

# 009 12/27/99 Many confuse 'punish' with 'discipline'

Our responsibility as Christian parents is to discipline our children. Many people confuse the word "punish" with "discipline." When we seek to bring our children to mature adulthood, we need to consider a much broader definition of discipline. Discipline is training. The root of the words, "disciple" and "discipline" are both from the Latin word, *discere*, which means to learn. Christ's disciples were learning as they listened to Him and followed His teachings. We want our children to listen to us and follow our teachings.

We cannot expect our children to know what is right unless we tell them. Children are by nature self-centered. It is our responsibility as parents to help them become less self-centered and more other-centered as they mature. It will not happen without instruction. Punishment alone will not accomplish the goal.

Remember the instructions that Moses gave to the Israelites: "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons..." Deuteronomy 6: 6-7a. Moses recognized that diligent effort must be made by parents to instruct children in what is right.

Suppose that your four-year old takes a toy away from his little friend. If you spank him, he will know that he has done something wrong. The next time he wants to take a toy away from his friend, he will remember that it is not the right thing to do. If, however, you instruct him about sharing his toys, he will have knowledge that can be carried into a different set of circumstances. With continued instruction about sharing, he will learn about respecting the feelings of his friend and other people. He will be moving away from self-centeredness to a genuine love and concern for others.

Since children are self-centered little beings, there will be times when they will not heed your instruction. Punishment will be needed. Hopefully, opportunities for instruction during positive times will be more frequent than the times that punishment is required.