

CHAPTER 17: CHASTISEMENT

1. Is it not necessary on some occasions for parents or those in charge of children to chastise them?

Yes there are few, if any, families in which it is not necessary at times to resort to some kind of punishment. Severe punishment, however, is not necessary with all children – very far from it – seeing that a firm and decided training from the birth, will, as a rule, secure uniform obedience. When children know that you are determined to be obeyed, and that nothing will move you, they will usually yield such obedience, and that with pleasure.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions. Some children are so naturally obstinate and wilful that they must be dealt most firmly with, and more frequently chastised than others, else their wills will remain unsubdued, and they will neither obey God nor man. It is safe, perhaps, to say that there will be times in the history of all children when at least some mild form of chastisement will be necessary.

2. But ought not parents to seek to make their children obey them and be good from motives of love rather than fear?

Of course they ought. We have already shown this, and shall do so again. When the prevailing spirit in the home is that of fear, that home is radically wrong. Nevertheless, fear has its place in the government of children as in the government of men. Noah was moved by fear to build the ark, and so saved himself and his family. Just so, children will not only be moved by love to keep your rules, and so be good children, but they will often be sensibly assisted in doing so by a seasonable fear of your anger and the punishment which they know you will inflict upon them if they disobey.

3. What are the principal motives that are likely to influence children to obedience?

There are five distinct feelings natural, that is to say common, in the breasts of children to which it is perfectly right for the parent to appeal.

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The first and highest motive of obedience is that of AFFECTION. That is, children should obey their parents and those in authority over them because they love them, and they will do so when real affection exists.

The second is that of RIGHTNESS. The child should be taught to obey because he ought to do so; and he should have no choice or feeling in the matter, but simply to find out whether he ought to, and then he should do it because it is right.

The third is that of GAIN. We suppose it is allowable, especially in the case of very young children, for you to help them to do their duty by rewards. We have seldom found any very great advantage ourselves from this (indeed not having practised it very often with our children), but no doubt the promise of books or little treasures of various kinds is helpful in some cases. Sundry lawful and agreeable indulgences, such as holidays, and the like, are quite a legitimate, and even healthy, inducement to children to obey – not as bribes for which they are to do their duty, but as rewards when they have done it.

The fourth is HAPPINESS. It is quite allowable to show the children that to be good is the only way in which they can be happy.

The fifth is FEAR. It is, as we have seen, perfectly permissible for you to appeal to this instinct, and to show the child that if he will not be good he must suffer. Sin and suffering are as closely united as righteousness and happiness, and if he will not obey you it is your duty to make him suffer.

4. But is there not a danger of parents using too much severity in the management of their children?

Yes, there is. Some parents get a notion that if they are to make their children obey, nothing will do but a stern, inflexible, and severe course of treatment, and therefore they are constantly appealing to the principle of fear, and working on it as the means to this end. "Mind you do this!" is the constant cry of one parent or the other, "and if you do not, you shall be whipped, you shall be sent to bed, you shall have some

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dreaded infliction of some kind," until the poor children's lives are a burden! As we have already seen, fear is a useful and necessary principle in all government. God uses it in appealing to men. But it should not be made the prevailing motive. For the whole house to be constantly filled with an atmosphere of dread, and to be always ringing with threats and mutterings, for faces to be ever covered with gloom, and for punishment in some shape or other to be always hanging over the heads of the little ones, is most injurious to the dispositions of the children. It is also utterly destructive of the happiness of the home. Threaten seldom, and when you have threatened, and the penalty is deserved, inflict it, unless you can find out some way to forgiveness which will make the child equally fear doing wrong in the future.

Chastisement should be the last resort – every other method should be acted upon, and if punishments be regarded as solemn matters, to be seriously inflicted when they are necessary, there will be little necessity for them.

5. Is it a mistake to threaten children with chastisement without any serious intention of inflicting it?

Yes, a most serious one. Parents should make it an unalterable rule never to threaten that which they do not intend to carry out. There are parents who are always saying what punishments they will inflict upon children if they neglect their duty, but who seldom or never carry out their threats. Children soon find this out, and the little punishment, if any, that is inflicted upon them is of no avail, because of the uncertainty they feel regarding it. If father and mother are always threatening to punish, and seldom, if ever, doing it, the children will come to think it does not matter what they say, they will not keep their word.

6. Ought not parents to be fully satisfied in their own minds that the child is really guilty before the infliction of any punishment?

