

## *First Things First*

David Halbrook

All learning requires us to learn “first things first.” In math, you must first learn to count and identify written numbers and various symbols (+, -, =). In baseball, you must first learn about balls, bats, and bases. Spiritual things are similar.

Since spiritual things cannot be seen with our eyes, how can we learn them? We learn about them using what we do see. For example, though you never saw your great-great-great-great grandmother, you know she is in your family tree. Similarly, the things we see teach us of God’s invisible power (Romans 1:20). *The heavens declare the glory of God* (Ps. 19:1). God is. This is the most basic truth to learn.

Knowing that, we also see the invisible power of God in Scripture in the fulfillment of ancient prophecies (2 Pet. 1:19-21). Knowing these first principles, there is a “gold mine” of knowledge available to you that will train you in truth and help you escape error. This world is full of false ideas about God, man, right/wrong, and salvation. Without learning “first things first” you will be deceived. Do you understand the first principles of God and Scripture? If not, now is time to begin to learn. How may we help you?

Editor’s Note: There are no, or few, subjects more basic than the two topics introduced in this article. Use our article in *Arkansas Weekly* to remind someone of these things. You might, or might not, be surprised by the lack of understanding that exists even in these things. Our society is offering fewer and fewer reminders of these things---will you offer one?

### Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Ed & Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Noleka Hopper, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, and new Christians among us.

*Join us each Sunday at 10AM (classes), 10:45AM, & 5PM and Wednesday at 7PM.*

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# The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*  
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## *Source of Wisdom* (James W. Adams)

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

The wisdom implicit in these words is recognized by mature people. A child "allowed to express himself" without the guidance, instruction, reproof, and correction of his parents will likely be despised for his unruly, and incorrigible character. While reproof and the rod are never pleasant to the recipient, they can be a source of wisdom. Hence the statement, "He who spareth the rod hateth his son."

It is unfortunate that many in the church do not recognize the value of the rod and reproof in the realm of things spiritual. It is thought to be at variance with the "spirit of Christ" to indulge in reproof or the use of the rod. Whereas the Spirit of God says, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12:6-8) The illegitimate child of days gone by was ignored and allowed to grow up without parental reproof or correction. Why? Because he was regarded with greater favor than the legal child? Indeed not! He was not regarded with the love and favor of a legal son. Chastisement was, therefore, an evidence of the father's love. Why then should it be regarded as antagonistic to the spirit of Christ in the church?

We hear much today about "positive preaching." Preachers are lauded because of their positive preaching in meetings. What is meant by this is not what was formerly meant by it. Then, it meant that a preacher was uncompromising in his setting forth of Bible truth and condemnation of human error. Now, it means that he is inoffensive, that he says nothing that will condemn his neighbor's religious faith and practice. God's great men have all been positive teachers; that is, they have positively set forth divine truth and positively condemned all error.

## *The Positive Side Of Discipline*

Andy Diestelkamp

Professing Christians agree that being a disciple of Jesus is a good and positive thing. Yet we often have a very negative association with the very thing that is required of every faithful disciple: discipline. Discipline is “training that corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties or moral character;” “instruction having for its aim to form the pupil to proper conduct and action;” or, “correction, chastisement, punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.” Jesus said to His disciples, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Matthew 16:24). Unfortunately, rather than hearing Jesus’ call for self-denial as a gracious invitation full of hope, all too many of us perceive self-denial as a negative thing.

Was Jesus’ self-denial in going to the cross a negative thing? While having some negative associations and implications from an earthly perspective, from the divine perspective Jesus’ crucifixion was ultimately glorious in what it accomplished (Hebrews 12:2). When we glory in the cross of Jesus Christ, we find no pleasure in its cruelty and brutality; we do find joy and hope in what it meant and what it accomplished (Galatians 6:14).

This, then, is the nature of discipline. “*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (Hebrews 12:11). We love and admire the fruit of good discipline. Every parent envisions his/her child growing to maturity with strength and success. Yet, if that vision is to become reality — it will require discipline, for “*a child left to himself brings shame to his mother*” (Proverbs 29:15).

Instead of practicing discipline, many people want their undisciplined lives to be not only tolerated but affirmed and validated as legitimate. They label any discipline in the form of correction as being judgmental. Many people misapply Jesus’ condemnation of unrighteous judgment (Matthew 7:1-5) as a means of deflecting any application of the Word of God being made to their lifestyles. So, while we affirm the practical importance, need, and long-term value of discipline — we may still seek to avoid it for as long as possible.

We must keep the goal of discipline fixed in our minds. That picture of the “*peaceable fruit of righteousness*” must be ever before us in order to motivate us to exercise self-discipline. A church in fellowship focused on the salvation and growth

of “*one another*” will submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21) and discipline one another through instruction and correction from the Word of God (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2; Hebrews 10:24-25, etc.). Yet, of all the realms of discipline, parental discipline is primary. The failure of parents to instruct, train, correct, chastise, and punish their children in the fear of the Lord is the primary cause of a lack of self-discipline in the lives of individuals and our families, communities, and churches. No nation, no school, no family, and no church can be expected to instill in children the self-discipline which parents fail to provide in the crucial formative years. People may blame the media, the schools, the churches, the culture, their children’s friends, etc.; but, generally speaking, the failure of parents to teach and exemplify self-discipline is the source of our societal woes.

We need to change. We need to make a conscious decision not to react negatively to the word, concept, or action of discipline. Discipline must become a positive word in our minds and vocabulary so that we will not flinch when we hear it. The potential fruit of good discipline should motivate us to be eager and diligent in pushing past any momentary unpleasantness. That’s what Jesus did for us. That’s what we should do for ourselves, our children, and one another. (*The Gospel Teacher, Volume XLV, issue No. 41 — April 19, 2015 www.lawofliberty.com*)

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5 *Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.* 6 *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.* (Proverbs 27:5-6)

An open rebuke that is designed to warn us of our error and sin, is preferred over professed love that remains silent when it sees us in danger. We are led to believe that true love will not reprimand another person, yet genuine love will not withhold wise rebuke. Being rebuked may hurt for a moment, but a true friend knows its temporary pain can produce a good outcome. So, when a friend rebukes your sin do not become angry, be thankful for their love. That is the friend who truly loves you. Feigned love remains silent and acts out of self-interest. True love knows what sin does to its friend, and so brings a rebuke intended to save the soul (read James 5:19-20). To pretend to love while refusing to rebuke sin is the action of an enemy, not a friend.

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