the biblical standards of leadership are laid out in the Bible. I then present the staff with the following scenarios:

A pastor says to you, "I know verse 2 states that a pastor should be the *'husband of one wife'* but there are so many needy women in my church, I just had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

"I know verse 3 says that a pastor should not be *'addicted to wine'* but there are just so many pressures in the ministry I had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

"I know verse 3 says a pastor should be *'free from the love of money'* but there are just so many opportunities for the use of money in the ministry that I had to put this on the altar for God?" What would you say?

"I know verse 4 and 5 says, *'He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)'* but there are just so many needs. God's call was so compelling. The ministry I was called to required such sacrifice, that I had to put this on the altar for God." What would you say?

In God's eyes none of these designs is acceptable. You do not put obedience on the altar. You put self on the altar for the sake of obedience, not vice versa. You do not sacrifice others, you sacrifice yourself. "John, there are great needs on the mission field, so I am going to sell your car and give the money to foreign missions!" I don't think so. "Honey, there are so many needs in the ministry. I am going to have you and the kids make the sacrifice for my ministry." I don't think so.

You, as the minister, sacrifice. You sacrifice your ego. You sacrifice the praise. You sacrifice the organizational standing. You place *yourself* on the altar and obey God. If, in the context of obeying God, you can have the ministry size, the organizational standing, the praise, that is well and good. It is from God. If not, you die to this and place yourself on the altar and fulfill your responsibility to God in the area of the family. You *obey* God. You do not put obedience to God on the altar.

Pastor, staff person, executive of Christian organization, missionary, you could have chosen to remain celibate. You could have chosen to give yourself totally to the

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*"I had just been asked to join the team as a staff supervisor. It was a great compliment. I was a little anxious, as it would require me to be on the road and away from home about 25% of the time. At the first meeting the team of supervisors met for prayer. These men were all ten to twenty years older than I was. The first began to share the grief he was experiencing in his family. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he shared how the years of neglect of family for the ministry were now bearing fruit. The next man began to share along the same vein. Tears formed in his eyes also and rolled down his cheeks. One by one, each man went around and shared the same story of years of placing the family on the altar for God and how it was now bearing fruit in their marriages and in their families. At the end of the prayer time I handed in my resignation as a staff supervisor and went home to my wife and children. The man who took my place now has the same testimony as the others."*

The Author

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ministry—unencumbered by wife and children—but you did not do that. If you had, your wife no doubt would have married some fine Christian gentleman who considered both her and the children a blessing and would have been committed to fulfilling the biblical injunctions to the family in obedience to God. But you asked her to marry you. You gave her children to bear. Now, God looks to you to fulfill your responsibility for these designs that you made. You do not go to God and say, “Here, you can have them back, I put them on the altar.” No, that is an area of obedience that God requires of you. You do not put obedience on the altar.

## 5. MIRACLES ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (MIRACLES AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Moses Principle. Moses did great signs and wonders, but the Pharaoh was deceived because he fixed his mind on these and not the Word of God. Thus, he did not believe Moses or obey God when his magicians were able to do the same thing. Moses was a man of

miracles, but what made him a man of God was not the miracles, but the fact that he both taught and obeyed the Word of God. Miracles were purely secondary. They occur throughout the Bible. Sometimes miracles are performed by God, sometimes by Satan, sometimes by angels, sometimes by demons, some times by men of God, and sometimes by servants of the devil. We will want to subject all miracles to the Word of God, not blindly accredit them to God. When a miracle happens, all you can say is that a miracle has happened. It is later, as the Word of God is applied, that the miracle is truly understood.

The simple rule of thumb here is to remember that if a miracle or spiritual occurrence takes place, that is all that can be said about it. A miracle or spiritual occurrence has taken place. All else is subject to the Word of God.

It is true that great prophets such as Moses did miracles such as turning a rod into a snake and it is equally true that the pagan Egyptian priests did the exact same miracles. It is true that in Acts 2:22, the ministry of Jesus is described as one characterized by “signs and wonders” and that in Acts 5:12 the ministry of the Apostles is characterized by the same “signs and wonders,” yet it is equally true that in 2 Thes 2:9, the anti Christ will be characterized by “signs and wonders,” and that in Mk 13:22 “signs and wonders” will lead many astray from the gospel of Christ. Keep in mind that two things were said about John the Baptist in the Scriptures; first, he was the greatest prophet ever to live; second, he did no miracles.

In fact Jesus Christ Himself rebukes the desire for “signs and wonders.” In Jn 4:48, Jesus condemns the people's dependence on signs and wonders saying, “*Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe.*” Going even further in Lk 11:29 in speaking of the desire to see signs as authoritative indication of the work of God, Jesus says, “*This Generation is a wicked Generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah.*”

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*“Don’t try to tell me this is not from God. I saw him heal her with my own eyes.”*

Pastor in discussion with me on the doctrinal improprieties of a visiting evangelist.

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*“Don’t try to tell me this is not from God. I saw him heal her with my own eyes.”*

Indian student in discussion of the spiritual value of Hinduism vs. Christianity in defense of his Hindu Holy Man.

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The Word of God is clear. It alone is the authoritative Word of God. Signs and wonders are just that, signs and wonders. This is true whether the miracles are events, such as healings or holistic, such as success in growing a church, starting a television ministry or leading an evangelistic campaign. They do not validate or invalidate the teaching accompanying them. The Word of God does this. A man's ability to do miracles or to maintain a miraculous ministry does not mean his philosophy of child raising and his teachings on Family Discipleship are from God. The Word of God is the test and the rule. The simple request of "Chapter and Verse, please" and then a thoughtful consideration of the Word of God will tell you all you need to know concerning the man and his teachings. Miracles and miraculous ministries, in and of themselves, are not conclusive. Only the Word of God is conclusive.

## 6. PRAISE IS SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (PRAISE AND SCRIPTURE)

I call this the David Principle. David wrote wonderful Psalms of Praise and gave us the most praise-filled book of the Bible. Yet, his life was also characterized

by adultery, murder, and failure to order his family, discipline his children and raise them by scriptural guidelines. True, David was a man of praise and a man after God's own heart, but we will want to subject his family values to the Word of God before emulating them.

*Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;*" and as a result any one who confesses Christ is deemed of God and his teachings of God. The problem with this is that the first passage is dealing with the testing of faith not praise, and the latter passage is talking about the confession of Christ as the Messiah in terms of personal salvation and discipleship, not just the mere words.

We know this because words to God always come cheap from both men and demons. Consider the following praises and confessions, their origins and whether you would like to submit unreservedly to the teachings of those from which they emerge.

Mt 7:22-23 *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"*

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*"Of course it is from God. He praises God, he gives God the credit, it could not be of Satan and be able to do that could he?"*  
Christian businessman in discussion of pastor with questionable doctrinal teachings concerning Christ and the Word of God.

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*The Word of God says in 1 Pt 1:7 "that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" This verse is often used to argue that if a man is praising God then that is the proof of his faith. That he is of God or he could not praise Him. Again, in 1 Jn 4:2 the Word of God says, "By this you know the "Whenever I go to spank my son he begins singing praise songs he has learned at church. I know that no one of Satan can sing praise songs and rejoice that the Holy Spirit is doing the work in his life, so I don't have to spank him. You don't want me to interrupt his praise songs to spank him do you? I figure he is in a state of grace at that point."*

Mother excitedly explains to me during question and answer session of the seminar her joy in not having to spank her child because of the Holy Spirit's intervention.

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Mk 1:23, 24 "And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, 'What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? **I know who You are—the Holy One of God!**'"

Mk 3:11 "And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, '**You are the Son of God!**'"

Mk 5:7,8 "And crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What do I have to do with You, Jesus, **Son of the Most High God?** I implore You by God, do not torment me!' For He had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'"

Acts 16:16,17 "And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, '**These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation.**'"

As you can see all sorts of miracles, wonders and confessions of faith can be made not just from carnal Christians and non-Christians, but also from the demons themselves. A praise service or the words "praise God" do not justify everything that is taught prior to the confession or following it. Instead, every teaching, every theology, every philosophy, every act must be subject to the Word of God.

## 7. GIFTS ARE SUBJECT TO SCRIPTURE (GIFTS AND SCRIPTURE)

I call this the Corinthian Principle. The Church at Corinth was a highly gifted church: tongues, miracles—all the big ones in the world's eyes were there. Yet a careful reading of the church and family life of the Church at Corinth shows it to be bankrupt in terms of God's design. I praise God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit manifested by the Church at Corinth, but you will not want to shape your family values by what you see in this Church. You will want to scrutinize them carefully by the Word of God.

A gift of the Holy Spirit is by nature a gift. It is not given on the basis of merit. Otherwise it would be called a reward of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are replete with gifted men of bankrupt families. Neither their gifts nor their callings freed them from the scriptural injunctions concerning the family, nor did they free them from the tragic results of ignoring these injunctions.

Gn 34:5 "Now Jacob heard that [Shechem] had defiled Dinah, his daughter; but his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob kept silent until they came in."

Gn 34:25 "Now it came about on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male."

Gn 34:30 "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me, by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the

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"Their church manifests all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I don't see even half of them at work in yours. That in itself is all I need to see to tell me who is right and wrong on this issue."

Campus minister discussing a principle of ministry.

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"I don't care what they teach, if they can heal my son, that's all I care about".

Mother and fellow teacher, discussing the doctrinal teachings of a traveling evangelist

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*Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I shall be destroyed, I and my household."*

Gn 34:31 *"But they said, 'Should he treat our sister as a harlot?'*

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1 Sm 2:12 *"Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the Lord."*

1 Sm 2:25 *"If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the Lord desired to put them to death."*

1 Sm 3:13 *"For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them."*

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1 Sm 8:3 *"His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice."*

1 Sm 8:4 *"Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah."*

1 Sm 8:5 *"And they said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.'"*

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2 Sm 13:20 *"Then Absalom her brother said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart.' So Tamar remained and was desolate in her brother Absalom's house."*

2 Sm 13:21 *"Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry."*

2 Sm 13:22 *"But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar."*

Men with gifts are gifted men but their lives and family values must still be scrutinized by the Word of God not by their gifts. The Word of God is supreme over any gift. This is especially true since spiritual deception is most easily accomplished in the spiritual realm, one in which we are least at home. When a man is justifying his family on the basis of his gifts and callings, always, always, always ask, "Chapter and verse, please."

## E. THE RULE OF THE TOTAL MIND/ REVELATION OF GOD

This rule is a new one, brought on by the proliferation of Bible study programs via computer. It is easy for us to think we have the whole mind of God on a topic if we have a printout in front of us with all verses involved. Unfortunately, for this method at least, the Bible is not written topically. There are doctrinal concepts at play that must also be mastered. The concepts of Grace, Mercy, Sufficiency of Christ, Faith, and Works all come into play. As with the above illustration, the student can easily fall into error. He must be willing to spend the time to master the subject from the Word of God, rather than give it a cursory approach based on a few

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*"I wanted to find out what God has to say about the issue of baptism and how it relates to salvation. I punched in 'Baptist, baptism, baptize and baptized' in my computer and printed out all the verses. I feel like I now can say with confidence that baptism and salvation are inseparably linked."*

Businessman sharing with me his revelations from Bible study by computer.

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basic words. The computer sheet is a starting point, but it cannot be separated from a lifetime commitment of study, reading and mastering the total mind of God on a subject.

To find out what the Bible says on child raising, you will have to do more than look up all the verses that have the words “child, children, son or daughter” in them. In an age of instant information, it is important for us to be willing to give both time and effort to mastering a subject from the Scriptures.

## F. RULES OF STATED AUTHORITY

### 1. STATED TRUTH VS. IMPLIED TRUTH

In our understanding of Scripture it is important not to speak with authority where the Bible does not, even though the implication seems to be there. An example of this is the truth found in I Jn 4:16 where the Word of God states, “*And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*” In this passage, the phrase “*God is love*” can be found. This is true; however, it does not mean, “*love is God.*” This second statement is not presented by Scripture and therefore cannot be concluded, even if it seems to be implied by the Word of God.

Another example of this is found in Eph 5:22 where the Word of God states, “*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” During my college days, many zealous young men took this one step beyond the stated Scripture. They deduced that since wives were to be subject to their husbands, then women in the ministry should be subject to men. The Bible however does not say this. Simply because you feel it is implied, does not give you the authority to state it as biblical truth.

A third example can be found in Heb 1:14, where the Word of God states concerning angels, “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*” It is true that angels serve as ministering spirits—it is not true that we should pray to angels to care for us and for our loved ones. This second conclusion cannot be made simply by implication; it must be made by stated revelation.

I have encountered each of these situations in the course of my ministry. In each case the individual or individuals involved were shocked that I would question the authority of their implications as not equal to that of Scripture. Our own conclusions, our own opinions, are not the same as stated revelation. It is very important to let the Word of God begin and end exactly where it begins and ends. It does so for a divine purpose. To take it further always entails some error or problem that we, in our finite minds, cannot at the time fathom, but God in His infinite wisdom has discerned and therefore not stated. Remember the difference between your word and God’s Word *is* the difference between your word and God’s Word.

### 2. TRUTH BY STATEMENT VS. OMISSION

In a similar vein, the fact that the Bible does not speak to an issue does not mean that God has forbidden it, or that the event did not occur. The Bible is silent on many historical issues. One reason for this is given in Jn 21:25 where the Word of God states, “*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world*

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*“Since musical instruments are not mentioned by Christ, nor found to be used in the book of Acts, nor mentioned in any teaching of the Apostles in the New Testament, we reject them for use in the Church.”*

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Church of Christ Minister

itself would not contain the books which were written.” The reason being the sheer crushing volume of the weight of information.

If every detail of information was given us, can you imagine how lost we would be in our search to know God? In His infinite wisdom and according to His divine will and perfect plan, God has given us exactly the amount of information needed for us to know Him, and to be equipped for every good work. Now after this last statement, a good Navigator would say, “Where does the Bible say that?” To which a good Navigator would respond, “In Jn 20:31, the Word of God states, *‘but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.’* And from this we know that the Word of God is written that we might know Him. In 2 Ti 3:17, the Word of God says concerning itself, *‘that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.’* And from this we know that it was given to equip us for every good work.”

In the first example, it is true that musical instruments are not mentioned in the New Testament. This does not mean they were not used, nor does it mean they are forbidden. Christian books are not mentioned in the New Testament. Sunday Schools and Educational wings on churches are not mentioned. Sunday school manuals are not mentioned, to name but a few. Simply because these things are not stated does not mean they were not used or were forbidden. It is true that you cannot command them, but it is equally true that you cannot forbid them.

This is true of the second example as well. We cannot say that since eating meat was not mentioned in the days of Adam, that Adam did not eat meat. We must not fall into the humanist view of a hierarchy of life: microscopic, plant, insect, and animal. There are two classifications of life: human, and all other. To kill and eat a microbe, to kill a plant, to kill an insect or to kill an animal are all the same in God's eyes. The Word of God specifically states in Mk 7:19 concerning Christ's statements about food, *“Thus He declared all foods clean.”*

In the last example the author will readily admit that the rod is not mentioned in the disciplining of children in the New Testament. I will go on to point out that any time in the New Testament that discipline is explained, it is explained in the context of physical or corporal discipline. Also, there are no examples of the day-to-day workings of the Christian family life given in the New Testament. If we were to use this line of logic we would not just throw out the baby with the bath water, but brother, sister, Mom and Dad as well.

It is very important for us, when reading Christian books, when listening to sermons, when drawing our own conclusions to think, “Does the Bible really say that, or am I just concluding it?”

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*In the creation account, Adam and Eve were commanded "Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so." (Gn 1:29–30)*

*You will notice that no mention is made of eating animals. From this we may surmise that it was never intended for man to eat animals and that vegetarianism is the original plan of God for mankind."*

University student as to why vegetarianism is the higher dietary plane

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*"Neither the teachings of Christ nor those of the New Testament advocate the Rod. Therefore, spanking or any form of corporal punishment is not something Christians need feel bound to use in raising their children."*

Mother explaining her personal view during coffee break of Family Discipleship Seminar

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### 3. TRUTH: EXPOSITION VS. DECLARATION

This last area is closely related to the other two. We must differentiate between exposition of Scripture and declaration of truth. In exposition of Scripture, the verse is given and then it is restated and developed. In declaration of truth, a statement is simply made without reference to Scripture. A good Navigator, a good disciple, will always have his antennae up and be thinking, where in the Bible does it say that? If given a chance to ask, he will always ask for the chapter and verse. Those not forthcoming, he will remain tentative in his acceptance until the statement is firmly grounded in Scripture.

*"Chapter and verse please..."*

The response to any good Navigator when a spiritual truth or opinion is presented.

### G. THE RULES OF LIMITATIONS

Man chafes against any form of limitation, especially spiritual limitations. He does not like to think that there is anything that he cannot know or understand given the time and opportunity. I am always amazed when I share Christ with non-Christians that they have such strong feelings about a God in whom they do not believe. I don't know how many times I have shared Christ with a non-Christian and he has responded, "A loving God will not send anyone to Hell!" Hey, wait a minute. You don't believe in God. You don't believe in the Bible. You don't believe in heaven or hell, but here you are giving me a theological lesson on the doctrines of the eternity and the nature and character of God. I have seen the same thing with evangelicals. A parent who explains away a wealth of Scripture on the basis of culture or psychology will then quote from the same book or portion of Scripture to defend their view. Hey, wait a minute. I thought this wasn't reliable. I thought this wasn't culturally applicable. Now, here we are quoting it. Man simply hates not to be able to speak with authority on a subject, even when he professes disbelief. He will still turn around and preach from that which he has originally denied.

*"A loving God will not send anyone to Hell!"*

Non-Christian explaining this to me for the zillionth time.

It is important to reconcile ourselves to certain limitations in the Word. If God is silent we must be silent. If God has revealed himself, then we must be consistent in our acceptance of the entire revelation of God. Both the non-Christian and the Christian parent must humble themselves before the Word of God. If it speaks, they must listen. If it is silent, they too must be silent. The Bible reveals several areas of silence.

*"But the Bible says 'Do not provoke your children, that they may not lose heart!'"*

A parent, after rejecting the authority of Scripture in the area of spanking, quoting Scripture to defend his position for not spanking.