Yes, most certainly they ought. And if there be any room for doubt, the child must have the benefit of it. We have known most serious consequences follow from parents allowing themselves blindly to be possessed with the notion that the children have been guilty of some wrong-doing of which they were innocent, and punishing them

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because they would not confess to it. Such mistakes are most serious, and calculated to leave marks not only in the memory, but on the nervous system, enduring for a lifetime.

7. Will you name some of the most important considerations that should be borne in mind by parents in inflicting punishment?

(1.) In chastising a child the parents should mind that they are not influenced by selfish anger. No parents are capable of rightly training children who have not the ability to govern their own tempers when their children grieve and offend them.

It is to be feared that with many, not only is the character of the punishment inflicted made to depend upon the humour of the parent at the moment, but the question whether there shall be any punishment at all.

If mother or father happen to be "put out," and be, consequently, in an "irritable" condition when a child commits itself, then the punishment will be prompt, and often far greater than deserved. But if, on the other hand, the parent is in a good humour, the same offence will as likely as not be passed over altogether.

All this the children soon come to understand, and they soon come also to associate with such punishment the idea of injustice. We need not say that with children, as with older persons, it is utterly in vain to expect any benefit to arise from the infliction of punishment if they are smarting under the feeling that the penalty is out of proportion to the offence committed, or not deserved at all.

Parents should never punish their children while in a state of irritation. If they do, the children will be likely to conclude that they are being chastised, not because they have done wrong, but because father or mother is "in a bad temper."

Better far pass by offence – for a time at least – and wait until you are in a mood sufficiently calm, not only to deal justly with your child, but to make him understand that it is painful to you to inflict punishment, and that in doing so you are actuated solely by desire for his highest good.

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(2) Punishment, when deserved, should always be certain. That is, it should never be possible for children to calculate that they will be able to do wrong without being punished. If they can reckon on the chance of escaping the just consequences of naughty conduct because of any peculiar circumstances, such as the presence of company, the extra good humour of parents, the being from home, the being out of health, or any other reason whatever, the effects will be most disastrous.

A child who can reckon upon being able to "can't" his mother into overlooking sins, or wheedle his father round by caresses and excuses, will not be likely to regard with salutary fear any threatened punishment. The child should be made always to associate suffering, or what is equivalent to it, with the idea of wrong-doing.

It should be made impossible for a child to presume on being able to do wrong without suffering, by the quick and uniform infliction of chastisement, unless there shall be such a repentance as shall render it right and just for the offence to be forgiven. But even then, no such exemption should be made if there is any likelihood of a repetition of the offence.

(3.) Parents should watch against allowing any affection for their children to hinder them from inflicting such chastisement as the real interests of the child require. How common it is with parents, when a child does wrong and they feel that all the interests of the child require that he shall be punished, for their feelings to rise up and protest against the infliction of this pain! If they could benefit the child by suffering themselves, they would gladly do it. But they cannot bear to make the little darlings weep, whom they so idolise. How can they endure their screams, and see them broken-hearted! No! It is more than they can stand, and so they let them off.

If there were anybody else who could punish them, without their seeing the effect of the pain, or hearing their cries, they would perhaps allow it to be done, as the interests of the children require it; but they cannot do it themselves. So the little ones are allowed to go on hardening in their disobedience and naughty ways in order that the parents' feelings may be spared.

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All this will be seen, on a little consideration, to be the sheerest selfishness. It is really not to spare the feelings of a child, but their own, that they neglect this duty. To rightly train children there must be deep in the soul of the parent the conviction that the child must be made good; and if this cannot be done without inflicting pain, that pain must be inflicted, however harrowing it may be to those who have to administer it.

(4.) Parents must always aim to make punishment deterrent, or reformatory. Your aim in punishing the child must not be to be revenged on him, by making him suffer, as it were, for having disobeyed you or done something wrong, but to create in his heart a feeling that he has done wrong. He must feel that to do wrong is a very serious thing, and means suffering; and, more than this, you must seek to make him resolve, if possible, not to offend after the same fashion any more.

8. Do not children sometimes, under such circumstances, refuse to confess that they are wrong and to promise amendment?

Yes, and it is very mournful when they do, because for you to give in without securing a real repentance would do the child incalculable harm. You must win, however painful the controversy, or however long the struggle.

