

Discipline: An Awesome Responsibility

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Finally.... the long-awaited for cry of a newborn infant pierces the air!!! In amazement, the new mother and father stare at the miracle produced by their love. God, in His infinite wisdom, has bestowed upon them the blessing of a covenant child. Even as their grateful hearts and mouths praise the Lord for this precious and wonderful gift, their souls are overwhelmed by the awesome responsibility that coincides with the bestowal of this treasure. They are now covenant parents entrusted with the care and upbringing of one of God's precious jewels! How can they, mere mortal, sinful human beings, provide the covenant instruction and discipline required by their Heavenly Father?!? Again, what an *awesome* responsibility!

Soon after, the jubilant new parents arrive home with their newest blessing from God. This covenant home, first established when the young man and woman exchanged their marriage vows, now includes a child whom they had already been admonished (in the marriage form) to bring up “. . .in the fear of the Lord, to the honor of thy holy name to the edification of thy Church and to the extension of the holy gospel.” During the first few weeks of the infant's life, the young parents already see the signs of total depravity. Very soon they learn to distinguish the genuine cries of hunger, discomfort, or distress from the cries of displeasure, discontent, or anger. Although discipline at this point cannot consist of much more than a stern tone of voice, discipline *has* begun.

After four weeks or so, the young father requests permission to present their child for the sacrament of holy baptism. When the Sunday for this notable event arrives, the proud parents stand before the minister with the child in the father's arms and proclaim before the entire congregation their promise and intention “to see (this child), when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are parents or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?” (Third question of the Form for Baptism.) This “bringing up” and instruction includes discipline. Once again these covenant parents are faced with the *awesome* responsibility God has given them.

As the months go by, the young parents watch as their progeny begins to smile, to coo, to sit, to crawl, and eventually to walk and run. In conjunction with the child's developing independence, his curiosity about the world around him also is growing. Thus, only a few months after his birth, this child begins to reach out and towards the “new” and interesting objects and places of his environment. Needless to say, many of these objects and places are not only “off limits” to the child, they are also dangerous. So begins instruction and discipline through the simple words of “no, no” and if necessary, the slapping of hands and bottom.

At this point we should discuss the “choices” that these young covenant parents are faced with regarding the discipline of their child in the world today. They have been bombarded, not only through the media, but also with the advice of the medical profession, friends, neighbors, and maybe even family as to how their child should be raised. Most of these views are based on the premises that the child is innately good, and that any type of corporal punishment is to be seen as barbaric and contrary to the human laws of “decency” and “parental” love. They have been told that the “old-fashioned” and “biblical” means of discipline are, in fact, harmful and detrimental to the child; that no parent who “loves” his/her child could possibly expect to show this love by the use of the biblical rod. However, this young couple, through prayer and the grace of God, has determined to follow the biblical mandate given in Proverbs 14:23, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes,” as had their parents before them. Although the rest of the world may look on them with dismay and shout accusations of cruelty and abuse, these covenant parents know that true parental love

involves both the rod and reproof: “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” (Proverbs 29:15. Also read the pamphlet *The Rod and Reproof: The Loving Discipline of Covenant Children* by Rev. Steven Key.) Just as our Father in heaven chastises us, His children, in love, so must these covenant parents chastise their child. Only through such discipline is true parental love expressed, that love that shows a boundless concern for the child’s eternal soul.

Throughout the preschool years, the discipline of their child is primarily administered by the parents. When the child sins, he is reproved and, if necessary, spanked. Day after day the young parents pray for guidance and patience concerning his upbringing. Too soon the child is old enough to be sent to school. The parents again adhere to their promise made at the child’s baptism to bring up and instruct this child in the doctrine of the Church, that is, in the fear of the Lord, by sending him to a school where that same doctrine is taught. And since the school is an extension of the home, they acknowledge that necessary discipline will be carried out for the same purpose as they themselves administer it.

As their child enters the teenage years, the need for discipline by these parents does not diminish. Just as when he was a toddler, the emerging young adult continues to strive for independence and in so doing reaches out to encounter new and interesting experiences. However, many of these experiences are “off limits,” dangerous, and totally against the commandments of God for a true child of the covenant. Again, these parents are impressed with the *awesome* responsibility God has given them in being there to discipline, in love, their erring teenager with reproof and the rod. More than ever they realize the need for prayer and grace from God to be able to carry out this task according to His will.

Finally.... these same parents, the Lord willing, sit in the congregation and witness their child, now a young adult, stand before the Church of Christ to profess his faith as a member of that Body of Christ. As they watch, their hearts, minds, and souls sing with praise and thanksgiving to God for His wonderful grace and mercy in helping them instruct and train this child in the way that he should go, in guiding them with this *awesome* responsibility.

Dear young people, the next time you receive instruction and discipline from your parents, please take a moment to reflect on this responsibility that God has placed on them. However, you may not fully understand the *awesomeness* of this task, as I did not, until the circle is complete and one day *you*, D.V., hold your own precious jewel from God in your arms.

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