### 1. SECRET THINGS

There are certain secret things that we simply are not know. Examples of these include: what God did before creation; why God created; the early years of Jesus; the family lives of the Apostles. All these and more are silent. Much harm can be done in the area of Family Discipleship to bring in tradition, myth and conjecture as to the Old Testaments saints, Jesus' or the Apostle's family experience. Where the Word of God is silent, so too we must be silent.

*"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever."*

Dt 29:29

## 2. HIDDEN THINGS

There are certain things that are higher things, that though revealed, we simply do not understand. Unexplained prophecies, symbols, and parables are all good examples of this. It is fine to ask God why He did something, or said something, but if He is silent in His Word we must learn to say, "God does not say. This is what I think, but God does not say. We just don't really know."

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*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Is 55:8-9

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## 3. THINGS WE ARE TOO SINFUL TO COMPREHEND

These two questions, though worded the exact same way, have opposite unspoken meanings. It happens all the time. In asking God "Why" or "What," it is always important to ask in the right way. One type of why is an accusation against character, sovereignty and will. The same question, asked with a little different tone and inflection is a humble request for information in order to more fully

obey. We must be sure that all our questions are of the latter nature. We must always keep in mind when approaching the Word of God, that we as sinful beings have a moral system and intuition light years away from God's. It is God who defines both sin and righteousness. If it does not seem clear to us, it is our place to make the adjustment to bring our value system in line with God's. From the passages below, it is clear that God is always right and when there is a question of will, we are always wrong.

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*Dn 9:7,14 "Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame,... Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice."*

*Neh 9:33 "However, Thou art just in all that has come upon us; For Thou hast dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly."*

*Rom 9:14 & 20 "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this?' will it?"*

There are some things that we are just too sinful to comprehend. We have to accept them as just and right simply because God did them or said them, without reliance upon our own flawed value system.

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*Spoken: "Why would a loving God have us spank our children?"*

Unspoken: (It is hard for me to understand why a God of love would have us spank our children since we, as His earthly representatives, are to picture Him. Are there any other Scriptures or principles that I am missing in my understanding of this?)

*Spoken: "Why would a loving God have us spank our children!"*

Unspoken: (It is hard for me to understand how a God of love would have us spank our children since we as His earthly representatives are to represent Him. How can He be a loving God and require this of us?)

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#### 4. EXTRA BIBLICAL REVELATION

There is a new fad sweeping Evangelical circles and it is called is called by many names, “after-death experiences”, “word of wisdom,” “visions,” “dreams,” and some forms of “tongues,” but what they all actually are can be summed up in one simple phrase: “Extra-biblical revelation.”

The Bible is clear in Rv 22:18–19 when it states, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” This closes revelation until the return of Christ. The Bible is a finished product, and nothing more will be added or taken away.

What is meant by “Extra-biblical revelation” is three-fold:

First, it applies to any new information concerning spiritual things, be it heaven, hell, the nature of God or any other spiritual issue or teaching not found in the Bible.

This would include: visions in which Jesus is visually seen; after-death experiences where information about Heaven or Hell which is not contained in the Bible is gleaned or seen; information about the passage into Heaven or Hell which is not in the Bible; or any spiritual truth or teaching which is *not a direct quote of Scripture*. All this is extra or new information not found in the Bible. If from God, we would need to add this to our Bibles as new revelation. The person with this knowledge would have superior spiritual insight and information, as opposed to those people who only had the Bible.

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*“I was at a meeting of the Gideons and a man stood up and related how he had died and then been brought back to life. He had seen heaven and was able to tell us what it looked like. He saw Jesus, the streets, the mountains, people he knew who had died, his grandmother rocking in her favorite chair and even his little baby who had died a year before. He was the happiest little baby in the entire world. It was wonderful...”*

Christian lawyer relating a recent testimony service at the Gideon camp meeting.

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*“I don’t see what you are making such a stink over. All he was doing was sharing an experience. How do we know he did not in fact go to heaven? The few things that came out in his testimony that are not in the Bible are of no consequence. I doubt seriously if anyone was listening as closely as you were. Chances are they went right past the whole congregation.”*

Pastor in discussion with me after this same man gave his testimony in our church at the invitation of the above lawyer.

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*“If we are going to stay the same age we are now when we die and go to heaven then I don’t want to go there. I thought we were going to get perfect bodies; I don’t want to be stuck for eternity in some old decrepit body. Or what if I die tonight and have to be 14 for eternity? I can’t stand to think about it.”*

The teenage daughter of a deacon in the church where the lawyer’s guest recounted his story. She has refused to go to church or youth meetings since that occurrence.

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*“I have a vision from God to share with you. I had this vision last night. It entailed you, your wife and your family. In it I saw Jesus. He was in heaven. It was all so glorious. I could not sleep and I have come right now to talk with you about it. I believe He has a special message just for you.”*

Wife of staff supervisor to a young staff man at a mission’s conference.

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*“I have never been more confused or fearful than after I heard that so-called vision. I wish I had never listened to that woman.”*

The young staff man in counseling

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Second, this term applies to any statement made directly by God The Father, God The Son or God The Holy Spirit. The definition of inspiration is found in 2 Pt 1:21 *“for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”* Thus, a dream, vision or after-death experience where God talks to them or they overhear a conversation God is carrying on, or any statement that begins with a variation of “God said” is extra-biblical. As such, we reject it. In either case you would need to write it down and staple it in your Bible.

Thirdly, this term would include: any after-death experiences where Jesus or God spoke; any ecstatic speaking in tongues where the person was not doing the speaking, but rather the Holy Spirit speaking through him; any word of wisdom or knowledge that begins, “I have a word from God for you...” or “God says...” any prophetic utterance at the movement of the Holy Spirit which is a revelation from God concerning events. All of these would be new revelation. They would be words from God and need to be added to the Scripture. They would render the one possessing them with superior knowledge of the mind and working of God to those who simply rely upon the Scripture.

Needless to say, this is completely unacceptable. We do not say that these people do not have experiences. We do hold to the scriptural doctrine of the closed nature of the Bible. No new information will be added and none will be taken away. To do either is sin. It is important to ask, when presented with any spiritual truth, “Chapter and Verse please.”

#### IV. CONCLUSION: WHEN GODLY MEN DIFFER

It is important for us to remember that when men differ on issues of spiritual truth, it is not a reflection on God, but on man. It does not bring into question the authority of God's Word, but highlights the sinfulness of man. Even when following these rules, differences will occur. It is important, though, to make sure in our own hearts that these differences are truly differences in interpreting what the Word of God says and not differences based on a misuse of the Word of God. In other words, differences about what the Word of God says, and not differences about what we want the Word of God to say.

Once that has been arrived at, it is perfectly all right to agree to disagree. Tread lightly, knowing that Godly men differ. Accept the fact that there is a degree of error in all of our thinking, and give respect and honor to others, even though we disagree with them. This does not mean for the sake of “getting along,” we do not use the rules of biblical interpretation and do not recognize it when others are not using the rules of interpretation and are misusing the Word of God. It simply means that we recognize that Godly men differ on some issues. Sometimes because of sin, sometimes because of God's silence, and sometimes because the issue is just not that important to God.

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*“Always tread lightly when Godly men differ.”*  
Irma Warr

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*“It really bothers me that sometimes, John, I feel like when I share something with you that you don't agree with, that you listen to what I say, consider the Scripture, and then the best we can come to is to agree to disagree.”*  
Staff Supervisor to author

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## **V. Summary**

- I. The Bible is God's Word, it is the literal Word of God
  - A. Inspired—God Breathed
  - B. Inerrant—without error
  - C. Eternal—God has sovereignly watched over and shepherded it throughout the ages
  - D. Without Contradiction—it is pure and tried by God before delivery to man
  - E. Authoritative—God's Word judges man, man does not judge God's Word
  - F. Spiritual Food—man needs continual nourishment from the whole Word of God, not a simple one-time reading or surface knowledge of the Scripture
- II. There are basic questions we must ask when reading a passage or studying the Bible.
  - A. Doctrine vs. Historical revelation
  - B. New Covenant vs. Old Covenant
  - C. Parables and Symbols, are they explained or not explained
  - D. Prophetic and Hidden things, are they explained or not explained
  - E. A Universal Truth or a Devotional Thought
  - F. Chapter and Verse Please
- III. Basic Rules of Interpreting the Bible
  - A. Rule of Language—The meanings of words in the Bible cannot be avoided or changed to fit our biases; we must come to terms with the meaning of the terms employed by the Holy Spirit.
  - B. Rule of First Meaning—The obvious meaning, rather than inferred or symbolic meanings, is always embraced unless the passage is presented as symbol, parable or prophecy.
  - C. Rule of Clear vs. Obscure—We do not abandon the clear for the obscure. We are sometimes left to tell what the verse does not mean on the basis of the clear, without ever fully understanding what it does mean.
  - D. Rule of Subjugation—All experiences, events and authorities are subject to the authority of the Scripture.
    1. That if we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.
    2. That if we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.
    4. That our decisions in life are not based on majority rule or personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word that is subject to no other authority.
    5. Neither experiences, ministry success, miracles, praise nor gifts substantiate the Word of God. Only the Word of God substantiates itself.
    6. Culture is not neutral. Culture is fallen and sinful. When there is conflict, culture is seen to be wrong. Scripture is seen to be right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority, and is redeemed by Scripture.

7. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, then they are seen to be wrong and the Word of God is judged to be right.
8. As a result, all aspects of life and ministry are subject to Scripture
  - a. Experience is subject to Scripture
  - b. Culture is subject to Scripture
  - c. Feelings are subject to Scripture
  - d. Ministry success is subject to Scripture (Ministry success and the justification of Scripture)
  - e. Miracles are subject to Scripture (Miracles and the justification of Scripture)
  - f. Praise is subject to Scripture (Praise and Scripture)
  - g. Gifts are subject to Scripture (Gifts and Scripture)
- E. Rule of the Total Mind of God—To understand a biblical principal we must seek to find out what the Bible says on it from the entire Word of God, not simply a set group of Scripture or single passage.
- F. Rule of Stated Authority
- G. Rules of Limitations
  1. Secret things—that which God has chosen not to reveal
  2. Higher Things—revelation that is unexplained
  3. Things We Are Too Sinful To Understand—clear revelation that we cannot understand in terms of God's motives or thinking.
  4. Extra-biblical revelation—spiritual experiences that yield knowledge or truths not presented in the Bible are always rejected.

## **Chapter ONE**

### **Post-Study Projects**

#### **Scripture Memory Verse—1 Pt 1:24–25**

**“All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord abides forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you.**

**Last week's verse—I Ti 3:16** “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...”

## QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 THES 2:13

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 THES 4:8

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 2 TM 3:16

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

## QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 2 Pt 1:20,21

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Mt 24:35

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: 1 Pt 1:24, 25

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

I. There are basic questions we must ask when reading a passage or studying the Bible. The following passages are listed in biblical order. As you read the following passages and/or thoughts, place the letter next to the passage to indicate the type of scriptural response that you would give in interpreting it.

(Some passages may need to use more than one letter).

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| A. Narrative                     | G. Old Covenant—in New Testament             |
| B. Doctrine                      | H. Parables and Symbols—explained            |
| C. Historical revelation         | I. Parables and Symbols—not explained        |
| D. New Covenant—in New Testament | J. Prophetic and Hidden things—explained     |
| E. New Covenant—in Old Testament | K. Prophetic and Hidden things—not explained |
| F. Old Covenant—in Old Covenant  |  |

\_\_\_\_\_ Lv 3:1 *Now if his offering is a sacrifice of peace offerings, if he is going to offer out of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without defect before the Lord.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Is 53:6 *All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.*

\_\_\_\_\_ Mt 2:17–18 *Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.”*

\_\_\_\_\_ Mt 13:36–37 *Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He answered and said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man...”*

\_\_\_\_\_ Mk 13:4–5, 32 *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?” And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you... But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”*

\_\_\_\_\_ Lk 11:13 *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*

\_\_\_\_\_ Lk 13:18–19 *Therefore He was saying, “What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches.”*

\_\_\_\_\_ Acts 19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.*

\_\_\_\_\_ 1 Cor 3:16 *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

\_\_\_\_\_ Eph 1:13–14 *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory...*

II. Below are listed a series of statements, each with a supporting Bible verse. As you reflect once more on the list in the above section, how would you respond to each? Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

We are to build churches worthy of the kingdom of God and the tithe is how we are to support such churches. Does not the Bible itself say in Malachi 3:10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."?

**Response:**

In the Bible Moses parted the Red Sea, Joshua parted the Jordan, Elijah parted the Jordan, Elisha parted the Jordan, Jesus walked on water, and then Peter walked on water. If we are truly spiritual, if we have faith, then we will have power over water.

**Response:**

Acts 2:2–4 states "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." All true disciples who want to be used by God will have this same Pentecostal experience.

**Response:**

In Leviticus 11:4–8 the Bible states, "Nevertheless, you are not to eat of these, among those which chew the cud, or among those which divide the hoof: the camel, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you. Likewise, the rock badger, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; the rabbit also, for though it chews cud, it does not divide the hoof, it is unclean to you; and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you. You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you." Which is why, as Christians we should not eat pork.

**Response:**

III. Below are listed the basic Rules of Interpreting the Bible. As you review them, consider the statements listed below and then answer on the basis of one of the rules of interpretation. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

A. **Rule of Language**—The definitions of words in the Bible cannot be avoided or changed to fit our biases. We must come to terms with the definitions of the terms employed by the Holy Spirit.

B. **Rule of First Meaning**—The obvious meaning, rather than inferred or symbolic meaning is always embraced, unless the passage is presented as symbol, parable or prophecy.

C. **Rule of Clear vs. Obscure**—We do not abandon the clear for the obscure. We are sometimes left to tell what the verse does not mean on the basis of the clear, without ever fully understanding what it does mean.

It is true that the Bible says in Proverbs 13:24 “He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.” But the meaning of rod here is symbolic for discipline. This can be inferred as a time out, it can be withdrawal of privileges. The word “rod” here means “discipline.”

**Response:**

The Bible says in Genesis 33:13,14 “But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. “Please let my lord pass on before his servant; and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.” Here the Bible teaches that children are frail, they need special care and should not be spanked.

**Response:**

Although the Bible says in Proverbs 23:13,14 “Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, And deliver his soul from Sheol.” Now the definition of “beat” does not mean to hit, but rather to threaten and the definition of the word “rod” does not mean a stick but rather any form of discipline. Thus when you threaten your child, when you use creative forms of discipline, you help to mold their spiritual character. It does not mean to literally hit your child with a stick.

**Response:**

Another rule of biblical interpretation is the Rule Of Subjugation, review these rules, read the illustration given below and then answer them in light of the rules. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

- D. Rule of Subjugation—All experiences, events and authorities are subject to the authority of the Scripture.
1. That if we experience it as being true, but the Word of God says it is false, then we deem it to be false.
  2. That if we experience it as being false, but the Word of God says it is true, then we deem it to be true.
  3. That our decisions in life are not based on majority rule or personal experience, but on the authority of God's Word, which is subject to no other authority.
  4. Neither experiences, ministry success, miracles, praise or gifts substantiates the Word of God. Only the Word of God substantiates itself.
  5. Culture is not neutral. Culture is fallen and sinful. When there is conflict, culture is seen to be wrong, and Scripture is seen to be right. Culture bows to Scripture as its authority and is redeemed by Scripture.
  6. Our feelings are subject to the Word of God. When they are in conflict with the Word of God, then they are seen to be wrong and the Word of God is judged to be right.
  7. As a result, all aspects of life and ministry are subject to Scripture
    - a. Experience is subject to Scripture
    - b. Culture is subject to Scripture
    - c. Feelings are subject to Scripture
    - d. Ministry success is subject to Scripture (Ministry success and the justification of Scripture)
    - e. Miracles are subject to Scripture (Miracles and the justification of Scripture)
    - f. Praise is subject to Scripture (Praise and Scripture)
    - g. Gifts are subject to Scripture (Gifts and Scripture)

I started out spanking my child but it just did not work. What did work was positive reinforcement. If my child does not want to obey, when I spank him he cries and throws a temper tantrum, but when I promise him candy or something else, he obeys. The key is to just find out what he wants. I feel really bad when I spank my child. God loves us and wants us to be happy. He wants my child to be happy. Something that makes us both feel this bad cannot possibly be God's will. All these verses on spanking are from another time, another culture. In the Old Testament it was a time of violence, they did not have the luxury of knowing then what we do today about the psychology of the child. Our culture is just not one in which spanking works. Besides, I have the gift of mercy and spanking contradicts my spiritual gifts.

**Response:**

Below are listed the last three rules of biblical interpretation. Read the statement below and then answer in regard to these two rules of interpretation. Remember, respond from the study list, not from your own devotional thoughts.

*E. Rule of the Total Mind of God—To understand a biblical principal we must seek to find out what the Bible says on it from the entire Word of God, not simply a set group of Scripture or single passage.*

*F. Rule of Stated Authority*

*G. Rules of Limitations*

- 1. Secret things—that which God has chosen not to reveal*
- 2. Higher Things—revelation that is unexplained*
- 3. Things We Are Too Sinful To Understand—clear revelation that we cannot understand in terms of God's motives or thinking.*
- 4. Extra-biblical revelation—spiritual experiences that yield knowledge or truths not presented in the Bible are always rejected.*

The Bible says in Titus 2:4 “that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,” So you see, we are to love our children, not spank them. Besides, show me one place in the Bible where a child was spanked. Show me where Joseph, Daniel, Samuel, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, or any of the disciples were spanked. As I was praying about this, Jesus appeared to me and said, “Blessed are the children, love them and deal gently with them, I will correct them, lo I will guide them, let them not feel the rod of wrath or the tongue of sorrow.” You can do whatever you want, but I am going to do what Jesus has told me to do. If God wanted us to spank our children, then why did He not give us examples in the book of Acts of children being spanked? Acts is the Acts of the Apostles, if the Apostles don't spank them, neither will I.

