

TODAY'S CHILD EXPERTS: "PUNISHMENT DOES NOT HELP" by Mark Roberts

Journalist Betsy Flagler writes the syndicated "Parent to Parent" column that asks readers to write in with parenting problems and then tries to get expert help to those troubles. A mother in California recently wrote in that her first-grader has been pushing and hitting, been kicked out of the library, and all attempts to take away privileges and toys to discipline him have failed. "His problem seems to be a lack of self-control" she writes. Flagler's response well illustrates the destructive psychology of today that destroys children rather than helping them.

She notes that "instead of thinking you must control your child's behavior, help your child learn to control himself. Set limits, give reminders, be his advocate." Okay, that all sounds great. What happens, however, when little Johnny breaks the limits and won't listen to reminders? Some might think that would be the time to discipline Johnny. Oh, no! We must not do that! "External controls such as taking a bike away do not teach self-control," says child expert Jane Nelsen (who of course has written a book on child rearing). Ms. Nelsen goes on to analyze why the child pushes and hits others and notes that discipline is not the answer: "It's a crazy idea that to help children do better, first we have to make them feel worse . . . A misbehaving child is a discouraged child. Punishment doesn't help him feel he belongs." A Dallas school teacher, June Humphreys, says misbehavior comes because kids can't communicate their feelings, and punishment just stifles that all the more. "Instead, these children need to be taught vocabulary to use to express feelings at the first sign of discomfort."

Amazing stuff, isn't it? One hundred years ago parents knew how to handle children who hit and kicked others. Now, in our sophisticated age, we "know better" than to discipline like grandma and grandpa did but kids are more unruly than ever! All these experts write book after book on child rearing but everyone seems to have forgotten The Expert's book on child raising, the Bible. The Bible notes that these parents who are so worried Johnny will feel "left out" or "that he doesn't belong" actually hate their child: "He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Proverbs 13:24). A parent who is more concerned with the child's immediate feelings than long-range character growth is a parent who is failing that child!

Further, the experts can say all they want about punishment not being helpful but God says "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). Talking and learning communication skills aren't the issue: selfishness is. Johnny doesn't have a communication problem – he is very good at letting everyone know that he wants his way now. Instead of being paralyzed with a fear that for even a moment Johnny might not feel great about himself Johnny must learn that if he acts badly, he will feel badly – because he should feel badly about acting badly! "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Today we have far too much analysis of why children misbehave and not nearly enough decisive action to stop it. There is too much concern about Johnny's self-esteem and not nearly enough interest in his actions and making wrong behavior extremely unpleasant and undesirable. May God bless every parent to seek His wisdom and not the foolishness of today's self-proclaimed parenting experts.