In such a case, if your victory be complete, the child's will may be so subdued that in all probability it will never be set up again in opposition to yours. Whereas, if, through any tender feeling on your part, you give in or make a compromise, the same battle will have to be fought over again, and perhaps on far more disadvantageous terms so far as you are concerned.

Mind, the child must be conquered, and made to feel that he is conquered; and woe to you, and woe to the child, if you accept any other than a whole-hearted confession and submission!

This is most important, both to you and your children, and therefore we again say, that the end of all punishment is that the child shall be brought to see the evil of his doings, confess it, and resolve never to offend again in a like manner.

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The following incident of such a contest, given by a modern writer, will illustrate our meaning:

A gentleman, sitting by his fireside one evening, with his family around him, took the spelling-book, and called upon one of his little boys to come and read. John was about four years old. He knew all the letters of the alphabet perfectly, but happened at that moment to be in rather a sullen humour, and was not at all disposed to gratify his father. Very reluctantly he came as he was bid; but when his father pointed to the first letter of the alphabet, and said, "What letter is that?" he could get no answer. John looked upon the book, sulky and silent.

"My son," said the father pleasantly, "you know the letter A."

"I cannot say A," said John.

"You must," said the father, in a serious and decided tone, "What letter is that?"

John refused to answer. The contest was now fairly commenced. John was wilful, and determined that he would not read. His father knew that it would be ruinous to allow him to conquer. He felt that he must, at all hazards, subdue him. He took him into another room, and punished him. He then returned, and again showed John the letter. But John still refused to name it. The father again retired with his son, and punished him more severely. But it was unavailing. The stubborn child still refused to name the letter, and when told that it was A, declared that he could not say A. Again the father inflicted punishment as severely as he dared to do it, and still the child, with his whole frame in agitation, refused to yield. The father was suffering from the most intense solicitude. He regretted exceedingly that he had been drawn into the contest. He had already punished his child with a severity which he feared to exceed. And yet the wilful sufferer stood before him, sobbing and trembling, but apparently as unyielding as a rock. I have often heard that parent mention the acuteness of his feelings at that moment. His heart was bleeding at the pain which he had been compelled to inflict upon his son. He knew that the question was now to be settled who should be the master. And, after his son had withstood so long and so much, he

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greatly feared the result. The mother sat by, suffering of course, most acutely, but perfectly satisfied that it was their duty to subdue the child, and that in such a trying hour a mother's feelings must not interfere. With a heavy heart, the father again took the hand of his son to lead him out of the room for further punishment. But to his inconceivable joy the child shrunk from enduring any more suffering, and cried, "Father, I'll tell the letter." The father, with feelings not easily conceived, took the book and pointed to the letter. "A," said John, distinctly and fully.

"And what is that?" said the father, pointing to the next letter. "B," said John.

"And what is that?"

"C," he continued.

"And what is that?" pointing again to the first letter.

"A," said the now humbled child.

"Now carry the book to your mother, and tell her what the letter is."

"What letter is that, my boy?" said the mother.

"A," said John. He was evidently perfectly subdued. The rest of the children were sitting by, and they saw the contest, and they saw where the victory was. And John learned a lesson which he never forgot. He learned never again to wage such an unequal warfare. He learned that it was the safest and happiest course for him to obey.

But perhaps some one says, it was cruel to punish the child so severely. Cruel! It was mercy and love. It would have been cruel had the father, in that hour, been unfaithful, and shrunk from his painful duty. The passions he was then, with so much self-sacrifice, striving to subdue, if left unchecked, would in all probability have been a curse to their possessor, and have made him a curse to his friends. It is by no means improbable that, upon the decisions of that hour, awaited much of the destinies of

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that child's future happiness. It is far from improbable that, had he then conquered, all subsequent efforts to subdue him would have been in vain, and that he would have broken away from all restraint. Cruelty! The Lord preserve children from the tender mercies of those who so regard such self-denying kindness. - Abbott.

9. Ought parents, at such times of conflict with their children, or in the administration of punishment, to read the Bible and pray with them?

Yes. Parents ought to pray with their children from their earliest infancy, in all their little griefs and trials; but in a conflict so important as that of which we are speaking, if ever it should come, it is of the utmost importance that parents should pray for and with their children, and if they are old enough to understand the Bible, they should read a portion of it adapted to the circumstances, and explain it to them.