**Response:**

# CHAPTER TWO SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR THE DISCIPLINING AND TRAINING OF CHILDREN

- Bible Study: pp. 57– 62
- Lecture: pp. 63– 97
- Summary: pp. 97– 98
- Post Study Projects: pp. 99– 108

## *Scripture Memory Verse: Prov 23:13-14*

*“Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol.”*

## Chapter Two:

# The Scriptural Basis for the Training and Disciplining of Children— Bible Study

*“For no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*  
2 Pt 1:21

## INTRODUCTION:

This study, as does the rest of this workbook, assumes a basic foundational conviction of the divine nature of the Word of God as it pertains to the disciplining and training of children.

First, consider 2 Tm 3:16–17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The key words in this passage are:

**All** *Every word* is inspired by God, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This includes doctrine and history, science, theology, sociology and psychology. In fact, all disciplines are ultimately subject to the Word of God.

## Inspired

The Greek here means “God-breathed.” Not as men whose inspiration came from within, e.g. emotion or intuitive response. Not as men whose inspiration came from without, e.g. beauty, music, the panorama of nature. But rather men whose inspiration came from God, e.g. God’s Holy Spirit moving within them and speaking through them to us. They were not emotionally moved by God, but literally *moved*, used by God.

## Profitable

It has value, use and application to our daily lives. It transcends both time and culture. It is a wise and sure investment. There is not risk in its use and application, or in terms of the outcome. In every area of life, in every area of child-raising, it is “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” God’s inspired Word will be our profit.

And what is the result of this? No less than equipping the man of God for every good work. As a result, this study assumes that the Word of God will make men both adequate and equipped for the parenting of their children.

The second passage of Scripture which will shape our approach to this subject is Heb 4:12— *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

Here we see that the Word of God is both “*living and active.*” It is not a dormant document such as is found in all other literature, but rather it is alive and animate and as such it cuts to the “*division of the soul and spirit,*” judging “*the thoughts and intentions of*

*the heart.*" All that we feel, all that we believe, all that we hold as true must be scrutinized under the piercing light of the Word of God, and in this light budged as to its truth and worth. All principles, theories, and applications are ultimately judged and evaluated by the Word of God.

In light of these scriptural truths we must conclude that where psychology, psychiatry or sociology disputes the Word of God, as it pertains to the raising of our children, the Word of God will be held to be true and all other disciplines to be in error. of course, this will not always be the case. When in direct contradiction to the Word of God, the Word must hold sway over all others.

The fact that we hold the Word of God over secular disciplines should not be seen as an abrogation of thought or responsibility. Many of the secular disciplines have changed and continue to change over the years. What one learned professor lays down as the dogmatic truth today, contradicts what learned men in the past have said and will no doubt be contradicted again in the future, and in some other institution is presently being challenged. A simple stroll through a medical school's historical section will produce many volumes of worthless information which *were* taught as the cutting edge of medicine and psychology. Included in these will be tomes on the care and raising of children. As for the sciences of medicines and psychology, not only is what was written a thousand years ago of no value, but from one decade to another, principles once held dear are found to be untrue and actually harmful. Meanwhile, the Word of God has remained unchanged and is as useful today as it was thousands of years ago.

The following Bible study, lecture and workbook should place you on firm footing as it pertains to the Scriptural basis for the training and disciplining of children.

## Bible Study

***Eph 6:1–4 will be referred to over and over again in the course of this study. As you may recall, interpretation of a verse is subject to the definition of the words in the verse.***

*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*  
Eph 6:1

*A good starting point will be for us to define the key words in this passage. In doing this project, do not rely upon your own opinions or definitions, but use a modern dictionary.*

**Dictionary used:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Children:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Obey:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parents:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Right:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Honor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Father:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Commandment:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Provoke:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Discipline:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Instruction:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Proverbs and Discipline

The following are a list of verses from the book of Proverbs. First read the verse, then write out a devotional thought as it pertains to the disciplining of children.

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Devotional Thought As It Pertains to the Disciplining of Children</i>
<b>Prv 13:24</b>	
<b>Prv 20:30</b>	
<b>Prv 22:15</b>	
<b>Prv 23:13</b>	
<b>Prv 23:14</b>	
<b>Prv 29:15</b>	
<b>Prv 10:1</b>	
<b>Prv 13:1</b>	
<b>Prv 15:5</b>	
<b>Prv 17:25</b>	
<b>Prv 19:18</b>	
<b>Prv 22:6</b>	
<b>Prv 29:17</b>	

*From these passages in Proverbs...*

- A. What did you learn about God's view of the use of the rod or physical discipline?
  
- B. What did you learn about the results of a lack of discipline in children?
  
- C. What did you learn about the positive results of disciplining children?
  
- D. What stood out to you in these passages?

### ***GOD'S Expectations For Us As Parents***

*Read the following passages, and then write out what you feel to be the expectations of God for the parent. (Try to narrow it down to one short phrase.)*

**Passage**

**God's Expectation For You As the Parent**

**Eph 6:4**

**Prv 22:6**

**Prv 23:13**

**I Tm 3:4**

## *God's Example For Us As Parents*

*Read Heb 12:4–11*

- A. Does God discipline His children?
  
- B. What characterizes this discipline (v. 11)?
  
- C. Is this discipline being talked about of a physical nature? (v. 6)
  
- D. What is God's expectation of His earthly fathers and their children in terms of discipline? (v. 7— 10)
  
- E. If earthly fathers do not discipline their children, how will it effect:
  1. the children's understanding of this passage?
  
  2. the child's view of his earthly father in light of this passage?

## *Our Value System*

- A. If you walked into a restroom in a restaurant and saw a man or woman beating their child with a rod, what would be your reaction?

- B. Now, read Prv. 23:13— 14  
Do you believe this passage is the Word of God?

According to this passage who has the wrong value system, the one beating the child with the rod or the one condemning them?

What holds sway over your mind in terms of the disciplining of children: the present world system or the Word of God?

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Scriptural Basis for the Training and Disciplining of Children—Lecture

### INTRODUCTION:

The Word of God, in Eph 6:1 states “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” This takes certain options out of the hands of parents in terms of defining roles, actions and options, right from the beginning. God has staked out the moral high ground as obedience, so far as it pertains to a child’s behavior towards his parents. The moral imperative here is laid down by God. The moral thing, the right thing, that thing which defines what is right in God’s eyes, is that the child obey his parents. Parents then are left to start at this point. Parents are not given total say over their moral designs within a family in terms of their children, any more than they are in terms of their marriage. Adultery is wrong even if the married couple agree that it is all right. If a husband is going on a long business trip and his wife says to him, “I know that you have legitimate physical needs. You are free to satisfy them as long as love is not involved.” This does not free the husband to commit adultery. The prohibition concerning adultery does not begin and end with his wife, but rather with God.

In the same way, parents are not free to excuse disobedience in their children based on circumstances. They are not free to decide whether, in a given case, obedience is right or wrong, God has made that decision for them. To be successful parents, parents must first and foremost come to grips with this reality— in any given situation, children are to obey their parents, for this is right. Parents who struggle with the morality of a child obeying his parent, struggle with God, not man. It is not unhealthy for a child to give obedience to his parents. To obey quickly the first time, is not a vice but rather a virtue. Parents who struggle with this, need to reconsider their own value system as it contrasts to the Word of God. God says, “Children obey your parents for this is right.” As parents we are able to raise our children within this frame work, but may not step out of it. We may decide with a great degree of latitude what we ask of a child, but we may not decide whether or not, once asked, the child is morally obliged to obey. God has already decided and revealed the answer to that, and it is a resounding “Yes!” Children are to obey, for this is right.

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*“Sally is such a precocious child, she has such a creative and strong will. We found ourselves fighting with her all the time so we just decided not to make her obey. We let her choose what to do and it makes our family life so much more pleasant.”*

Missionary couple at Seminar

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*“I don’t know what she is going to do about potty training. She just hasn’t decided yet whether or not she wants to be potty-trained. Of course, this is her decision. I mean what right do I have to tell her what to do with her body? We have discussed the options and so when she gets up in the morning I just ask her, ‘Well, what’s it going to be today, plastic diapers or panties?’ and then, the decision’s made, no conflicts, no fuss, it’s completely her decision.”*

Parent discussing her child at son’s little league game

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CHILDREN:

We must begin our study of this verse with what God begins with, “children.” God considers children to be a *blessing*. The Word of God states clearly, “*Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward.*” Ps. 127:3 Children are a gift from God. Notice the Word of God in this passage says “a gift,” not “the gift.” God has many gifts for His children. He bestows them according to His perfect will, as He knows best. No stigma is attached to the withholding of a gift. We are all happy for the one who receives a gift, but a gift by its nature *is not earned*, it is a gift. A gift does not reflect on the merit of the one who receives it, nor does it speak ill for the one who does not.

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“What did you want to go and do that for!”

Relative on hearing that El was pregnant with our third child.

“Holding out for a boy, huh?”

Comment made one zillionth time on hearing we have four children.

“Which two are yours and which two are Eleanor’s?”

Second place in stupid question category on hearing we have four children.

“Is your wife Catholic?”

Third place

“I don’t see how you can afford to have so many children!”

Fourth place

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At a birthday party one child receives a gift, while the other brothers and sisters do not. This is not as a result of merit, but rather a gift freely given. A father returns from a trip, and sometimes he picks up something special for his wife and children, but sometimes he is not able to do this. A gift is a gift. It does not mean he is rewarding his family on the one hand and punishing them on the other. When you receive a gift, you rejoice in your good fortune, but not in your merit. When you do not, you may wish that you had, but you need not repent.

In God’s historical revelation of the actions of men and women of the Bible, the Holy Spirit records accurately all that they did or did not do, as Chuck Swindoll often says, “warts and all.” This does not mean God is agreeing with their actions, just recording them. When David commits adultery with Bathsheba, God is not agreeing with this action when he records it. When men take multiple wives, God is not agreeing with this action when He records it. Similarly, when women in the Bible who are not able to bear children are devastated and feel completely useless to themselves, their husbands, society, or even God, God in recording their reactions is not agreeing that this is the right reaction to their situation, He is simply recording it. You should not view a woman’s reaction to not bearing children as a reflection of God any more than you should view a man’s decision to take more than one wife as a reflection of God.

A gift from God is not to be taken lightly. To my knowledge, western culture is the first in the history of the world that has put a dollar value on children in the negative column. In other words, to weigh children against the cost of raising them, not in terms of survival, but in terms of their impact on the ability to acquire and accumulate luxury items. For countless ages men sought, in obedience to God’s command in Genesis to “be fruitful and multiply.” Those who did so were considered most blessed of God. It never occurred to these parents that more children meant fewer luxury items. What more precious luxury item existed than a child from God?

It never occurred to these parents that more children meant less room. Room for what? What is a home empty of children? The modern home—large and spacious, filled with luxury items and devoid of children, would seem as barren as a pharaoh’s tomb to our spiritual forefathers. Unfortunately, most parents, whether Christian or not, have bought

into the concept of the two-child home without even thinking about it. If they were to consider the true reason, most would acknowledge that it was for the sole purpose of maintaining the lifestyle and independence which they hold so dear: to maintain a standard of living which allows for luxury items, adult toys, which they would rather not go without. I challenge Christian parents to rethink this blind acquiescence to the two-child family. I do not know of another age in the history of civilization where adults, en masse, said of one heart, “We do not want children, we want our things!”

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*In America the courts are swamped with drug cases, and our jails are overflowing. One answer to this problem has been a growing movement to legalize drugs in the U.S. This does not solve the problem. It just places our culture in a state of denial. True, if drugs were legalized, almost overnight the number of crimes in America would drop. This would not be as a result of a drop in drug use in America, it would simply mean we could feel better about it.*

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The question often arises, “How many of these gifts are we to accept?” My answer is simple, “Do not accept a gift from a close friend or relative that you cannot assume responsibility for.” I have a friend who is a multimillionaire. He drives a new Mercedes Benz and trades it in each year for another. One of these cars is worth more than my year’s salary. He once asked me what I would do if I had one. I replied without hesitation that if someone gave me a Mercedes Benz, I would have to turn around and sell it; I could not afford the insurance, the repair costs or the upkeep. It was simply beyond me. I was surprised to learn recently, that many contestants on game shows who win fabulous prizes, opt out for cash settlements worth much less than the prize itself. They simply couldn’t afford the taxes, the upkeep or the responsibility of their “fabulous” prize.

Each parent must decide what gifts from God he can afford to accept. But this should not be done flippantly or lightly. A gift from God is no small thing. I would say if God is offering you gifts, sit down prayerfully together and say, “Given our health, our gifts, our callings, our capacity as parents, what is the greatest amount of these gifts we can accept from God and still be good stewards?” Then, accept them freely from God. Remember: pagan humanists say, “Two children and after that you are irresponsible,” while God says, in Gn 8:17, “*Be fruitful and multiply.*”

The word for “children” in Eph 6:1 is τέκνον, “TEKNON”, and it occurs 99 times in the Greek New Testament. The Word of God in *this* passage is “child.” Since it is akin to *TIKTO*, which means to beget or to bear, we can assume it is used for a young child or a dependent.

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*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*

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Eph 6:1

It is different from *HUIOS*, “son.” *HUIOS* stresses the dignity and character of the parent/child relationship. A child must obey his parents. A son or daughter must honor them. There is a time then when there will be a shift in the relationship. One is always a son or daughter and as such, honor will always be due to one's parents, but one is not always a child. So, it is equally true that the time for obedience by a child will pass just as the child passes from the role of a child to the role of a son or daughter. The Word of God gives only a few guidelines concerning when this shift takes place. One most certainly is marriage. Gn 2:24 states “*For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*” Another guideline is the call of God illustrated in Mt 4:19–21, when men left their father and their father's employment to follow Christ’s call.

Time does not allow an exhaustive study at this point. However, there does come a time when a child ceases to be a child. In American culture this process begins around

age 10, when the child begins to be regarded by society, not as a child, but as a “young person.” This period culminates with high school graduation, where the young person is viewed by society as an adult. Parents who slow or fight this process do both themselves and their children a disservice. In reality, here in America, we have about ten years to do the preliminaries, to prepare our child for the transition period, and then about eight more years to effectively launch our child into the world. Do not waste this time fighting and arguing about whether this is right or not. It just is.

### OBEY:

This passage is speaking directly to children, and in God’s eyes the right thing for children to do is, “obey.” The Greek Word here is ὑπακούω, “HUPAKOUO.” It occurs 21 times in the Greek New Testament and it means literally, “to listen to, to attend to and then to submit to by obeying.” It is different from the Greek Word PITHO, which means “to persuade, to win over.” In PITHO, the obedience is not due to submission to authority, but persuasion. This latter form is not the form used when God tells us what it is “right” for children to do. Not *to be persuaded*, but HUPAKOUO, *to submit to authority*, to obey.

### RIGHT:

Children are to do this, the Word of God says, because it is “right.” Here the Greek word is δίκαιος, “DIKAIOS,” which occurs 81 times in the Greek New Testament. It denotes that which is Just or Righteous, that which is in accordance of DIKE, rule, right, justice. In other words, the Word of God clearly states that children are to obediently submit themselves to their parents' rule and authority because in God’s sight this is the righteous thing for them to do, the right thing, the morally correct thing in the eyes of God. It is not up for negotiation. It is not a question of further understanding. It is not an issue of persuasion or negotiation. *It is out of the hands of the parents.* It is simply the right thing to do.

*A Christian organization here in the States was struggling in the area of evangelism. All the staff were concerned, as the number of converts reported each year was steadily declining. The more they looked at it, the worse the situation became. Eventually, staff who were not fruitful in evangelism became more and more in the majority, and complaints began to be heard concerning the annual reports. The solution? This particular Christian organization decided to stop reporting in this area. This did not result in an evangelistic revival within the movement— they merely felt better about it.*

### PARENTS:

It is important for parents to understand that God has already defined what sin and righteousness is in this area. The decision as to whether or not children are to obey their parents has already been made by God and the answer is, “Yes!” We are not in a position to decide whether it is important, whether it is an option, or whether or not we should require it. God has already made that decision for us: children are to obey their parents. This is the right thing to do. As parents, our authority is limited. In order to save money on taxes, we cannot ask our children to lie about income they have generated. In order to get scholarships and grants for school, we cannot ask our children to lie on the applications about how much money we make. God’s Word restricts us as to the morally correct response to many situations. Obedience to the parents by the child is the morally correct response in the eyes of God. We do not, as parents, have the moral or spiritual authority to decide otherwise. This decision has already been made for us and we work from this point.

This study then will be an equipping manual for parents on “Parenting”— it is not written to children on “Childrening.” It is not written so that you can guarantee your children will “turn out right,” though by following it the odds are greatly increased. It is written so that you, as a parent, will “turn out right.” It is my conviction that one follows the other, as a general rule. If a parent turns out all right, then the odds are that the children will turn out all right. You as a parent have certain responsibilities before God. One of these is that your children obey you. Neither you, as a parent, nor your children are, “turning out right” if this is not true.

Now what exactly does this mean, “obey?” I have found that among college-educated— professional adults of an extremely sophisticated nature— an instant dumbness sets in on this issue. They begin saying things like, “Yes, but what does ‘obey’ really mean?” I have found that this highly localized form of dumbness strikes those regions of the brain housing the vocabulary index of biblical terms which we do not like or find uncomfortable. Actually this term, like most biblical terms is quite simple. We all know what obey means and what obey looks like.

Does your child obey you? Ask your child to do something and see what happens. In a normal tone, without any unusual inflection, in a calm way, ask:

- your toddler to come or hush when crying.
- your preschooler to sit quietly.
- your elementary school child to stop playing and pick up his toys or clean his room.
- “Please come to the table, dinner is ready.” (All the children are watching their favorite TV show).
- your children to get out of the pool or down from the play ground equipment, as it is time to go home.
- your teen to get off the phone and come to the dinner table.

If, in each case, the response of the child is obedience, then they have obeyed and done what is right before the Lord. If it is not, then they have disobeyed. It is time for you as a parent to take a hard, close look at your child’s relationship with God in this area and the role you must play in insuring that your child conforms to this Scriptural command. You, as a parent, must also conform to this Scriptural command. It is really no use playing word games with God. The correct response to the realization that your child does not obey you is not to stop asking your child to do that particular task or action, but to deal with the child in that particular area. The goal is not to find all areas of conflict and then eliminate expectations in those areas, but to teach the child the value of obedience.

