

# Unconditional Love In The Context Of Child Rearing

## [Part 3]

The fourth way in which we can express unconditional love to our children is through discipline, correctly pronounced “*disciple-ing*.”

**Unconditional love and discipline cannot be separated and punishment is only a very small part of discipline.**

**For a child to be well disciplined they must know that they are loved.**

**The application of “*behaviour control techniques*” without the foundation of unconditional love is barbaric and unscriptural.**

### What is discipline?

Let us first look at its correct goal.

The goal of discipline is to train a child’s mind and character, to enable them to become a self-controlled, constructive member of society.

Every type of communication has to be involved in such discipline.

First let us consider how the Creator God, through His Word, the Christian Bible, trains us to become members of His society, that is, His created family, the Kingdom of God.

### Guidance by example –

**2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9** [New King James] “*For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;” ... “not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”*

**Guidance through an example to a right thought and action is far superior than to punish for a wrong action.**

**Punishment for a wrong action only lasts until the pain has been forgotten.**

**Guidance towards right thought and action lasts for eternity.**

Without a healthy and strong love bond between the parent and child, any guidance of whatever form will be looked on as an imposition and will be resisted, this will then relate to any authority in the adult life of the child.

If a child has been listened to with “*focussed attention*” so that they know that we understand what they are trying to communicate to us, then any correction we feel is needed to consolidate the teaching of some principle will be responded to in a positive manner by the child.

**A child should never feel that their thoughts have been ignored when we use our authority.**

**Repeating a child's thoughts back to them is a good way to ensure that the child knows that their communication has been understood, even if we do not agree with it.**

We must control our own emotions when we are disciplining a child, for our uncontrolled feelings or anger is the worst enemy we can have in rearing a child.

**If we do "lose our cool" never be afraid to apologise after we have calmed down.**

The response from our children will be very positive and warm, it will also be among those precious moments that a child will remember all of their lives.

**There will be certain circumstances when anger will be difficult to control, especially when the child's action has placed them in a dangerous situation.**

**Always remember that discipline is not a form of punishment –**

What we are studying is based on the way that the Creator God deals with us as His created children, that is, every human being.

**Revelation 1:4-6** [New King James] *"John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."*

It is also the way we, as firstborn into the Kingdom of God, will be ruling with Jesus Christ as priests, that is teachers, after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, [**Revelation 20:4**].

This should be an added prod for us to make sure our child-rearing is in complete harmony with that taught us in God's Word, the Christian Bible.

**Revelation 2:26-27** [New King James] *"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels', as I also have received from My Father;"*

This is referring then to all who are to rule with Jesus Christ.

This is a very misunderstood scripture, we need to allow the Word of God to explain its meaning, **not** put a private interpretation on it.

**Psalms 23:4** [New King James] *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

**How is it that a rod and staff are implements of comfort to David?**

The shepherd's rod was used to gently steer the sheep in the right direction by simply holding the rod to block them going in the wrong direction, or directing them into the right path with a gentle nudge on the side of the head.

**This is why we must always look on discipline as "course correction" not punishment.**

The staff, or crook, was to collect those sheep who had fallen into a dangerous position, using the hook on the end to drag them to safety.

**When does a potter smash a pot? Only when it needs to be completely remade. Is this not what God has to do with each of us when He starts to work with us?**

**John 3:3, 6-7** [New King James] *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” ... “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”*

We have to be *“born again.”*

Using this approach of course correction, starting new instead of punishment, we will not fall foul of God’s instructions through Paul.

**Ephesians 6:4** [New King James] *“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”*

**This is the way that our Heavenly Father deals with us.**

## **Learn to forgive –**

**One of the most destructive times to discipline a child for a misbehaviour is when the child is genuinely sorry for what they have done, the key word is genuinely.**

The harm could come in two ways –

a) If the child is always sorry for their inappropriate act, then their conscience is alive and well.

**This is what we are aiming for, the child has learnt from their mistake.**

A good and healthy conscience is the best deterrent to repeating any misbehaviour, punishment would remove this feeling of guilt.

b) Punishment under these circumstances could produce a feeling of anger in the child, when their conscience is already making them feel bad.

The child is actually punishing themselves.

**What the child does need is reassurance that even though what they did was bad, they are still loved.**

So we see that punishment under such circumstances would only bring negative results.

**Psalms 103:13** [New King James] *“As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.”*

**This is how a parent should respond to a repentant child who has respect to the parents’ authority.**

Another reason it is essential to forgive a child under these circumstances is that they must learn how to feel forgiven as a child so that in their relationship with their Heavenly Father, on repentance, they will **not** continue to live under a burden of guilt in adult life, [**Isaiah 43:25**], but accept the forgiveness of God when they genuinely repent.

**Forgiveness does not mean the child should not assume some responsibility for the circumstances their misbehaviour caused.**

**Restitution may be indicated.**

Help the child to restore what was broken whether it was physical or even more important a broken relationship.

## **Pathway to acceptable behaviour –**

### **a) First, request proper behaviour from the child**

**To request instead of demand will instil a sense of personal responsibility in the child.**

The child then knows their parents understand that they, although yet a child, has the ability to think and make decisions for themselves.