In any such conflicts, it is of the utmost importance that you should be fully satisfied that the course you insist upon is a right one, and, as has been noticed before, that the child is not, from ignorance or nervousness, mistaking your wishes or blinded as to his duty.

10. In administering chastisement, ought not parents carefully to distinguish between the faults and the misfortunes of their children?

Yes, most certainly. Children should never be punished for things they cannot help. Misfortunes deserve pity rather than penalty. Parents often apply this rule to themselves, while they neglect to act upon it with respect to their children.

For instance, a father will make a false step, or a miscalculation of distance, and consequently have an accident and break something valuable. He will be very sorry for himself, and go about asking for pity. Whereas, the child of the same man may have a fall and break some treasure, and the father will rave about it in the most angry fashion, and punish the child with the most cruel severity. All this is most unjust, and the children will feel it so, and any such punishment will do them more harm than good.

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11. Then children should not be punished for misfortunes or accidents?

Certainly not. Never, under any circumstances, should they be punished for what they cannot help. We are too much in danger of measuring wrong-doing by the evil consequences which flow from it, rather than by the motive and aim which inspire it.

For instance, here is a child who has been permitted to climb on the chairs and take things from the table. While nothing serious follows, the habit is unnoticed and unreproved, but when, unwittingly, the child pushes some valuable article off the table, which breaks in falling, he is condemned to suffer punishment.

But wherein did the child do wrong? Never having been forbidden to climb on the chairs, there was no disobedience in his act. He was not aware that he was doing wrong. If only a knife had fallen instead of a fancy dish, not a word would have been said, and consequently it is sheer cruelty to punish him on account of it.

But supposing the accident to be the result of carelessness or forgetfulness, what then? Well, even then, great forbearance should be exercised. Too much ought not to be expected from children in either of these respects. We all know how easily their attention is taken off from their duty, and how readily they forget the instructions given them. Thoughtlessness and forgetfulness are the causes of most of their little troubles.

12. What occasions, then, do you think are sufficiently serious to call for punishment?
I should say:

1. Repeated acts in carelessness.
2. Wilful mischief.
3. Neglect of duty.
4. Untruthfulness.
5. Wilful disobedience.

The two last ought never to be passed lightly over. But in these, as in all other instances, in administering chastisement every effort should be made to bring the transgressor to think of the great evil of his conduct.

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13. You think it necessary, then, that punishment should be inflicted in such a manner as to carry with it, to the mind of the child, the idea that it is necessary for you to administer it?

Yes; a child should not only be made to see that it is right for you to chastise it for having done wrong, but it should, if possible, be brought into that state of mind in which it will be grateful to you for doing so. Further, if the counsels we have so far given be acted upon, we think that all sincere children will be thankful that they have parents who love them sufficiently to take such pains to make them happy and good.

14. Will you name some forms of punishment that are objectionable because likely to be injurious?

(1.) Never punish your children by exciting unnatural fears.

Never do anything which is likely to unduly shock the nervous system. Many poor little things have been made cowards for life by this course of treatment. Do not allow anything of such a kind with your children as threatening them with ghosts, putting them into a dark room, telling them that some evil spirit is coming to fetch them away, or any other ridiculous and lying stories. Such treatment is calculated to arouse fears and create apprehensions that will never be destroyed, making them afraid of going into the darkness, or of sleeping alone, or going along lonely roads at night, and the like, all the rest of their days. In short, you may in this way easily create for them all manner of mental tortures, not only for the moment, but for the future, and endanger their reason as well.

The following incident is given by a writer on this subject. He says, "I knew as fine, as sprightly, and as intelligent a child as ever was born, who was made an idiot for life by being, when about three years old, shut in a dark closet by a maid-servant in order to terrify him into silence. The thoughtless creature first threatened to send him to the bad place, and at last, to reduce him to silence, put him in a dark closet, shut the door and went out of the room. She went back in a few minutes, and found the child in a fit. He recovered from that, but was an idiot for life. When the parents, who had been on

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a visit for two days and nights, came home, they were told that the child had had a fit, but were not informed of the cause. The girl, however, who was a neighbour's daughter, being on her death-bed a few years after, could not die in peace without sending for the mother of the child and asking forgiveness." There is little doubt that numbers of children have suffered similar evil effects from similar causes. Parents, beware.

(2.) Never punish your children in such a way as will make them appear silly in the estimation of other children.