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*Phyllis got tired of fighting with her children in two areas: the first was their room; the second was the dinner table. She decided that she simply would not ask them to do anything in these two areas. It is no surprise that conflict ceased in both arenas. In fact, this took care of most of the conflicts in the home. Compared with the former experience, the home was relatively peaceful. This did not mean that her children were learning wisdom and life skills as they pertain to possessions, lifestyles, living areas, manners and habits. It just meant she could feel better about it.*

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*Connie decided she wanted her children to pick up one toy before starting to play with another. Charlene decided she wanted all the toys picked up in one room before the child moved on to another room. Darla decided the toys all had to be picked up twice each day, before leaving the house in the morning and before coming to the dinner table at night. In each case, what is acceptable in one home will be disobedience in another. The key here is obedience to the parents, and parents who carefully lay down training which they feel will guarantee the future success of their child.*

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True, different parents have different requests. There is great latitude given here in the Scriptures concerning what parents may or may not require of a child. Something not required is not disobeyed. We must, as parents, be honest with ourselves and with God. We must determine what will best help our child prepare for living successfully outside our home on his own, and then require that of him.

## I. The Scriptural Basis for the Training and Disciplining of Children: The Results of No Discipline or A Lack of Discipline in the Life of your Child

*When I was a student at the University of Texas, the Vietnam War was in full swing. I lived in the least expensive dorm, and this was where many returning vets on the GI bill ended up. These guys had been trained in decorum, appearance, discipline and order. They knew how to keep a room in order, right down to where each pair of socks went. They were thoroughly trained in the military, yet when they hit the dorms they became model slobs just like the rest of us. As a college student, you would have been proud to see their trashed-out rooms, disorganized desks and unkempt appearance. Yet I noticed something different. When it came time to do job interviews, these men could turn out as professional-looking as any businessman on Wall Street. Their appearance and poise in the interview process gave them not just an edge but a mile-long lead over any of their civilian counterparts. They knew how to dress, how to hold themselves with confidence, and how to relate successfully to others in a position of authority. They were both prepared and successful in their interviews. The reason was discipline and training. It is true that they did not use it as college students. It is equally true that having been trained in it, it was theirs to call upon when needed for an interview. The rest of us were slobs by disposition, not by choice. We were simply following our nature. These men had a choice and it put them light-years ahead of us.*

We, as parents, must realize that although the way we raise our children does not guarantee how they will turn out, it does guarantee that they will have the proper tools. Remember, the goal of this workbook is not that our children “turn out right” but that we as parents “turn out right.” If we turn out right, that greatly increases the opportunity for our children to do so. Nothing will guarantee that upon reaching adulthood they will choose God over self.

It is the same way with our children. We are to discipline them, train them, gives them options. They may or may not *use* these options later in life, but they have them. The undisciplined child has no options. He has only his nature, which is moving down a slippery slope. Apart from an intervention by God, he is doomed for destruction. But this is not God’s first choice.

## A. REASONS TO INTERVENE

God's first choice is intervention by the parent on behalf of the child. Without this, the child is left to his fallen nature. The Bible is clear on the results of the fallen nature of the child (the fact that all children are born sinful and in need of the salvation of Christ), when accompanied by a lack of parental discipline.

1. FOOLISHNESS: "FOOLISHNESS IS BOUND UP IN THE HEART OF A CHILD; THE ROD OF DISCIPLINE WILL REMOVE IT FAR FROM HIM." (PRV 22:15)

The Word of God says that within a child lies foolishness. Children are born this way and are, in and of themselves, if left to their own devices, doomed to stay this way—it is their natural bent. Foolish children, foolish teenagers, foolish adults, do foolish things to their own hurt and sorrow.

We live in an age when things are turned upside down. Unborn babies are not babies, they are fetuses; homosexuality is not a sin, it is a life style; the way to prevent teen pregnancies is to teach teens to have sex more carefully; and the list goes on, and on. One of these upside-down myths moving within our culture is the "from the mouths of babes" myth. According to this myth, in the lives of children there can be found a purity and wisdom that parents have lost because of the extended time they have spent in the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Bible clearly teaches that children are born a.) Sinful— Rom 5:18 clearly states, "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men..." Every child is born with the sin of Adam and as such they are born b.) Foolish— Prv 22:15 "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child..." Despite these two overwhelming truths, we see a growing movement in our society of "child wisdom." This takes the form of peer mediation in our schools. It takes the form of a lack of confidence in our parenting. It takes the form of parents wanting to discuss and reason with a child concerning issues of obedience. It takes the form of the childrens' rights movement.

Do not be deceived. Your child was born sinful and with that sin came foolishness. Your child rebels against you, resists what is right and spoils many things which are for his benefit and fun, not because he is bad, but because he is a sinful and foolish child. If you begin to believe the problem is yours and that your child is not sinful and foolish, you will never be able to solve this problem for him.

Remember, the Word of God says that *within a child* lies foolishness. Children are born this way and are foolish in and of themselves, if left to their own devices doomed to stay this way—it is their natural bent. Foolish children, foolish teenagers, foolish adults, do foolish things to their own hurt and sorrow.

2. DEATH: "DISCIPLINE YOUR SON WHILE THERE IS HOPE, AND DO NOT DESIRE HIS DEATH."

*"You know, John, when your children get a little older, they are going to rebel against all this discipline you are giving them." Gus was a fellow campus minister with a very laissez-faire attitude toward child raising. He and his wife, Karen, prided themselves on the independent nature of their children. Since Gus and I were good friends and he had taken the liberty of speaking openly to me, I responded to him with the same candor. "You know Gus, you may be right. I hope you are not, but you may be. But I will tell you what. Your kids are going to rebel too. Not against anything, though. Your children are not going to rebel against discipline. When they rebel, they will be carrying out their own nature, their bent towards life. My kids may rebel. I don't think they will, but they might. Yours however, unless you change or God sends another agent to save them, will simply continue on down the same road as teens as they are on right now." Gus actually agreed that I had a valid point, but he made no changes in his child-raising philosophy. I am happy to say that my children did not choose to rebel and are involved in fruitful and successful lives. I am sad to report that Gus's children are still on the same road.*

*Sexually active children between the ages of 12 and 17 are the fastest growing group of HIV positive individuals*

PRV 9:18

The ultimate price of this foolishness in moral and spiritual decisions will be death. The stakes here are not philosophical; they are not matters of simple lifestyle emphasis; they are death.

In 1970, my senior year of high school, the worst consequence of being sexually active was pregnancy. Today it is the best and the worst is death. The worst consequence of substance abuse was a severe hangover. Today that is the best and the worst is death. The worst consequence of a traffic altercation was a black eye. Today it is death. Parents have abandoned their children to foolishness, and our children are becoming permanently ill, disfigured, emotionally scarred or dying at alarming rates.

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*"Wow, four children between the ages of one and ten, how did you stand it?"*

Mom 1

*"If I couldn't send my children off to my Mom's I'd go crazy!"*

Mom 2

*"I have got to get those children in day care and me back to work before I lose my mind."*

Mom 3

*"If we don't find a nanny and me get back in the ministry with Clyde I will lose my mind. I mean it, I will go crazy with those children all day."*

Mom 4

*"I just stay in bed, Bill gets the children off to school and then I get up. I just can't take it any more. He's a pastor, he can handle these things better than me."*

Mom 5

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3. HELL: "YOU SHALL BEAT HIM WITH THE ROD, AND DELIVER HIS SOUL FROM SHEOL." (PRV 23:14)

Since children left to their natural bent will constantly choose wrong, they are in great peril as pertains to both their moral and spiritual well-being. Left to themselves, they are doomed to both physical and spiritual destruction.

4. GOD:

God can and does intervene and it is His will to do so at an early age through the obedient parent. He is not limited to this, but this is His first choice. It is the obedient parent in action that is the safeguard of the children. The parent, in obedience, preserve the children and the family through submission to the Word of God.

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*Claudia was the wife of a career missionary. They had returned home from the field so that their children could finish high school in the States and go on with their lives. As career missionaries in a secular European country, they had adopted the prevailing view of spanking as something bad or dysfunctional. As a cultural adaptation, they decided "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." When I met Claudia for the first time she was a cowed, mousy woman completely dominated by her overbearing teenagers, and without the support of her uninvolved husband who was preoccupied with his studies and his ministry. He just couldn't see what the big deal was. Slowly, over the years, the teens grew up, left home and got on with their lives. As each one left, Claudia came more and more into her own. A year after the last one was gone her countenance had returned. When we saw her again two years later, she was almost unrecognizable— alert, self confident, happy with life and enjoying each day. The difference was that the children who were her shame were now out of her life. What a testimony to her missionary husband! What a shame that she married a man who submitted her to this shame rather than applying the "rod of reproof" so that Claudia could enjoy being a mother with wise, respectful children. As spiritual head of the household, Claudia's husband, in making this decision concerning spanking, had effectively cheated her out of one of her life's most precious callings.*

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## B. THE RESULTS OF A LACK OF DISCIPLINE IN THE FAMILY ARE NO LESS DEVASTATING IN...

1. THE MOTHER: "THE ROD AND REPROOF GIVE WISDOM, BUT A CHILD WHO GETS HIS OWN WAY BRINGS SHAME TO HIS MOTHER." (PRV 29:15)

Ultimately, it is the mother who bears the brunt of an undisciplined child. While Dad is away at work, Mom must live with this little terror who will not pick up after himself, screams at everything, fights and kicks, will not allow her to cook meals or talk on the phone in peace, makes shopping a chore, makes certain stores or fun places for Mom

completely out of the question, makes a quiet cup of tea, a pleasant hour spent with a friend, the enjoyment of cooking a meal, or even using the restroom in peace impossible. Unless the little beast is asleep, or has decided to offer a reprieve, Mom is faced with another day of headaches and turmoil.

Unless she is romantic enough or airhead enough to begin thinking of this behavior as "cute," guilt and shame begin to creep into her life. "This is not at all what I had in mind. What am I doing wrong, what is wrong with me?" Dad comes home, "What's the big deal?" He romps with the children, feeds them, puts them into bed and off to work before they get up. It is the mother who bears the brunt of the undisciplined children.

The theme is clearly taught in God's Word. Lack of discipline brings foolishness and rebellion. Foolishness and rebellion bring grief to the mother. This is most clearly seen in the book of Proverbs.

Pro 10:1 ...a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

Pro 15:20 ...a foolish man despises his mother.

Pro 29:15 ...a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.

Ultimately, it is the mother who bears the brunt of an undisciplined child.

Larry and Tina were in my office. Larry wanted Tina to homeschool their children. Tina wanted a break for rest and recovery. The variable was undisciplined children. Larry, an executive whose work schedule had him home only in the evenings and gone many Saturdays, did not see it. What was wrong with Tina? Why couldn't she up hold her end? Tina, a Christian, was wracked with guilt and shame, "What's wrong with me? Why can't I get it together?" I had seen her four children and I knew the problem. The four boys constantly bullied their mother, resisted every effort and gave no ground without a fight. Tina had no emotional energy as a result of this. She was constantly worn down and wracked by guilt because deep, deep down she really did not enjoy being the one thing she had looked forward to all her life, a Christian mother. Larry was unwavering in his insistence that the home and children were her responsibility, not his. The counseling went nowhere and soon ended. Both of their desires were met soon after this interview. Larry did indeed get Tina to homeschool their children and later that year, Tina was admitted to a psychiatric hospital with a total breakdown due to stress, so she got her break from the family after all.

**2. THE FATHER: "A FOOLISH SON IS A GRIEF TO HIS FATHER, AND BITTERNESS TO HER WHO BORE HIM." (PRV 17:25)**

The Father is not immune from the results of failure to drive out foolishness from the child. It is ultimately his grief. Grief in his relationship with his wife, whom he loses to emotional drought caused by the children; grief in his social life, when the subject of children come up, and grief in his public life after one more embarrassing incident. The theme is clearly taught in God's Word. The lack of discipline brings foolishness and rebellion, and foolishness and rebellion bring grief to the father. This is most clearly seen in the book of Proverbs.

Pro 17:21 *He who begets a fool does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.*

Pro 17:25 *A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.*

Pro 19:13 *A foolish son is destruction to his father...*

Pro 28:7 *...he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.*

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*Tom was an executive with a large firm. He bought a house out in the country so that between his travel and his commute he only had time for "quality time" with his children. He just didn't see what the big deal was. He came home about bed time, the children having already eaten. He played with them, tucked them in and was off before they got up in the morning. If anything, he received a groggy hug a kiss as he passed them, in front of the TV set. Yet, here they were in counseling. Jane was absolutely adamant— no more children. When she became pregnant with her third, it was like the bottom dropped out of her life. She became listless, unresponsive and unmotivated. The thought of being saddled with another little hellion was more than she could bear. Tom came from a very liberally educated family and received Christ late in life. He saw no need for spanking children. "If you hit children, it only teaches them to hit," he proudly proclaimed. Now things were coming unraveled. He wanted a large family, but his wife could only handle two and was shut down with three. What was wrong with her? During counseling, Tom began to see for the first time what Jane's life was like and began to make changes. He changed his discipline, his job profile, and his schedule. Tom is at home much more now. The children are their mother's delight, and she has gladly born him three more.*

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**3. THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS:**

"SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE COMES SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD; THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP CAUSES TROUBLE, AND BY IT MANY BE DEFILED; THAT THERE BE NO IMMORAL OR GODLESS PERSON LIKE ESAU, WHO SOLD HIS OWN BIRTHRIGHT FOR A SINGLE MEAL. FOR YOU KNOW THAT EVEN AFTERWARDS, WHEN HE DESIRED TO INHERIT THE BLESSING, HE WAS REJECTED, FOR HE FOUND NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE, THOUGH HE SOUGHT FOR IT WITH TEARS." (HEB 12:15-16)

"DO NOT BE DECEIVED: BAD COMPANY CORRUPTS GOOD MORALS." (1 COR

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*Phil was the pastor of a medium-size church. He neither had the time nor the inclination to discipline his children. The two boys were little hellions and the brunt of church jokes. There was not a business meeting or social where the latest anecdote concerning the boys wasn't told. Many times, within earshot of Phil. More than once, I have seen the grief in Phil's face as his children caused him embarrassment or worse in the Church and at school. Ultimately, it cost him his spiritual standing in the Church, and with the loss of this respect came then the loss of his job.*

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*As a school teacher I saw the impact on peer leadership. The first child to act up in class was watched by the entire class. If decisive action was taken and the penalty was severe and teacher maintained control, then the class stayed orderly. However, if the infraction was not dealt with, the entire class got the word, "This is a goof-off class, you can get away with anything."*

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15:33)

As with Jacob and Esau, the foolishness and bitterness of an undisciplined child defiles many, and if left unchecked, can and does affect their brothers and sisters. Although there are notable exceptions, such as Joseph, we see for the most part, in Scriptures as in real life that the failure to discipline children feeds on itself as older, foolish children influence their younger brothers and sisters in this same way. We see in some of the great biblical families, Jacob, Eli, Samuel and David, how the sins and rebellions of children affected and influenced them. It is no less true in our own homes. An immodest daughter affects her sister. A bully of a son harasses his younger brother and teaches him to be the same kind of bully. How many times have I seen it, brothers and sisters bringing one another to ruin? So many children grow up fighting one another and competing with one another, rather than loving, helping and serving one another. It is very important that older brothers and sisters not be raised in such a way as to disciple the younger ones in sin.

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*Tom was a career missionary who just didn't have time for his children once he was on the mission field. His career improved and his time at home lessened. His first son was away at college and doing well, but there was tragedy at home. The second child rebelled constantly and the rebellion finally ended in his death. The third asked simply to live elsewhere during the teen years. I have seen Tom weep as he talks of how he traded the ministry for his children. "I disciplined the whole world, but not my own children," he once shared with me as tears ran down his face...*

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*As a youth minister, I once asked what the deal was with the Smith family. The Smiths were a large and prominent family in the Church. Dr. Smith was a physician and deacon in the church. His wife, Hannah, was a wonderful Christian woman and devoted wife and mother. The Smiths had eight handsome children. As each one reached high school though, they dropped out of all church activities except for Sunday morning Church. "What was the deal with the Smith family?" There was no hesitation in the reply, "It's Emily." Emily was a senior in college and hadn't been around in years. The junior high student went on to explain that she influenced the one behind her and each one in turn had done the same. Each, in turn, had taken it upon him or herself to disciple the next one down in the things of the world as older brother or sister had done. A little less churching and doctoring and a little more attention to Emily during those first crucial years of high school could have made all the difference in the world for the younger brothers and sisters.*

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#### 4. THE FATHER'S TESTIMONY:

"AN OVERSEER, THEN, MUST BE ABOVE REPROACH, THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE, TEMPERATE, PRUDENT, RESPECTABLE, HOSPITABLE, ABLE TO TEACH, HE MUST BE ONE

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*It was several weeks before the prom and my son Sam had asked a very sweet girl from a sister church to go with him. Although I did not know the family, I did know the young lady by reputation. She was active in her youth group, in the Christian Student Union at school and had been involved with our daughter Becca in Evangelism Explosion training and weekly evangelism. I was a little surprised to get a phone call from her mother. She made small talk and hemmed and hawed, when I realized something was on her mind. Finally I asked her point blank if anything was the matter. "Well," she replied, "it's just that I am a little concerned. My daughter is a pretty quiet girl and ..."*

*"Yes?" I persisted, "You can feel free to share anything with me that you want."*

*So she blurted out, "And all we know about your son is that he is a preacher's kid and frankly we are a little concerned."*

*What a great testimony my brethren in the pulpit have left for me. All she knew about my son is that he is a "Preacher's Kid" and that is enough to cause her serious concern about her daughter going to the prom with Sam.*

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WHO MANAGES HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD WELL, KEEPING HIS CHILDREN UNDER CONTROL WITH ALL DIGNITY (BUT IF A MAN DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO MANAGE HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD, HOW WILL HE TAKE CARE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD?)”  
(1 TM 3:2,4,5)

“LET DEACONS BE HUSBANDS OF ONLY ONE WIFE, AND GOOD MANAGERS OF THEIR CHILDREN AND THEIR OWN HOUSEHOLDS.”  
(1 TM 3:12)

Ultimately, a man’s testimony is sacrificed both within and without the church. He loses his platform from which he may speak and minister, if not by overt act of the church then by the deterioration of his testimony due to the foolishness of his children. Now some will say that they know of many ministers who have been allowed to continue as deacons, as elders or as pastors despite the fact that they did not manage their household well and that their children were far from being under control, much less dignified. What is not taken into account is that an office is more than a title.