Also, have the ability to control their own behaviour, and must learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

**This will encourage the child to do things without resentment.**

### **b) Occasionally parents must be more forceful and command a child to do something. This should only happen when a request is ignored**

Before such a command to obey, we must be sure that our request was appropriate, that is, suitable for the child's age, understanding and ability.

**Matthew 25:15** [New King James] *“And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.”*

We must **not** expect from or place on a child more than they can deal with and succeed in fulfilling.

### **c) Defiance –**

This is one of the few indications that punishment is needed.

Stubbornly refusing to obey a reasonable request **cannot** be permitted, however every parent must attempt to avoid such unpleasant encounters.

How can we do this?

By constantly re-examining our own expectations of the child.

Making sure that our expectations are considerate and in accordance with the child's age, level of development and ability to respond.

## **Appropriate punishment –**

**A child is sensitively aware of fairness and consistency.**

They know when their parents have over-reacted or have been too harsh.

A child must have our love and fairness together, firmness based on unconditional love.

Lack of firmness fosters permissiveness, but love with firmness does not.

## **Children with special problems –**

Children with special problems such as diabetes, learning difficulties, deafness, hyperactivity or mental retardation, generally also have markedly greater emotional and behavioural problems.

**Perceptual problems** – that is, difficulty in taking in information from their environment.

Remember, every way we have to convey our love to a child requires the use of one or more perceptual senses, sight, touch or hearing.

This may make it difficult for us to convey our love.

### **Handicapped children –**

Such children can easily become depressed as they grow older due to the continual degrading experiences due to their handicap.

The boredom and depression will come out in the form of unsociable behaviour.

Handicapped children need most of all to feel genuinely loved.

Unconditionally loved.

They will then do better in dealing with their handicaps.

I personally found that my “*special*” and “*precious*” attitude towards my grandchild Rachel, who was wheelchair bound, brought out the “*me do it*” from her even if it was totally beyond her ability to perform.

I always allowed her to have her limited “*hands on*” while I did the major part of the task.

Handicapped children need our love to be conveyed to them in an even more direct, simple, straightforward and accentuated way.

Love communication with such children must be clear and strong.

I learnt a lot about communicating love to other people from the years I assisted my wife with other carers helping Rachel enjoy her life inspite of her great handicaps.

Rachel died in her late teens in her sleep, directly after a great party at a special college.

She is greatly missed and tears fill my eyes as I write this, remembering what a great impact her short life had on many people because of her positive courage and determination to enjoy the limited life she had.

**A direct result of knowing she was unconditionally loved by many people.**

### **Helping your child spiritually –**

One major complaint we hear is that parents have **not** given their children ethical and moral standards to live by.

This is **not** something we can leave to school education to give our child.

The child must and will look to its parents for direction in this area of life.

**But to accept these values the child must first see them acted out in the lives of their parents and know that they have unconditional love for each other.**

This is why single parent children have great difficulty in accepting moral standards demanded by their single parent, the visible foundation is **not** there for them to see.

**Remember that a child's first response is on the "feelings level."**

**The experiences the child has which are associated with the Creator God and "spiritual" things must be pleasant experiences.**

For example, God's Sabbath Day should be a special Family Day with special food and extra time with their father in particular.

**Every child loves a story, and spiritual principles brought out in the form of a story is the most effective way to instil it in the mind of a child.**

Bedtime is a good time for this, as it is a time when children are more eager to interact with their parents.

Whether this is because their "emotional tanks" need topping up or they just want to delay bedtime makes little difference.

Giving instructions in an atmosphere of love, eye and physical contact, together with "focussed attention" will assist the child to accept our instructions.

Parents should share their spiritual life with the child, this is "on the job" training.

They need to know what part of God's Word, the Christian Bible, the parents are studying and meditating on, also who and what the parents are praying for.

**The child needs to know how dependent their parents are on the Creator God to provide all the needs of the family, that includes them.**

The children need to know also that the parents have experienced the loving forgiveness of the Creator God when they have acknowledged their mistakes to Him and repented of them.

## **Conclusion –**

As we have seen, unconditional love is the basis of life.

Therefore, such love must be the basis of all the interaction we have with every other human being, and that includes our children.

**Love is only expressed by the way we act, not merely by words.**

**1 John 4:8, 16** [New King James] "*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*" ... "*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*"

We are told that God is love, and this is illustrated by the recorded life of His Son Jesus Christ in His Word, the Christian Bible.

We can also learn this by the way He deals with us in our personal lives.

**Our children can only learn this unconditional love that the Creator God has for them by the way we deal with them on a day-by-day basis.**

I have shown you four ways in which we can express and recognise unconditional love in this series of articles.

Eye contact – physical contact – focussed attention – disciple-ing.

I encourage you to use all four of them in your day-to-day life with your family and every other human being you meet with.

By doing this we will be preparing ourselves, our children and other human beings for a new world, after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when the basis of all life will be unconditional love worldwide.