They should be very extreme cases in which anything is done to destroy the child's self-respect, or to make him ridiculous in the eyes of his companions. This applies to some of the systems of punishment at schools and elsewhere, which, we are very glad to say, are getting out of fashion, such as "the dunce's cap," setting children on a form to be gazed at by others, making them wear some mark to signify that they are blockheads, or truants, or otherwise rendering them the laughing-stock of all who are about them. Avoid all such nonsense.

At the same time you will, of course, see that no child can be punished without it being known to the whole household, and the dread of this amount of shame and exposure will become a very valuable part of the child's training to avoid evil.

15. What modes of punishment do you recommend?

With young children we should be inclined to the old-fashioned method of "a little whipping," which may be made very terrible to the youngsters, and it will always add materially to the effect of it if it follows quickly after the offence. With older children the consideration of their age and circumstances must help to determine what is likely to be most effective

If the children see that it is a great grief to you to give them pain, that, more than anything else, will distress them, and they will not very often give you reason to resort to this part of your duty. Nevertheless, you must do so if necessary, and you must be faithful and prompt in discharging it, and the more prompt and faithful you are, the less call will there be for it in the future.

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There are plenty of ways of inflicting chastisement without having recourse to any of the objectionable methods already named; for instance,

(1.) Children can be deprived of their ordinary privileges – such as holidays – or their little luxuries, or the enjoyment of your own company, or they can be prevented from coming to table for meals, which, as a rule, is felt to be a great hardship. They can be fined, if they have any money, or their pocket-money can be confiscated.

(2.) You can impose solitary confinement. Only care must be taken not to fall into the error we have just mentioned. When children are sent by themselves, care should be taken that they have something to employ their time; something less agreeable than that in which they would have been employed but for their offence, and at the same time something likely to be useful, if that be possible. We have found it a good plan to require children to write a letter expressing their sorrow and repentance for their offence, if they feel any.

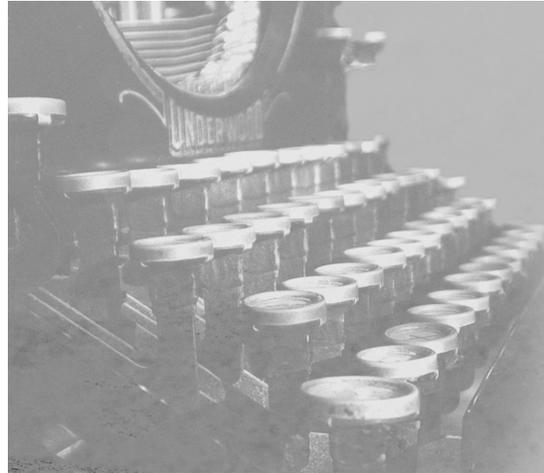
(3.) Tasks can be set children, if they are old enough to learn them.

We do not think it wise to follow a very common custom of making children learn or write out portions of the Bible as punishment, such a course being calculated to create a distaste, if not a positive hatred, for the Book. We know it has been so in many instances. Rather let them learn something in the ordinary course of their education.

(4.) Extra work can be insisted upon.

16. Is it not important that the quarrels and disagreements which unavoidably arise among children should be dealt with according to the strict principles of truth and justice?

Certainly. It is most important that at such times there should be a careful investigation, and every effort should be made to decide who is in the right and who in the wrong, in order that praise or blame be administered accordingly.



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The course very often taken on such occasions is simply to condemn all present and to give a little lecture on the folly of quarrelling, winding up with a general order to "kiss and be friends again."

In small and trifling matters this may be the best plan, but even then we question it. But in matters of any serious moment, the wrongdoing should be carefully uncovered, and the wrongdoer impartially condemned.

A favourite, foolish, and most unjust mode of dealing in such cases is very common both with respect to children and adults, namely, that of saying, "Oh, there are faults on both sides," or, "There's six of one and half a dozen of the other," whereas it frequently happens that the weakest and most conscientious are overborne and misrepresented by the cleverer and less scrupulous. When thus summarily dealt with, of course a double injury is inflicted, and the innocent made to suffer for the guilty. The only way for real reconciliation between any offending and offended parties is, that the one who has done the wrong shall fully confess and repent of it, and then a reconciliation can be effected. It is with children as it is with adults; while the sufferer is smarting under a sense of wrong, his soul cries out naturally for justice. Let that be done, and then comes the time to willingly and cheerfully make the quarrel up and be friends again. And that is the friendship likely to be lasting; indeed, there is no other.