First, a man must have respect to minister effectively. Despite the office, without respect, he cannot accomplish what he needs to. I remember in our own state we had, for the first time in over a hundred years, a governor of the minority party in office. He found that even though he was governor he could not get the bureaucrats and appointed officials to work with him. To them, he was an outsider and they cared nothing for his title. Position without respect is of little value.

*“I am sorry but we can’t meet at Jim’s house. We’ll never get anything done. Haven’t you seen his children at church? Believe me, his home is a disaster area. Better meet somewhere else.”*

Deacons meeting discussing which deacon’s home to meet in. It was then agreed that we should not meet in homes with pre-school or elementary children because they would disrupt the meeting.

Second, a man must have the blessing of God to minister. A man can remain in a building, in a position, with a title long after he has ceased to function in God’s eyes as a holder of a spiritual office. There is a Unitarian Church in our city, as well as a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Both of these call themselves churches and both have pastors, elders and deacons. They have certificates of ordination on the walls and they are registered with the state, but I can assure you

*We had been having International Students over to our house for meals long enough to know what was about to happen. The Asian graduate students were and was bringing what he was saying carefully, so as not to offend. “Your children are different than Pastor Deacon?” I asked our oldest daughter on the way home from church.*

*“Yes?” I demurred, trying to give him room to express himself. “Well the children can’t believe we’re so involved in the Youth Activities and are a different” he insisted trying to express himself. “Your children obey you. You see, all we have ever been around are Unitarian children and so we thought that Christians did not discipline their children. This is so very different for us to see.” Well evidently, pastors’ children don’t exactly have the reputation of being ‘good children’, more or less excited about the Lord.”*

*That little scenario has been played out at least a hundred times in my home or office or on the campus. What a great testimony my brethren in the ministry have left for me. “She had not entered the pastoral field until Becca was in 9th grade.” She had not been asked by children and parents alike how come she was so turned on for Jesus. After all, they were “preachers’ children.” What a great testimony of my brethren in the ministry.*

that in God’s eyes they are not Churches and the men who hold the offices do so before man only, and not before God. If God disqualifies a man for a certain office because he does not meet the requirements, I can assure you that the fact that a board or a congregation decides to retain him in that position does not override the counsels of God. He may stay in the building and retain the title, but he can only retain the spiritual position by the recognition of God. There will be many surprised elders, deacons, pastors, missionaries and Christian workers in heaven when they discover that God was true to His Word, even when man was not.

I know that many deacons, elders, pastors and missionaries have wonderful families and delightful children, but something is definitely going wrong when society as a whole is surprised when their spiritual leaders have children who are excited about Jesus, Church and the ministry, not to mention, well-behaved and obedient. When a child is not disciplined, ultimately a man's testimony is sacrificed, both within and without the church.

## C. THE SPIRAL EFFECT

This spiraling effect finally touches on the child's ability to lead a fruitful and fulfilling life. If a child does not learn early the value and use of discipline and teachability, he bears the fruits of this throughout his entire life. He begins to develop traits which he will carry with him until they are undone by society, by some institution, or by God and his church.

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*Dorothy called Eleanor on the phone. She could not understand why her little darling was not doing well in school. Perhaps he had a learning disorder—tested, but no luck. Perhaps he had a chemical imbalance—tested, but again no luck. Maybe he was a gifted child and just bored by the mundane pace of the average kid on the block—tested again, zippo. Dorothy could not understand it. Unfortunately, El knew the reason. This child had not been made to obey and learn at home from his mother. What did she expect to happen when he was expected to obey and learn from a total stranger? Did she really think a teacher with twenty other children was going to dote on this little darling like it was her only child, and she had all day to spend with him while he made up his mind if he wanted to learn and cooperate?*

*I don't think so. The mother was not at all open to the suggestion and so it was left at that. Another bright child doomed to stupidity by the unwillingness of a Christian parent to teach him to love discipline.*

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### 1. STUPIDITY: PRV 12:1

“WHOEVER LOVES  
DISCIPLINE LOVES  
KNOWLEDGE, BUT HE  
WHO HATES  
REPROOF IS STUPID.”

What most parents don't realize is that success in school goes hand in hand with discipline.

As a school teacher, parent, youth minister, college minister and pastor I have seen this scenario played out many, many times. If you can't control your own child, what makes you think someone else will, or will even want to?

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*David and my son were playmates, although I wasn't really thrilled about it. His parents, though well-entrenched in suburban America, had not ever really accepted the realities of post-collegiate life. They weren't very responsible and had a very laissez-faire attitude toward their children.*

*David and Sam got to know each other playing T-ball during Kindergarten and both went in for screening for first grade on the same day. As Sam sat quietly waiting for the screening, David could be seen wandering restlessly in the hall, going into rooms he was not supposed to go into, playing with the water fountain, spilling the water on the floor and generally making a pest of himself. Any attempt by his mother to control this behavior was met by resistance and sometimes even shouts. After the interview, El got a frantic call from David's Mom. He had been turned down for first grade. This did not surprise me, as I always considered David to be kind of a sullen dolt.*

*David's mother immediately took him to a psychologist and had him tested and lo and behold, he tested out as a gifted child. This poor boy was more intelligent than Sam intellectually, but because he had been raised in such a way as to hate reproof, he was considered by all to be stupid. A teacher later recounted that the mother brought David in to school to see the counselor, armed with the test results showing that David was a gifted child and demanding entrance. On the way to the counselor's office, David spit on every classroom window he passed.*

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If you allow your child to grow up resenting and hating discipline, then the Word of God—not me, but the Word of God, says you are going to raise a stupid child.

2. SCOFFING: PRV 13:1 “A WISE SON ACCEPTS HIS FATHER'S DISCIPLINE, BUT A SCOFFER DOES NOT LISTEN TO REBUKE.”

Our culture, which does not accept discipline, has spawned a generation of scoffers. A

scoffer is someone who laughs at authority or that which has value or worth. When I think of scoffing I think of just about all the current comedy shows on TV, or the movies. Authority, religion, education, the military, the police, parents, teachers, government officials, historical heroes, anything of worth or value in our culture is scoffed at and people pay money to scoff and support scoffing. Think now to yourself, is there anything I would not laugh at in my culture? Is there any authority

*A while back, I was driving home on a cold, rainy day. It was already getting dark. As I rounded the corner of my neighborhood, there was a child of about five sitting in the street and playing in the rain. I knew this child, as did the whole street. He was sullen, disrespectful and totally without discipline. His mother prided herself on this, and told me so in no uncertain terms the day I called her because he and his brothers and sisters ambushed my car with an assortment of projectiles. I leaned out and called to the child to move. I tried honking. I finally had to get out of the car and in the rain literally drag the child, screaming at me, to the yard and then quick jump back in the car and drive off before he could retake his position. I could see him return to his position in the street in my rear view mirror as I rounded the curb. I remember thinking to myself, “Now that is what I call a really stupid kid.” I called his mother to report where he was, but was careful not to give my name. I knew all too well that if she thought for a minute I had physically touched this little cherub, she would call child protective services and report me. This child had learned from his parents to hate reproof and the results are that he is truly stupid.*

figure, that if the joke were not phrased the right way and the character done with taste, I would not scoff at? With young couples and families this is epidemic. Parents scoff at all authority including their own. Mothers openly scoff at their husbands before the children and vice versa. Scoffing, sarcasm, the quick wit, the one-liner, the fast retort, the little zinger, all these are in vogue and we see in our culture today as a direct result of this scoffing, an unwillingness on the part of our culture to accept discipline or rebuke.

*Early in our marriage, El and I found ourselves falling into the trap of the one-liner, and of scoffing at each other's roles and short comings. We both desired not only to not do this and to be open to correction when we found ourselves slipping into it. This not only did wonders for our marriage, but made us better parents, friends and ministers. Now, when we are visiting in a Christian home where this is rampant, the atmosphere seems stale, shallow and irreverent. I would have to say that this decision was one of the most important we ever made.*

3. FOOLISHNESS: PRV 15:5

“A FOOL REJECTS HIS FATHER'S DISCIPLINE, BUT HE WHO REGARDS REPROOF IS PRUDENT.”

The rejection of discipline is seen everywhere. This is defined by God as foolishness. We see it in the world's answers to problems— how do you keep the population from growing so that millions won't die of starvation? Kill millions of unborn babies. How do you reduce venereal disease

*As I drove home with my wife, I reflected somberly, “That is a sermon, by God's grace, I will never have to preach.” The denominational convention was in our city that year. As Associate Pastor I was excited about the last and traditionally largest meeting of the week. My brother, one of the team of pastors of one of the largest Churches in the denomination was there and his Senior. Pastor was delivering the message for the plenary session. As he preached, my pastor sat stone-faced. He preached on priorities of pastors and the family, and how children of Christians view their heavenly Fathers through the lens created by earthly ones. The following day, on Sunday morning, my pastor preached a sermon, which if you read between the lines could be titled, “I gave my life to the ministry and the business of the church and if it turned my children off to God, it's not my fault.” By God's grace I will never have to preach that sermon.*

and unwanted pregnancies among teens? Teach them the mechanics of sexual activity and then give them condoms which fail 18% of the time. How do you resist the breakdown of the home and family? Make divorces easier and get the state to assume the parenting roles. How do you teach children to respect and obey authority in the home and in the school? Eliminate discipline of children in these areas. The rejection of discipline creates a foolishness to which those schooled in it are totally blind.

#### 4. POVERTY: PRV 13:18

“POVERTY AND SHAME  
WILL COME TO HIM  
WHO NEGLECTS  
DISCIPLINE, BUT HE  
WHO REGARDS  
REPROOF WILL BE  
HONORED.”

My great-grandfather was a poor country preacher and missionary. His son, my grandfather, through much sacrifice attended college and became a newspaper editor. He was the first Mahon to break into the urban middle class. His son, my father, attended college and grew to

be an executive in a multi-national corporation. He was the first Mahon to move into suburbia. I have sought to be a good steward of the sacrifices that were made by my forefathers by completing a graduate degree and advancing my family.

If you look at family photos, each generation was a little better-dressed, better-educated, drove a better car and lived in a nicer home. In my high school, many of my friends had a similar family history. With one exception, they became professional bums called hippies. In fact, many of my generation took a great step downward in their educational and social standing, and did so willingly. They, as a generation, neglected discipline. Poverty and shame came upon them, whether they or society are willing to recognize it as such, it has happened. We have in a whole class of professional poor who are protected by society. The generation that spawned the hippies grew into a generation that protects and romanticizes poverty, to their shame.

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*As a project for her fifth grade class in a public school, my daughter Megan was asked to interview someone who came in contact with homeless people and to report on their story. The class was to put together an anthology, so to speak, of interviews with the homeless. Since at the time I was Associate Pastor in a downtown urban church, and since it was my job to deal with this aspect of our church's ministry, she interviewed me.*

*I shared with Megan that about four homeless people came to our church each week asking for money. Each had a story as to why they needed this money and I listened carefully to each one. I would then explain that our funds were limited and I had to make a few phone calls to check on the story to make sure it was a legitimate need. Of the estimated 500 interviews I had conducted up to that time, I was able to verify only four real needs. I was able to discount all the others as genuine cases of blatant fraud. Megan's interview was not allowed to be part of the anthology.*

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*At my 20th high school reunion there was a moment of silence for those who had died and could not attend. Their names were read and out of a class of about 400, there were six who had died. As I related this to my daughter, I commented that the toll would be much higher in her class. In most high schools classes, by the 20th reunion we can expect eight times that many to have died of AIDS, and even more to be dying given the growth rate of the spread of AIDS among teens and young adults.*

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5. DEATH: PRV 15:10 "STERN DISCIPLINE IS FOR HIM WHO FORSAKES THE WAY; HE WHO HATES REPROOF WILL DIE."

If anyone doubts the fact that those who hate reproof die, all they have to do is get an abstract from their local reference library containing the statistical tables of the causes of deaths of those under 20. They will see, first hand, the results in black and white. Failure to discipline our children is not just an oversight of a busy modern home, it is a ploy of Satan to destroy your happiness, your witness, your family and ultimately the life of your child.

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*"But to the wicked God says, 'What right have you to tell of My statutes, and to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, and you cast My Word of Gods behind you. Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.'"*

Ps 50:16-17,22

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D. THIS BRINGS US BACK TO PRV 19:18,

"DISCIPLINE YOUR SON WHILE THERE IS HOPE, AND DO NOT DESIRE HIS DEATH."

While the child is young we must go to work to protect him from this fate. If we fail, he will ultimately turn this attitude toward God.

The child who has the indulgent father, the absentee father, the preoccupied father, the unteachable father, the father who-has-bought-into-the-world's-lie (though-sincere)-father, this child ultimately, to his own sorrow and The child who has the indulgent father, the absentee father, the preoccupied father, the unteachable father, the father who-has-bought-into-the-world's-lie (though-sincere)-father, this child ultimately, to his own sorrow and destruction, turns this attitude toward his heavenly Father.

## II. The Results of Discipline in the Life of your Child

### A. THE RESULTS ARE LONG LASTING

Of all forms of input into the life of a child, the results of discipline and training are the most lasting. The Word of God says in Prv 22:6, “*Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.*” Our commitment to training and discipline must begin when they are children.

“I have tried and tried to communicate biblical truths of discipline to my flock. In this culture, you let the children run wild when they are young and then beat them when they are teenagers. The effects are disastrous in the life of the teens and in the family relationships. If they would only see that it is children who need discipline and training, and that teens need to be prepared for leaving home.”

Missionary at Family Discipleship Seminar

I cannot overstate the seriousness and importance of beginning the discipline and training of children early enough. Parents always ask me, “When should I begin?” and I always respond, “The first time you are disobeyed” Remember, the results of discipline are just as beneficial as the lack of discipline is just as damaging. Training should begin early for the sake of the child. It is amazing to me the amount of sophisticated early-age educational training parents give their children, while neglecting to discipline them because “they are not ready.”

### B. THE RESULTS OF DISCIPLINE

#### 1. ON OUR FALLEN NATURE

Discipline is viewed by God as a work of Grace in the salvation process. The Word of God says in Prv 23:14, “*You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol.*” God does not view disciplining children as punitive, but as positive and proactive; not as judgmental, but as redemptive. He views discipline not as merely sociological behavior modification,

“I get so tired of the same old scenario. We can’t get them to take spiritual training seriously when their children are children, and then they come rushing into my office when they reach the teen years and cry, ‘Pastor save my child!’ Where were they ten years ago with all this zeal for our ministry?”

Youth Minister at church staff meeting

as if our children were one of Pavlov’s dogs, but rather as a spiritual ministry to the child. Discipline is redemptive in nature, not just in terms of the child’s character and earthly success but also in terms of his soul and its eternal destiny. This is a major shift from the way our society thinks. It is important for us as parents not to mistake Grace for License, or view Redemption and Reconciliation as punishment.

#### 2. ON OUR OUTLOOK ON GRACE AND JUDGEMENT

An act of Grace is redemptive in nature, it *benefits* the person who receives it. An act of License is negligent or permissive in nature, it simply allows the person to act out their desires without regard to their well-being. Many parents consider it an act of grace if, when their child disobeys them, they overlook it or excuse it rather than acting immediately. “Jenny did not come when I called her, but I knew she was tired and had had a long day, so I decided to give her grace and just pick her up and carry her to the car.” or, “Sure I told Tommy to pick up his toys, but it was close to nap time and I thought ‘What the heck, give the kid a little break now and then,’ so I picked the toys up for him.”

Grace and license are two very different things. Grace is granting to others that which is not deserved. We extend Grace to our children by our unconditional love of them. License is to condone or allow sin even when it is known to be wrong. God extends Grace to us, but He never condones or allows sin. He disciplines us for our good as an act of grace. We extend grace to our children, but we never condone or allow sin in their lives. We discipline our children as an act of grace. If your child disobeys and you overlook it, this is not Grace on your part, but License. You are not benefiting your child by simply allowing them to “get away with it,” because you are either too tired or too preoccupied or too brainwashed by our culture to deal with it. If you sin and God does not intervene to teach you not to sin, that is a bad sign. It is not a sign of Grace if God does not begin to deal with you as you sin, it is a sign of judgment.

In Rom 1, when God allows a culture to disintegrate without intervening with His discipline to save it, this is not viewed as Grace but as Judgment. It means God is giving them over to their acts. Rom 1:23 states, concerning the sin of mankind, “*and [they] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*” In verse twenty-four we see God’s reaction, “*therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them.*” This phrase, “gave them over” is a recurring theme in this passage. Here, we learn that the fact that God did not intervene when idolatry was introduced but rather “*gave them over in the lusts of their hearts...*” The absence of involvement is not a sign of Grace, but of Judgment.

We, as parents, must realize that when we let our children “get away with it,” this is not an act of Grace but of License. We are benignly allowing them to slide towards “the lusts of their hearts,” rather than checking this slide with parental discipline. That is how God deals with us, He will intervene and check our slide, even if we resent it, even if we plead with Him to allow us to get away with it “just this one time.” God will intervene with whatever Redemptive discipline is necessary for our well-being. He is not a God of License, but a God of Grace. That is how God deals with us and that is how we should deal with our children.

The Word of God has ample illustrations of fathers who doted on their children to the child’s ruin and the fathers deep sorrow. In each case, it was a *failure to act decisively* on the part of the parent that lead to the destruction of the child. Whether it be Jacob, Eli, Samuel or David, the tragic results were always the same. We do our children no favors when, upon reports of their misbehavior, we create lame excuses for them. We live in a very permissive society. We also live in a society that is increasingly preoccupied with its own privacy and space. Given these two trends, if someone is emboldened enough by our children’s behavior to mention it to us, then something is seriously wrong. Rather than defend your child, you should praise God that he has sent this messenger to you to warn you.

### 3. ON OUR HEROES FROM THE WORD

We can see the results of this tragedy modeled in some of our heroes from the Word of God. Why did they not respond in a timely manner? Was it personal pride? Was it an unrealistic view of their children? Had they put their children up on a pedestal? Did they find their self worth in their children's approval in the face of marital difficulties in the home? Whatever the reason, the results were tragic.

Isaac did not intervene in the lives of his sons Jacob and Esau, to ensure harmony in the home and a closeness between these brothers. The result was life-long enmity between them and heartache and sorrow for both parents. Jacob too, failed to discipline and raised his sons as friends.

This yielded the same tragic result in his life. How much better for Isaac, for Jacob, and

for us, if we consider our own family relationships when we were young and then take steps to prevent the same errors from being repeated.

Do not simply take for granted that what you experienced is the norm, but compare it closely with the Scripture. How much better if we are proactive, if we discipline to ensure family harmony, if we discipline our children in terms of their relationship with God, with man and with each other. Both Isaac and Jacob overlooked sibling rivalry and conflict to their own grief and sorrow. Let us earnestly desire not to make the same mistake.

Later, we see the tragic figure of Eli, the great prophet of Israel who was instrumental in bringing the nation of Israel back to God, yet would not discipline his own sons. In 1 Sm 3:13, God says to Eli, *"For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he*

*George was a successful businessman who had been helped greatly in his walk with God by Steve. Under Steve's guidance, he had learned to share his faith, pray, study the Word of God, minister as a layman and preach the gospel. Opportunities opened for him that he never dreamed as God blessed his ministry. Steve, a well known layman in Christian circles, helped George expand and broaden his ministry. In George's eyes, Steve was a great man of God who could do no wrong. Yet, Steve could do wrong. His family was in shambles. His wife showed signs of emotional neglect, his children were rebellious and out of control. It was said that the chaos of the family, more than the call of God, kept Steve on the lay preaching circuit. Not only was George blind to this, but by emulating Steve's lifestyle he was headed down the same road. When I tried to approach George with this, he was hurt and not open to the subject. How much better for them both if George had been willing to take Steve off the spiritual pedestal he had placed him on. He might have been able to save both their families, but as it is they are both now lost.*

Esau, to ensure harmony in the home and a closeness

*"The first grandchild of each of my four spiritual heroes and mentors was born out of wedlock and now I am scared to death."*

Minister sharing at a conference with me that his eyes were only now opening to the family frailties of those he had been emulating

*When I was in the ninth grade, I went out for two sports— basketball and football. I can remember at the time I really liked my basketball coach. He was always very nice to me. He never shouted, gave me a few tips here or there, but basically just wanted me to enjoy the game. The line-coach on the football team was another matter. He was always in my face, always yelling, yanking me around, "do it over," "do it again," "hit him again," "try it again." It seemed like I could never please him. As I look back, the basketball coach never really believed in me. He just wanted me to be there, work out in the off season of football and enjoy the game of basketball. I would play on the practice squad, but he knew I had no real future in the game. As a result, he was indulgent and the favors and grace I thought I was receiving from him were really judgment against me— you can't cut it, so why bother?*

*On the other hand my football coach really believed in me and wanted me to excel, for both myself and the team. As a result, he was always on my case. The harsh judgment I felt he was meting out to me was really the discipline of Grace. I was getting a lot of extra attention, extra conditioning and extra skill development, even though it did not seem like it at the time. At the time I thought I was being unfairly judged and singled out, but I was the recipient of a special kind of Grace, the discipline of Grace. After the hardest workout there would always be praise, always be a pat on the helmet or a swat on the butt, an indication that this was not vindictive, but training.*

did not rebuke them.” What an indictment on this man! God is going to judge his house, “because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them.” When Samuel grew up however, he did not learn from Eli’s experience.

In 1 Sm 8, we find the people coming to Samuel. He had made his sons priests, but he did not require a high standard of them. He did not correct or rebuke them. When the people came to him saying in 1 Sm 8:5, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” Rather than admitting that his sons were out of control and something had to be done, he rebukes the people for desiring a king. It may have been wrong for the people to desire an earthly king rather than a spiritual one, but it was Samuel’s sons who caused the people, by their behavior to lose heart. What a sad state! Samuel can judge a whole nation, but not his own family.

David, the spiritual son of Samuel, carried this same weakness with him. He failed to deal decisively with his children. When David learned of the moral wrongs in his family it says in 2 Sm 13:21, “Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry.” Yet, he did nothing. Time and again in David’s life, though he knew something was wrong in his family, he failed to act. This resulted in all forms of heartache and family tragedies. From Eli, to Samuel to David, we see the theme. These were great men, capable leaders, respected in the secular and spiritual community, yet, when it came to their own children, they were impotent to act. They became weak and vacillating, to the grief of their children, their family and their community. If we as parents are going to be decisive in anything, let us be decisive in our families. If we are going to give a hard, cold look at any of the faults of our parents or spiritual leaders, let’s deal in reality in the area of the family so that we are not doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

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*“I am not too hard on Kenny for sneaking out at night. I used to do it myself, so I understand where he is coming from. In fact, my mother shared with me that she used to do it. Actually, it’s kind of startling and in a way kind of cute to see the way he treats us and tricks us just the way I used to do my parents.”*

Mother, blind to the repetitive path of disobedience in her family which she was now allowing to be repeated in the lives of her children

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## C. GRACE BRINGS ABOUT RECONCILIATION

An act of Grace brings about Reconciliation while an act of Judgment is punitive in nature; it simply evens the score. When the state passes judgment it cares little about the future well-being of the criminal. The court carries out the Law; the judge is very often disgusted by the crime; the attorney for the state will argue for the strictest of punishment; and the family of the person wronged will testify at the hearing to determine the strength of punishment, often in tears of anger, hurt and bitterness, in an effort to extract the very last ounce of judgment upon the guilty. It is an emotionally-charged

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*We live in a society that forbids cruel and unusual punishment. Is it legal in our society, to punish a man by exposing him to radiation so that he gets sick and all his hair falls out? If a man commits a crime, can the judicial system, as punishment, inject lethal chemicals into his body, bringing him to within an inch of his life? Can the prison system cut a man open and remove large parts of his body as a form of punishment, leaving large scars across his torso? In each case the answer is a resounding “No!” Yet, here in Houston, people come from all over the world and pay tens of thousands of dollars to get men to do these very acts. They come willingly. They relocate and wait in line for it. It is called Radiation therapy, Chemotherapy and Radical Cancer Surgery. The difference is that the former is judicial, punitive punishment and the latter is therapeutic, proactive medical care. The same type of actions with exactly the opposite results, based on motive and purpose.*

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atmosphere with only one thing in mind: the execution of judgment on the criminal. This is a far cry from discipline. Discipline, though sometimes harsh, is always for the *benefit* of the one who receives it.

That is how God deals with us and how we should discipline our children. No matter how hard, no matter how intense, the relationship should always be restored and reinforced after the discipline. The motive and the purpose of the parent means everything. Just as God lovingly disciplines us, we should do the same for our children. We should not, as an emotional backlash, omit physical discipline from our child-raising skills, but master it and employ it as God intended.

## D. GOD USES DISCIPLINE

### 1. AS OUR EXAMPLE

God uses the discipline and Grace process in the father/son relationship to illustrate His relationship with us as spiritual sons and daughters. In Heb 12:5–11 the Word of God states:

**12:5** *and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, My son, do not regard lightly the **discipline** of the Lord, Nor faint when you are **reproved** by Him;*

**12:6** *For those whom the Lord loves, He **disciplines**, and He **scourges** every son whom He receives.*

**12:7** *It is for **discipline** that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not **discipline**?*

**12:8** *But if you are without **discipline**, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

**12:9** *Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to **discipline** us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be **subject** to the Father of spirits, and live?*

**12:10** *For they **disciplined** us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He **disciplines** us for our good, that we may share His holiness.*

**12:11** *All **discipline** for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been **trained** by it. Afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

It is through loving, Scriptural discipline that the child learns of God’s dealing with mankind. We are, as fathers, the child’s frame of reference when he thinks of his Heavenly Father or reads passages in the Bible which refer to God as Father.

In verses five and six, we see that God here is calling us “son” and we are to relate to Him as a father when we receive His discipline.

In verses seven and eight, the discipline of earthly fathers is seen as a universal trait of love. What will your son think when he someday reads, “but if you are without discipline...then you are illegitimate children and not sons?” Will he thank God for a father who loved him enough to discipline him or will he wonder at this passage and the father who treated him with the benign neglect, as though he were a bastard child?

In verses nine and ten, this same discipline is used as an illustration of our heavenly Father’s love and commitment to us as His spiritual sons and daughters.

Verse eleven then sums up the value of discipline when done in a Godly manner. It is not judgment, in that it always carries with it the two unique qualities which separate discipline from judgment. The first quality: it is done for the good of the recipient, not for punitive retribution even though it causes sorrow; and the second quality: it always entails a restoration of the relationship.

“God wants us to be happy doesn’t He?” This is a lead-off question I love to ask and the response is always unanimous, be it a junior high Sunday School Class, a College Campus Meeting or an auditorium of young parents in my Family Discipleship Seminar. Hands fly up, faces light up, the room fills with cheer, the response is always a resounding, “Yes!” “Yes, God loves us and wants us to be happy!” or “Yes, God has only the best for us and wants us to be happy!” It comes in differing forms but is always the same answer, “Yes!”

It is then with a little gleam in my eye that I take them to Heb 12:11, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

The discipline of God makes us unhappy. It makes us “sorrowful.” It is such an integral enough part of our spiritual experience to warrant the term, “schooled in it.” No, God does not necessarily want us to be happy. He wants us to be Justified. He wants us to be Sanctified. He wants us to be Glorified. He wants us to be Fruitful. He wants us to be Fulfilled. He wants us to be Disciples and Disciplemakers, but He does not necessarily want us to be Happy, not all the time anyway. Sometimes, He wants us to be sorrowful.

This is an important lesson to learn, and the group I am sharing with always struggles. You can almost hear the gears of their brains grinding and smoking under the strain of this concept. Understanding this will help us to be better heavenly sons as well as better earthly fathers. Furthermore, this concept

frees the parent from the unrelenting tyranny of being responsible for keeping the child happy all the time. It is true that in Eph 4:4, the Word of God commands fathers, “do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” This word "provoke," though, means to purposefully and vindictively cause a child to get angry. It does not mean to avoid doing anything that might cause a child to become angry.

If we use this passage to do away with physical punishment, then we must also throw the baby out with the bath water. Suddenly, we have restricted ourselves from any

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*Don was not considered an overwhelming success in his ministry. He was definitely not a failure, but neither were articles written up on his ministry in his organization’s journals, and the leadership did not make trips to his ministry Mecca to try to spread his methods and philosophies abroad. He was a good, hard-working, anonymous grunt in the kingdom of God—one who will be asked to go to the front of the line in heaven when we discover that Christ was not joking when He said “the last will be first,” but that is another story, to be told at another time. For the present it is enough to say that Don was a solid man in the trenches for the work of God.*

*I had the privilege of meeting Don’s children. They were pure gold. Their love for their father was surpassed only by their love for Jesus. His oldest daughter was a great success as an evangelist and Bible study leader in my campus ministry and went on to become my secretary. His second daughter was a great encouragement to my daughter at a Christian camp and became a role model for Becca when she went to college. His son had a wonderful countenance, was active in the ministry and may well enter it full-time. Don’s commitment to his family, his commitment to the Word of God, to training and discipling his children had paid off big time. At a time when many Christian workers were wondering, “Where did I go wrong?” as the shadow of foolish children spread across their home and waning years, Don’s life and home were made full and bright by the joy of a wise son and righteous daughters.*

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behavior that might cause our children to become angry. Of course this would mean chaos in the home and most certainly the destruction of our child's moral, emotional and spiritual fiber, if not his life as well. It simply means, as parents, we are not to be spiteful, vindictive, petty or mean-spirited when we discipline our children. Even so, most parents gauge the success of their parenting skills on whether or not they have a happy child, not only in the big picture, but often, day by day or even hour by hour. This is a very heavy burden. Once the little darling realizes that this is your goal, he takes over and you become a very abused servant to his precarious tastes and wishes. Many parents labor under this yoke, both to their child's and their marriage's undoing.

## 2. TO MAKE US SUCCESSFUL

Discipline is a work of Grace both as it applies to our fallen nature and as it applies to our ability to be successful in life. It is a work of Grace in terms of our fallen nature in that it leads to salvation. It corrects the spirit and makes the mind teachable to the things of God. It is a work of Grace in terms of our being successful in life in that it prepares the child for a correct response to God after salvation. It gives the child the proper perspective that short-term sorrow will lead to long term joy, through training and discipline. It is the parents' responsibility to act while this crucial "window of hope" is open, as stated in the Word of God in Prv 19:18, "***Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death.***"

## E. DISCIPLINE AND THE FAMILY

Just as the lack of discipline affects the family, so discipline plays a redemptive role in making the family successful and pleasant— a place which is filled with the Grace and Love of Christ.

### 1. JOY

One of the most obvious ways that this it seen to be true is in the way it brings joy to the parents and to the home. Prv 13:1 states, "*A wise son accepts his father's discipline...*" while stating, "*a scoffer does not listen to rebuke*" In verse ten, God goes on to explain, "*Through presumption comes nothing but strife, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom.*" Thus, a son who has been schooled in discipline, who listens to rebuke, who is teachable

*Jim was retired, but at one time he was had held several positions as an executive in a multi-national, multi-million dollar Christian organization. He was the one of only two men I have ever met that could remain humble, professional, and unaffected by ministry success. The other is Ray Tallman, International Director of Arab World Ministries, based in Worthing, England (which of course puts me on the outside of this exclusive group as well). I was in town, and Jim found out that after the conference I would be staying on for one more night since my plane did not leave until the next morning. He insisted that I come and stay the night in his home. With a joy in his heart and a beam on his face, Jim began to recount the success of his children. His son had just completed another Christian book... and on he went. What a joy to see the gladness in this humble man's heart that a wise son had brought him during his last years on earth.*

is not only a wise son but creates a home atmosphere that is free from strife. That is why God can say in Prv 23:24–25, "*The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you.*" The home which houses children who have been trained by God's standards—the home which has employed the redemptive work of disciplining and training of children, is one characterized by rejoicing, by gladness and by thankfulness for the joy that only a Christ-centered home can bring.

We see this theme over and over in God's Word. Discipline brings Wisdom into the life of the child and Wisdom brings joy into the life of the home and the parents. We see this most clearly in the book of Proverbs...

**10:1** *A wise son makes a father glad...*

**15:20** *A wise son makes a father glad...*

**29:3** *A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad...*

Over and over again we see the same theme: wisdom through discipline, joy in the home through wisdom.

## 2. TESTIMONY AND WITNESS

A second blessing that discipline brings to the family is that it is not only a work of Grace within the family, but it is a work of Grace in the community as a whole. A family which is a blessing is the envy of every non-Christian in your community. The thought of a lifestyle or philosophy which will make the home a haven rather than a disaster zone will open homes across your neighborhood to the gospel and the study of the Word of God. It is for good reason that the Word of God links the conduct of the family within its four walls in 1 Tm 3:4, "*He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity,*" with the ability to influence the world outside those four walls for Christ in verse seven, "*and he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*" One who has a good reputation as managing his household well, keeping his children under control, having a home which is characterized by dignity, will have, as a natural result, a good reputation outside the church.

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*Tony was a little mystified as he shared. He had been in the ministry for some twenty years. His specialty was evangelism, prayer and equipping men in the disciple-making ministry. He had experienced some success, had had innumerable visits to his ministry and had been written up on a number of occasions in the professional journal associated with his ministry specialties and organization. Now, at what he thought would be the peak of his career, when he would be able to share his ministry experience and philosophy with the organization he was with and the wide, wide world, this simply was not happening. He was being asked to speak, but on the family. He had been asked to travel outside the country, speak to churches, to staff gatherings, to other Christian organizations. It had taken on a life of its own. The impetus for all this was his reputation as a devoted family man and the testimonies of his wife and children. He was not ungrateful for these opportunities, just a little bewildered. His only real regret was that his wife did not receive more of the spotlight and credit. It was pointed out, gently, that he was the solution to this—duly noted and acted upon.*

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## 3. FRUITFULNESS

As the child learns early the value and use of discipline and teachability in his life, he bears the fruits of this throughout his life. Not only does he receive benefits from the lessons learned from his father and mother, but in the future, lessons he will be able to learn in life will be because of his open attitude to correction and discipline. The Word of God gives clear evidence of this process and in the book of Proverbs, we find a concise list of the benefits of discipline and training which will be the big payoff for the child.

*"Oh, yuck, is that weird or what!" was Baca's exclamation and her preschool brother and sister giggled politely to themselves. The scene was a child about her age (1st grade) throwing a temper tantrum in the grocery store. I*

*"the rod and reproof give wisdom..."*

Proverbs 29:15

*praised God quietly to myself that I had children who not only had been trained at an early age not to do this, but were wise enough to see how foolish it looked in others.*

As I dropped Baca off at her high school, she turned to me and said, "You know Dad, I used to think you could make one Lordship decision and then just forget about it. But you know, it's not true, it's like I have to make a Lordship decision each day when I walk in the cafeteria. Who am I going to sit with? What crowd am I going to hang with? Will you pray for me today, Dad?" As I drove away, I praised God for a daughter wise enough to see this and wise enough to share with her father and to seek his prayers.

*Here we go again, I thought. This is really kind of embarrassing. I don't want to act like I don't believe in my children, but I also already know what*

*"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge..."*

Proverbs 12:1

*the outcome will be and what the problem is, if you can call it a problem. Maybe not so much the problem, as the cause. Megan's teacher had requested a conference and I already knew the reason. The other two had been down this same path about this same time of year for each. They want to test her to see if she is a gifted child. She is not, and she tests as such. You see the problem, or perhaps the cause, is that Megan was disciplined and trained to sit still, control her tongue and her movements, respect authority and follow instructions at a very early age. She therefore, like her brother and sister, was a quick learner and excelled in school. They assumed she was gifted because learning came so easily. Instead she was simply a child who had grown to love discipline and its benefits. As a result, knowledge came easily to her, as it did and does with all her sisters and her brother.*

*One of my great joys in life has been to see my children honored. At first, this honor came as a result of their behavior. It was not uncommon for adults to approach us in restaurants or at museum exhibits or at stores and praise the children for their behavior. I can remember the trouble we would have getting seated at nice tables in restaurants. You could see the fear in the maitre d's face as we insisted on a nice table, not stuck in the back where parents with small children are*

*"...he who regards reproof will be honored."*

Prv13:18

*"You know Mr. Mahon, Sam is not by any means the most gifted guy in the city league this year. In fact, there are several boys on other teams who are athletically pretty far ahead of him. But, he's a real team player. He's dependable and I have never had a young man who is easier to coach. That's why I am giving him the honor of playing on the city-wide All Star Team this year."*

Sam's 8th grade baseball coach.

*relegated. Then the praise would come from the waiter and staff as the children quietly ate their meal and talked with us in subdued voices.*

Later on, they were honored for academics, but as they moved along this slowly gave way to character. Not that they are not good students. They are all A/B students in honors-level courses, but, with the exception of Lizzy, the youngest, they are not "gifted." They do not move in that hyper-intellectual realm that exists in the large urban public schools in the city which we live—the one people love to test and talk about. No, my

children will graduate with honors from high school but they will not be National Merit Scholarship Finalists or Valedictorians of a class of 500, or recruited by Harvard or MIT to study astrophysics. Every year, they receive honors at the end of the year recognizing character, morals, citizenship and the other terms the world tries to come up with to mirror true spiritual values. In a way, I am even more proud of these than of an academic award based on mass testing or an athletic award based on physical accomplishments. Those are often as much a result of the genetic gifts of God as personal accomplishment. But my children's willingness to regard reproof is something they have been trained in and has consistently paid off for them.

I was listening attentively, with pen in hand because I really wanted to get this down. Millie is the mother of Meril, a woman in our campus ministry. I had always been impressed by Meril's character and by the types of friends she chose for herself. I coveted this for my daughters and, as is my habit, when I find a parent who is doing something right I ask a bunch of questions, jot down the answers and put it into practice. The question was, "What was the key in helping Meril to develop such good friendships over the years?" Millie answered without hesitation, "Be the one who picks them up!" She went on to explain, "Children like to go to malls and to movies together. Certain children have irresponsible moms. They say, 'pick us up at 9 p.m.' and they know this mom may not show till 9:30 or even 10. That's when children get into trouble. Always be the mom who picks up and be there early, waiting. The bad children will have none of this and find some one else's mom to do the deed, leaving your child to run with the children who don't mind. In the same line, you be the one who has the parties and hosts the get-togethers. The bad children won't stand for this. In fact, they will ostracize your daughter. She will be ruined for her whole school career, being confined to seek out friends among the good children." This was fantastic advice and so very true. A child with a parent who disciplines them, who gives them life-giving reproof, and who is involved in their lives will indeed dwell among the wise.

"He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise."

Proverbs 15:31

Becca had to make a decision. Our children have always attended public schools and for the majority of their schooling, they were in large urban public schools. We found that requiring them to join one academic club and one social club each year was a good way of ensuring that their school friends were among the good children. We limited it to two clubs, though, to leave room for studies and church activities. Now Becca had to make a decision. She had been invited to join the "Belles," a high-kicking dance team that her school sponsored, known throughout the state. If you were in you were really "in." It meant looking cute at football games, performing at half time, traveling, getting to perform at a professional football games and colleges as well. It was a great honor.

"A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is prudent."

Prv15:5

"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise."

Proverbs 15:31

Something was troubling Becca, though. She did not feel the outfits they were to be wearing were very modest and her freshman year she had heard the boys in the stands making comments during the high-kick routines. So, Becca had to make a decision. She

also had the opportunity to be on the planning team of the Christian Student Union of her school. These were good children, but considered kind of nerdy and definitely not of the popular set. We left this decision completely up to her. The CSU was her ultimate choice. She made it on her own and it was a real turning point in her witness at school. I praise God for a daughter who learned to regard reproof and became prudent in her decisions.

“Don’t worry, Liz, I stared them down.” Sam was swimming at the beach with his younger sister, Liz.

A couple of junior high guys, Liz’s age, with whom he was not real thrilled, wanted to make time with her. Her big brother, the high school baseball player, stared

them down and they got the message. I praise God for a prudent son who will look out for his sisters. He came by this honestly. I can remember three years before, his older sister Becca saying to me, “Don’t worry Dad, I stared them down.” Nothing puts the fear in a girl’s heart like an icy older sister in high school. Some junior high girls at a church outing were trying to make time with her brother. Becca was not at all impressed with them and would have none of it. I praise God for a daughter who is prudent and looks out for the best interest of her younger brother.

“Dad, it is definitely easier to be pure around Christian nerds than the guys on the baseball team.”

Sam explaining his decision to sit with the Christian Student Union members during lunch rather than the baseball team.

“But John, she’s so young; she’s just a freshman.” This was Eleanor’s first response to Becca’s request after we were alone in our room. Becca had

become very active in a campus organization known as Campus Crusade For Christ her freshman year of college. Now she wanted to attend a summer training program with them on the other side of the country, far from where we lived. Those who finished out the summer would be eligible to go on a summer-long foreign mission project the next summer, and the next and the next if you get the drift. It would be all summer long and her mother was really torn. She was excited about the opportunity and the honor bestowed on Becca being asked to join after her freshman year, but would sorely miss her darling who had become one of her best friends.

“For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life,”

Proverbs 6:23

I pointed out to El that Becca had grown up watching us minister to college students. She knew that the most mature, the real go-getters, were always being recruited by us to summer training programs or mission projects. Did we really think, after modeling this before her, after making a career in our ministry of separating sons and daughters from their parents, that we would go untouched? El agreed with her mind, but her mother’s heart was unconvinced. As we put Becca on the plane to her training program, I praised God that for Becca, the reproofs of discipline had indeed become a way of life.

#### 4. THIS BRINGS US BACK TO PROVERBS 19:18, “DISCIPLINE YOUR SON WHILE THERE IS HOPE...”

While we have the opportunity, we must act decisively. The “window of opportunity,” in terms of discipline, does not remain open long. We must begin while the child is young. We must go to work to ensure his place of blessing. We must discipline while there is hope, so that our children may be able to enjoy all the fruits of this hope throughout their lives.

### III. The Scriptural Basis for the Training and Disciplining of Children: God's Expectations for you as a Parent.

*(Before moving into this section it might be good to review two important points we have covered previously in the chapter.)*

#### A. FIRST: THE WORD OF GOD PRESUPPOSES THAT YOU WILL VIEW CHILDREN AND PARENTING AS A BLESSING IN A LOVING AND BENEVOLENT MANNER.

In Ps 127: 3–5 the Word of God states, “Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, When they speak with their enemies in the gate.” The phenomenon of our culture of the “unwanted child” is unknown to Scripture. Except in such cases, as in the siege of Jerusalem, where mass starvation was taking place, it was inconceivable in the Scriptural record to be upset by a pregnancy or another child. The bearing of children was a spiritual event and not having many children was something which burdened and caused sorrow to the families plagued by it. Women yearned for babies. Men rejoiced in babies. There are recorded virtual “baby wars,” as women sought to outdo one another in receiving the gift of God in the form of beautiful little babies. So, the Word of God views fathers as a blessing. Jesus in Luke 11:9–13 gives one of His many examples of how loving God is by comparing Him with earthly fathers. To be a father, to be a mother, to be a parent, to have children, is viewed by God as a supreme blessing, and a spiritual event. How do you view it?

*“Oh John, you don’t know how thankful we are to have you in our church. I could just cry.” I was not sure what brought this outburst of emotion from Darlene, but I knew it wasn’t my great ministry in her life. In fact, at this point I barely knew her and her husband Russell. As I inquired further, I found out why and I am afraid my discovery is an indictment of the evangelical church as a whole.*

*You see, Russell was a graduate student and he and Darlene already had two small children. Darlene had just found out she was pregnant with their third. She had come to church all excited only to be greeted with, “How on earth did that happen?” “My Lord Darlene, you have a college degree, don’t you know anything?” “How in the world will you be able to afford it?” (I love it when people depersonalize unborn babies by calling them “it”). “Good grief Darlene, you live in a one-bedroom apartment, you don’t have room for the children you have, where do you think it is going to sleep?” And, the closest thing to an encouragement, “Well, God is sovereign, I guess you will just have to trust in His decision.”*

*It never occurred to anyone that Darlene and Russell had planned to have another child. They loved children. In contrast with how most of the world lives, a one-bedroom apartment was no impediment to receiving the gift of God. They were excited and were planning to have another child just as soon as they could, and then another, and then another after that. This is why Darlene responded so emotionally to me. On hearing the news of her pregnancy, I had exclaimed, “Praise God Darlene. What a joy, what a wonderful gift from God, what a vote of confidence from God to entrust you with another baby. I am so happy and so proud of you both!” I could only share her sadness and the sad state of the church as she related to me the comments she had been receiving. Children are indeed the gift of God and the fruit of the womb is His reward. Let us never forget this.*

#### B. SECONDLY: THE WORD OF GOD DOES NOT VIEW PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE AS DEVIATING FROM THIS LOVING AND BENEVOLENT MANNER.

The old phrase, “this hurts me more than it hurts you,” may be discarded on the humanist junk pile. There need be no guilt in discipline nor remorse. It is an act of Grace. It is insuring your child’s success. Although there are many passages in Scripture that allude to God withholding His judgment and in His being sorry for man’s actions which result in His carrying out His judgment, no such statements are made in terms of God’s discipline. In fact, just the opposite is true. The Bible says, “Whom the Lord loves, He

disciplines...” Discipline is for our good. It is a blessing. It results in blessing. God would school us in it, He would refine us in it. He plans it for our good and experiences no remorse whatsoever. In the same way, we must not feel remorse or hesitation in discipling our children. It is for their good and you are performing an act of Grace.

### C. IN LIGHT OF THIS, GOD HAS FOUR DEFINITE EXPECTATIONS OF THE PARENT AS IT PERTAINS TO DISCIPLINE.

1. **Instruction:** and, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)
2. **Training:** Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)
3. **Discipline:** He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently. (Proverbs 13:24)
4. **Control:** He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (1 Tm 3:4)

Most parents instruct, some train, few discipline and, as for control, this is now considered by most as a form of dysfunctional behavior and is therefore rejected. These are not, however, optional areas of parenting. They are commanded by God. They are doctrinal in nature, spoken universally to all parents, transcending both time and culture. As such, all three must be considered and adapted to our parenting style. We are responsible to God for these as parents irrespective our personal preference or disdain for any one particular area or style.

## IV. The Scriptural Basis for the Training and Disciplining of Children: The Rod and Grace

True child abuse is epidemic in our culture. It is epidemic in two ways.

Violent parents who are hurting their children in serious physical and mental ways, and parents who are raising juvenile delinquents through benign neglect and a permissive parenting lifestyle. Both are wrong. If you grew up in a violent home, characterized by sexual or physical abuse, you most certainly should get professional help to aid you in recovering from the terrible and unjust scars meted out on your heart and mind. The scourge of alcoholism, pornography and the abandonment of Christian values, has only accentuated this problem. Hitting in anger or doing any form of discipline in anger is wrong. If you can do it no other way, then you should get help.

On the other hand, you should not allow children’s rights zealots to keep you from disciplining your children in a controlled manner as defined by God. Nothing torks me off more than to see overworked social workers following up leads turned in by children’s right zealots, who have taken it upon themselves to police loving Christian

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*“What most mothers and fathers fail to realize is that corporal punishment (spanking) is an ineffective and harmful method of managing children’s behavior.”*

Houston Chronicle, Parenting article

*“If you hit your child (spank) then you are teaching your child to hit.”*

Humanist truism as concerns spanking

*“You know, Rev. Mahon, it is not the children whose parents spank them who are violent. I can track each of the children in my class who have trouble with hitting or biting, back to parents who neglect them, and I don’t mean material neglect. Some of these families are really well off. I mean moral neglect. These children can get away with anything and they know it.”*

Sam’s third grade teacher

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homes and as a result, not leaving them time to get to the true abusers who are endangering the lives and minds of their children.

Discipline of children as carried out in accordance with God's Word of God has two key elements. First: the Rod, the implement of our discipline; and Second: Grace, the spirit of our discipline

## A. THE ROD

In the Word of God the term used for the Rod is "Shebet". Much has been made of this Word of God by exponents of differing philosophies of spanking, but I have not found it to be that complicated a term. Unlike Greek, Hebrew is a pretty straightforward language, it is what is termed in the computer world, "WYSIWYG" (*pronounced wizzywig*), an acronym for What You See Is What You Get, and that is pretty much how it is with the Hebrew language. Allow me to share with you a few scholarly observations on the word, "rod".

**Wilson's Old Testament Word of God Studies**— "A stick, rod, staff; a rod or staff for chastening."

**Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament**— "Denotes rod used for beating cummin and dill (Is 28:27), as a weapon (2 Samuel 23:21), shepherd's implement (Leviticus 27:32), to punish slaves (Ex 21:20), to punish fools (Proverbs 10:13), and to discipline sons (Proverbs 13:24)."

**Zondervon Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible**— "Rod was a length of tree limb or brush stock, employed at first for support or as a weapon. SHEBET to prop or support, hence a shepherd's staff and ultimately a scepter."

**Ungers's Bible Dictionary**— "A stick for punishment; a shepherd's staff."

### 1. PASSAGES ON THE ROD MAKE IT CLEAR THAT GOD HAD IN MIND AN IMPLEMENT WHICH WOULD INFLICT PAIN

**Proverbs 13:24**— "*He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.*" We are told that it is not to be spared.

**Proverbs 23:13-14**— "*Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol. The parent is enjoined to beat the child with the rod and then in a tongue in cheek manner chided, "he will not die".*

**Prv 20:30**— "*Stripes that wound scour away evil, and strokes reach the innermost parts*" This makes it clear that the stroke should be hard enough to leave a red mark and that a bruise is not the unforgivable sin.

If implements in childraising that cause bruising are to be outlawed and if anyone advocating or using an implement of training that causes bruising is to be arrested that list would look something like this. First: All nurses and Doctors who bruise children while taking blood and giving shots must go to jail. Second: all elementary teachers who supervise play on playground equipment where children are constantly being bruised must go to jail. Third: all coaches and trainers of almost all the sports and arts must go to jail. Fourth: all makers of women's shoes must go to jail. Fifth: makers of roller skates, roller blades and all skating rinks will be raided and the proprietors sent to jail. Somewhere in this list we will include the parent who spansks their child, where the occasional bruise or red mark appears. It's a package deal, if inflicting a bruise or red

mark on a child while training that child is an unforgivable sin for a parent, then it is unforgivable for all people who knowingly allow or do this in any type of supervision, instruction or training.

## 2. TWO PRIMARY FORMS OF SHEBET TODAY

**The first is the Switch**— this is a long slender branch with which the child is spanked. Generally due to its small size a multiple number of indeterminate strokes are used. This is the classic switch off Grandmas peach or Willow tree. Dad’s belt would fall under this category as would the fly swatter.

**The second is the Rod**— this is a small dowel, wooden spoon, paddle, etc., with which the child receives a specific and limited number of strokes commensurate the offense, (example 1, 2, or 3) depending on the infraction.

My personal preference is the rod, or wooden spoon. I have three primary reasons for this preference. First, I prefer to use a method where the exact number of spanks or strokes are known from the beginning. This allows the child to concentrate on the offense rather than Mom or Dad’s actions and how to manipulate them. Secondly it is over quickly and you can get on with life. Lastly, it is not subjective, and, as a result, is not prone to being overdone.

Do not withhold spanking from a child who cries easily when faced with discipline. Crying does not drive out foolishness from the heart of a child— it is the discipline of the rod. The Hebrew word for “cry” was available to

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*“We don’t spank little Tish. All I have to do is look at her sideways, and she cries. She has such a tender heart and she knows she has done wrong. Her sweet little spirit is so sensitive that she feels bad and cries without spanking. This is such a relief to Mom and me.”*

Minister on why he doesn’t spank his daughter

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God when Proverbs was written. So were words meaning “to feel sorry”, “to repent”, “to regret”, but these were not chosen by the Holy Spirit of God, SHEBET, “rod,” was chosen and this is what we are left with. Nowhere does the Word of God equate crying with the desired results of the rod. Crying is not the goal but a by-product. Disciplining the child is the goal. In discipline God does not consider pain, either directly inflicted by Himself upon the child or thorough His agent, the earthly parent, to be a negative factor. In the same vein, God does not equate crying with discipline. In fact, *nowhere is crying even mentioned*. The Word of God does not say, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child, but *crying* will remove it far from him.” But rather, the “*rod of discipline...*” There are many ways of making a child cry, and children can devise many ways of imitating crying. But the rod is the rod, it is not faked and it is not cruel. As a result, it should be a stroke, it should be hard enough to cause sorrow, but do not to force the child to cry. The child may or may not cry. This is not a test of wills to make your child cry, but a discipling process to train your child. Through discipline, your child will be more successful in life by abandoning foolishness in exchange for wisdom. Though foolishness is spiritually bound up in the heart of your child, is being removed far from him by the rod of discipline.

True, the norm will be tears and crying. For the majority of moms, no tears and no crying means their strokes are not doing the job. There is, however, the rare child who simply does not cry easily. I caution parents not to make it the objective to reduce this child, through strokes of the rod, to tears. The Bible does not command this and the results can be damaging to the child, to the parent, and to the family.

In my experience, when we become subjective in our discipline, relying on man's intuition rather than God's Word, more harm is done than good. The issue of crying is one of these. I have seen both extremes: on the one hand men who withhold discipline from the child who cries easily, to men who not only demand crying, but demand a certain type of crying which denotes repentance.

All of the men I have known who withheld the rod because the child cried and since crying signifying sorrow for the action was enough, had children who *used emotions as a manipulative tool*— especially where their parents were concerned.

All of the men I have known that have insisted that every time they discipline with the rod they get a certain kind of crying and persisted until they got that result, had an emotional or controlling agenda, which took priority over training. All of these men, to the number, pursued this agenda at the loss of their relationship with their child. Some knew it, some did not, but the child always did, as did the mother.

### 3. HUMANIST ALTERNATIVES TO THE ROD

The use of the rod is a pattern given to us by the Word of God. The rod is far better than humanist alternatives. These alternatives to God's first choice are not all equally as damaging, but in my opinion, they are usually emotional time bombs waiting to explode. Each damages in a small way the relationship and postpones dealing with the root matter in the child. There are basically five popular alternatives to the rod being utilized in the world today, finding themselves at work even in Christian families, sometimes in many subtle ways.

*"It's time to go Janie, please put down the nice toy and come with Mommy. That belongs to the store, not to us and it is time to go."*

*Now in a sterner voice stepping towards her little darling, "Now, Janie, Mommy said to come and I want you to put that down and come here now... I don't have time for this."*

*Janie backs off with ball in hand, mother aware other shoppers are beginning to notice. "Janie pleeeese come now and put the ball back, Mommy is tired and has to get home and make dinner. Pleeeese don't make Mommy sad."*

*Janie begins to listen again still holding on to the ball. Mommy, sensing hope, bargains, "Janie, when we get home Mommy will get out your ball and you can play with it and Mommy will give you some gum when we get into the car. You will like that wont you? Now come on and let's go."*

*Mommy turns to go but Janie opts out, a ball in the hand is better than gum promised, besides, this is starting to be fun, people are looking and talking. "OK, Janie, Mommy is going home, you can just stay here and they will turn off the lights and lock you in. Good bye."*

*Now earlier in the game Janie would have come screaming at this point, but over time she has learned that Mommy does not abandon little Janie to strangers, in fact she is afraid of loosing little Janie in a crowd. Now Janie plays her trump card, as soon as Mommy turns to leave, she picks up the ball and hightails it down the aisle in the opposite direction.*

*Mommy chases her down, picks her up and with Janie kicking and crying and leaves the mall, uttering threats and thoroughly embarrassed.*

#### a. THE WAR OF REASON

This is the classic model. You reason, you ask, you demand, you plead, your bribe, you threaten and then, if your bluff is called...you control by restraint.

I've seen this scene played out in a hundred malls, grocery stores

and shopping centers across the country. It has got to be the most ineffective method combined with the most damaging relational method that I can imagine. I guess that's why it is so universally popular with humanists. The main fallacy with reasoning with a child as if the child were an adult is that the child is not an adult. Even if the child can handle the vocabulary, the child has neither the spiritual nor the moral capacity of an adult. That is why the child has you as a parent. To instill these traits in the child so that the child can move successfully into adult behavior.

## b. SENSORY DEPRIVATION

This, too, is classic. After scolding the child you place him in a secluded room. Perhaps with the lights out, you make him stay there for no telling how long. He gets to hear the family going on without him. He gets to reflect on the unjustness and left alone with his thoughts, a root of bitterness begins to develop in his life. This coupled with the fear of being stuck in this room forever makes it the most cruel of the discipline methods. The Koreans developed sensory deprivation into a veritable art form. They found that they could reduce a Marine officer to a babbling baby through sensory deprivation alone. Prisons and those engaged in psychological manipulation love it. I cannot think of any means more likely to produce bitterness and fear in the relationship than this.

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*"If you don't obey right now you get the garage!" The statement obviously got the child's attention, but I did not quite get it. "The garage?" I asked. "Oh that," the mother responded. "I got tired of fighting with these children all the time. So, if they don't respond, then I stick them in the garage with the lights out. Five minutes in there and I find them to be very cooperative." I stared in amazement, here was a woman violently opposed to spanking, but using a most cruel method to intimidate her children into cooperation. The bitterness of the older children revealed all too clearly the toll this was taking on their long-term relationship.*

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*It was hard for me to understand the bitterness in the eyes of Gretchen's children. There was a very, very sweet side to these children, but there was also a resentful bitter side. As I got to know the family and saw the dynamics of the relationship, I began to understand why. Gretchen would allow the children to challenge her authority until she finally lost her temper. She would then strongly scold the child and send the child to the bedroom. There the child was allowed to cry, kick, pout, throw things and act out all the aggression in earnest. If it went on for too long Gretchen would shout out, "You're not coming out 'til you have calmed down." After a period, which was determined both by the mood of the child and of Gretchen, the child was let out. But you could see it in her eyes. Nothing had been solved; all that anger had been mulled over and internalized while in the room, sometimes acted out in violent outbursts of anger, and sometimes internalized in growing bitterness towards authority. Either way, the foolishness remained bound in the heart of this child. There was an evident, bitter streak in this child's heart that is so common in children whose mothers resort to this method.*

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*"Please come and help your father pick this stuff up" the mother called to her son as he sat in front of the TV. "What will you give me?" Was his immediate reply. "It's not what I'll give you if you do, it is what I'll give you if you don't," was the mother's quick retort. A fight was brewing and the father broke in. "Come on son, we have company coming. You help us out. Get your room cleaned up and behave yourself at dinner and tomorrow you can go to the mall with your friends and we will treat you to a movie and give you some spending money." The boy thought it over and after a little more negotiation, he hopped up, and helped out. There was a quiet dinner and pleasant evening with the church Sunday School class. Then, on the next day was the pay off. The parents had gotten off cheap. I knew only too well what this young man was capable of. His sullenness can cast a pall over an entire evening and spoil any get-together. He is only now learning the price he can charge for allowing his parents to entertain or have a nice evening at home. In the future his services will be negotiated for a higher price.*

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## c. BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION

Thanks to modern psychology's marriage to the evolutionary model, we are but animals and many homes have become one great Pavlovian laboratory. Stimulus response reigns. Do good, get good; do bad, get bad. What a great value system. Psychiatrists have developed a model for the sociopath that this training produces. He is called the marginal personality type. All his decisions are made on the stimulus response model in relationship with society without reference to morals.

**d. TIME AND SPACE BREAKS**

This may work on the football field, or basketball court, or ice hockey rink, but it is alien to Scripture. It presupposes that the child is basically good. That he gets into a bad rut, outside his basic nature and all he needs is a time and space break. Take a break, recoup, get back on the right track, and all will be well. The only problem is that this does

*“Excuse me just a minute John, I can’t talk right now.” I could hear the chaos of Larry’s three-year-old in the background as an argument over Kool-aid was erupting. “Daddy’s on the phone....” and the war of wills continued to escalate. “OK, that’s enough, time for a “time out.” Little Heather was placed on a stool and cooled down for a few moments. “OK, now I’ll be off the phone in a minute and then we’ll talk,” and Larry was back on the phone. Larry did not like to discipline with the rod. He just did not see it. If he ever could use the “time out” break instead, he always did. Without ever really admitting it to himself or to others, deep down in his heart Larry viewed spanking as an act of violence against his child. He really trusted the books he read on this subject, more than the Word of God. Little Heather was sweet, but she was also selfish, just like her other brothers and sisters. The time out break was more than putting off her desires and getting her temper under control on her end. It was also a way when she could command the total attention of her parents with very little lost on her side whenever she wanted. It was great indoor sport for Heather, and Larry was completely oblivious to the selfish and manipulative streak that was developing in his children.*

not deal with foolishness that is in the heart child. All it deals with are the limits to which Mom and Dad may be pushed. These, over a period of time, given an intelligent child can be stretched further and further as the parent’s pain and chaos threshold increase.

**e. INSTITUTIONAL**

This is the most cruel. The parent leaves it to an institution, be it day care center, schools— be they public, private, military or Christian. It could be a social worker, coach, teacher, etc., to deal with the behavior problems. I can guarantee you that an institution will be far less caring and far harsher with your child than you ever will be. You can forget about love and turn your child over to the cruel rules of institutions, but this is to abrogate your responsibility before both God and man.

*The mothers exasperated comment was filled half despair, and half prayer, “My only hope is that the \_\_\_\_\_ will straighten him out.”  
Now all that is left is for you to do is fill in the blank: school, Scouts, Army, church, camp— you name it, I have seen mothers and fathers put their hope in it. How much better to have trained their children in a loving atmosphere of discipline than to have to abrogate this authority now to an institution! In most cases, all that is accomplished is that the child develops a network of similarly disposed rebels from which he can learn.*

Now these methods are not all equally as damaging and harmful. In fact, a Christian in good faith can use methods other than the rod, *unless the new method is used to replace the biblical standard.* That, of course, would be sin. In a very limited and controlled manner they may, if the parent so chooses, be employed as a secondary aid in the discipling and training of children but you should recognize that they are not sanctioned by Scripture, though they could have been if God had wanted to include them. The vocabulary was there for God to draw upon. The concepts were in existence. God could have easily introduced these methods along with the rod of discipline, but He did not. They must never replace the biblical method and, in my opinion, are for the most part more damaging than helpful in the disciplining process. We took a pass on them all. The reason being, they are experimental, by their very nature. The Word of God clearly teaches that the rod is the Holy Spirit’s method of choice in the disciplining and training of children. No other method is specifically taught or mentioned in the Word of God. These other methods are developed by man. They are not inherently evil, but they are experimental in nature. We have no confidence— other than our own reasoning

powers— that they will work. The movement away from the rod in the evangelical church does not have its roots in a deep biblical study of the issue coupled with sound exegesis of scriptures by the conservative biblical scholars of our day. Rather it is a response to the world’s reaction to the principles in the Word of God and the influence of modern child psychology upon the evangelical church. If God’s Word presents us with the rod as a disciplinary tool then it must be a part of our training methods. You may or may not choose to employ modern experimental methods in raising your children.

### B. GRACE: THE SPIRIT OF OUR DISCIPLINE:

In discipling in Grace these keys must be kept in mind.

1. Discipline is done *for the well being of the child* and as a result, is not done in anger. If you are waiting until you get angry to discipline then discipline has become a selfish tool to deal with— an irritant, and not a work of grace in the child’s life.
2. Discipline is done *for the well being of the child* and as a result, is not punitive. Discipline is carried out without reference to punishment. You are not punishing the child... you are not getting even with him... you are not making him pay. Rather you are training the child for success.
3. Discipline is done for the well being of the child and as a result *is done in love*. **The relationship must never be in question.** There is no need to send the child away, no need to break fellowship. After discipling there should be love and emotional reinforcement and then life can go on as normal. Discipline, far from creating a rift between the parent and child, is relationally intensive.
4. Discipline is done for the well being of the child and as a result *is goal oriented*. The goal of discipling the child is to make the child a success. This should always be in the forefront of your mind and the child’s. This presupposes thought-through goals and plans, not just, shoot from the hip, stimulus-response child-raising methods.

## V. Summary

### I. THE BOTTOM LINE

- A. The bottom line is Eph 6:1– 4, children who obey, and parents who discipline and instruct.
- B. God has taken the moral prerogative away from parents. He has already decided what the right reaction of children to their parents is and should be. A key question all parents should ask themselves, “When you ask your child to do something, is his response to obey?”
- C. God’s first choice is intervention by the parent on behalf of the child. Without this, the child is left to his fallen nature.
- D. Failure to discipline your child results in tragedy not only in his own life but also in the family and in the Christian community as a whole.
- E. The failure by man, or by his institutions to enforce God’s standards on those employed in full-time ministry and Christian service does not mean that God has gone condoned their lack of faithfulness.
- F. Discipline is an act of Grace in the child’s life on the part of the parents. It affects him spiritually, socially and mentally, preparing him for a fruitful and fulfilled life

and bringing blessings on his home, his community and his spiritually family as well.

G. The Word of God presupposes that you will view children and parenting as a blessing in a loving and benevolent manner.

H. The Word of God does not view physical discipline as deviating from this loving and benevolent manner.

I. God has definite expectations of the parent as it pertains to discipline:

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

2. **Training:** *“Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* (Prv 22:6)

3. **Discipline:** *“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.”* (Prv13:24)

4. **Control:** *“He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity.”* (1 Tm 3:4)

J. The Rod is the tool of our discipline while Grace is the spirit of our discipline

K. Ample Scripture references establish the value of spanking your child.

1. Other methods may not be anti-scriptural but they are definitely man’s attempts, man’s experiments and do not carry the weight of Scripture.

2. The vocabulary and concepts were in existence if the Holy Spirit had wanted to bring out other methods besides physical discipling of the child, spanking. Yet He choose not to. We should recognize and accept this.

3. There are no illustrations of discipline in the Scripture where the rod is not spoken to either directly or indirectly.

## Chapter TWO

### Post-Study Projects

*At this point, there may be a real tendency on the part of the reader to make some radical changes in how you are handling your children. Let me stress to you not to do anything until at least after chapter four. The application section of the workbook is designed to give you time to make prudent thoughtful decisions based on a growing conviction in the Word of God. I would encourage you to follow the lead of the workbook and not make any rash decisions concerning your children. Of course, you and your spouse know best and this is not a hard and fast rule.*

#### **Scripture Memory Verse— Prv 13:24**

**He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.**

**Last Week's Verse— Prv 23:13** *“Do not hold back discipline from the child, Although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from Sheol.”*

## QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR TRAINING AND DISCIPLINING CHILDREN

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: EPH 6: 1–3

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: EPH 6:4

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and, is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: PRV 22:6

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

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**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: HEB 12:4–11

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

## Discipline Survey

Husbands and wives should do this project together and then discuss the results. If your children are too young for any of the questions then reflect upon the norm of behavior in your family, church, neighborhood or circle of friends.

Answer Each Question T = True and F = False

### I. Home

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Our toddler makes a mess when he eats, so we put newspapers or some type of covering under him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. When our child is in another room, we can call to him in a normal voice and he will stop what he is doing and come.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Our child picks up after himself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Our child has regular chores to do around the house.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When told to come, our toddler runs to us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Our child sits quietly at the table until served.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Our child gets up, gets dressed, does his chores and then comes to breakfast.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I look forward to meal times with the children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Our family eats at least one sit down meal together each day.

### II. Car

- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Trips are fun with our children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Our children amuse themselves on long trips in the car.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Our children play well together on long trips in the car.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. On car trips, our children go to sleep when told.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. When driving I can tell my children to hush...and they will.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I look forward to running errands in the car with the children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. The children will play quietly while I am having to concentrate on traffic.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. My children can eat or play without trashing the car.

### **III. Visiting**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. There are some homes into which we cannot take our children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. There are some stores into which we cannot take our children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Shopping with our children is twice as much work as without them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. When shopping I can elicit my children's help...and it will actually be helpful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. When shopping, my children follow my instructions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I am embarrassed by my children when shopping or in public.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. People often comment on how well-behaved my children are.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. If my children were well behaved we could have a lot of fun together on outings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. My children can accept the disappointment of changed plans without throwing a temper tantrum.

### **IV. Church**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. My children sit still during church.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. We need a church with a good children's program, or we cannot enjoy the sermon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I often go to church tired because of the work it takes to get my children ready.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. We rarely go out after church because the kids are so cranky.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. My children make cute things at Sunday school but they are ruined by the time we get home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. My children pay attention to the sermon, the older ones taking notes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. My children participate in the worship time, standing we when stand to sing, singing, sharing the hymnal even though they cannot read, etc..
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. After the service my children will stand quietly while I get a chance to talk with my friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. I see parents with well-behaved children in church and wonder how they do it.

## The Atmosphere of Our Family

In thinking back over this chapter of the workbook you should have begun to get a “feel” for God’s desires in this area as compared to the atmosphere of your family. Is the atmosphere of your home and family the same as that revealed in this section of the workbook? As you discuss this with your spouse, write down your thoughts, then your spouse’s thoughts. Then list the similarities and differences of your feelings.

Your Thoughts

Spouse's Thoughts

Similarities

Differences

## The Joy of Parenting

Reflect on your children. What aspects of parenting is a real joy for you as a result of their actions and behavior? In contrast, what aspects are a strain or drain on you because of their behavior?

*Areas of Parenting*

*Your Children Make a Joy*

*Areas of Parenting*

*Your Children Make a Strain or Drain*

# My Heart... God's Word

There are certain scriptural terms or principles which, because of our secular culture, we tend to react emotionally against. Each of the following Biblical terms or phrases has been used in this study. Reflect on the term or phrase and your reaction to it. Record your thoughts.

Biblical term used in the  
context of your children

My emotional reaction  
to this term

INSTRUCTION .....

TRAINING .....

DISCIPLINE .....

CONTROL .....

ROD .....

BEAT WITH A ROD .....

STRIKE .....

STROKES THAT WOUND .....

OBEY .....

HONOR .....

## Reality Check

*Sometimes we do not notice something because we do not think about it or we just get used to it. Anyone who has sold a house or done an exit walk though on a rental property has had this experience. Things are pointed out to you that you had simply ceased to notice. Perhaps you did at one time, but now you are used to them. Answer the following questions on a scale of 0–10, 0 being not at all, and 10 being perfection. Now for the reality check, go to someone who will be very honest with you: a sister or brother, parent or in-law, a friend you can trust, and ask them to rate your children. How do the results compare? Write a short one or two sentence summary.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Do your children obey you?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Are your children under control?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Do your children respect you in public?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Do others think of your children as obedient and well behaved?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Do your children show you honor and respect in public?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Can you have friends over to visit without your children constantly interrupting you.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Can you meet a friend at a mall, coffee shop or favorite place and enjoy the time together, if your children are with you?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Do you use the rod to discipline your children?

## "From the Mouth of Babes"

*The world has taken an incident in the life of Christ and turned it into a doctrine for their own purposes. We find in Matthew 21:15–16 an incident surrounding His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant, and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" and Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself?'"*

*The phrase, "out of the mouth of babes" from the King James Bible, does not refer to an innate unspoiled wisdom found in children, but rather the fulfillment of prophecy concerning Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Yet many have jumped on this passage, and whenever a child says something precocious or true, this verse is often quoted as if God has extended a special grace to children because of their unspoiled state.*

*What do the following passages have to say of the spiritual condition of children at birth as a result of the sin of Adam?*

**Rom 5:17 For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one [Adam]...**

**Rom 5:18 So then as through one transgression [Adam's sin] there resulted condemnation to all men...**

**Rom 5:19 For as through the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners...**

**1 Cor 15:21–22 For since by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.**

***In secular thought, we are born pure and unadulterated. We are the philosopher Rousseau's clean slate... a pristine creation, which, as time goes by, is marred by the world.***

- 1. Can you think of any ways in which your view of children has been marred by this perspective?**
  
- 2. How would this perspective effect your approach to raising your children?**