

THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

In my previous article, I argued that spanking our children is a legitimate means of parental discipline, yet parents must be careful that they spank biblically. Parents must be self-controlled when they spank, recognising that they too are under authority. Further, it was argued that spanking is rarely to be the first “go to” in discipline.

But it is also true that there are times when a parent’s refusal to use the rod is to disobey God and to place the parent under his rod of discipline. Yes, there are times when parents have a responsibility before God, and towards the well-being of their children, to spank them. However, our government now forbids this. Should we obey this law? What must a Christian parent do? Well, Christian parents must not shirk their responsibility to biblically spank their children. And the government must recognize what A. B. Kuyper called “sphere sovereignty.”

Kuyper (1837–1920) was a theologian, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam, and, among other achievements, prime minister of the Netherlands. He argued that the Christian interacts in many spheres of life. As Richard Mouw says, a “sphere” is “an arena where interactions take place, and where some sort of authority is exercised.” Kuyper identified some of these spheres as the state, the church, the family, and work. Mouw continues:

We all live in these different realms, and we can see how they interact and stay separate. We follow different rules in the home, the workplace, and the state. These sometimes are in contrast, but exert some authority over us. We have an example of having a father working for his son. In the home, the father is the head of the household and can properly tell the son what to do and what not to do without overstepping any boundaries.

However, when at work, the roles must be reversed. The son becomes the authority over the father and can (and should) dictate what behaviour is appropriate for the father. This can lead to tension, but if we respect the spheres properly, there should be no tension.

This rather lengthy explanation helps us as we face this latest legislative challenge. The Bible clearly teaches that human government has a legitimate sphere of responsibility and authority (Romans 13:1–7). Government is primarily responsible for safety and security of the society. So when it comes to the church, for instance, pastors who steal from

their church or who physically harm people must answer to the governing authorities. There is no argument there. When it comes to the family, the government has the right to step into the home

when abuse takes place. There is no argument there either. But at the same time, each sphere must recognise the entrusted authority and responsibility of the other spheres. Each sphere is to be respected by every other sphere. And a measure of that respect involves not usurping or overstepping the legitimate God-defined boundaries. Yes, each sphere is interrelated because no person lives as an island. But this is precisely where we need to show “spherical respect” and “spherical restraint.” In this recent case, unfortunately, the government has failed to do so. It has trespassed beyond its sphere of authority into that of the home. And so now parents are faced with the unpleasant responsibility of disobeying the government.

There cannot be two sovereigns; one or the other is an imposter. And when it comes to biblically spanking our children, parents must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Parents have the



biblical responsibility, within their God-established sphere, to say, “This far, and no further.”

I assume that most reading this understand that God has revealed in his word that parents have the responsibility to raise a godly seed, and that he has provided instructions how to do so. Many places in Scripture provide this instruction, but perhaps none is as rich with wisdom as the book of Proverbs.

In that book, our Father has instructed human fathers how to raise godly, and therefore happy and socially well-functioning, children. Fathers (parents) are instructed to teach their children right from wrong, who to avoid and who to befriend, what to speak and what not to speak, as well as how to speak it. Instruction is given concerning the value of hard work, the wisdom of stewardship, as well as various dangers to avoid. The underlying assumption is parental authority and responsibility. Parents are responsible before God (and by the way, they are also responsible to society) to raise their children according to God’s rules. And God grants them the authority for this responsibility: the authority to discipline, correct, and chastise their children when they rebels against that authority.

The sphere of the home/family does not require the government’s permission or legislation. Rather, it does expect government’s recognition. Government must recognise the “sphere sovereignty” of the family/home. Government has no legitimacy to establish house rules for a family.

But the question remains, how should parents respond to the unjust law which criminalises spanking children?

First, God’s laws always trump man’s laws. As has been well said, no person has a right to speak where God has already spoken. So, Christian parent, when you are disciplining your child and a spanking is called for, do it.

Second, when you obey God in this matter, don’t broadcast it. Just as underground churches take precautions as they persevere in obedience, so must parents when it comes to this matter. Be careful about what you post on social media. Why draw unnecessary attention to your home? There is plenty of trouble on the horizon; there is no need to bring it closer.

Third, when you are in a position where you need to utilise the rod, do so very wisely. This includes, as we have seen, being emotionally and physically under control. But further, don’t inform the crowd at Pick ‘n Pay that Johnny is going to “get a hiding when you get home.” And do not spank your child in public. (This, by the way, should normally be the rule whether spanking is outlawed or not. We should always avoid what would publicly humiliate our child.)

Fourth, discipline your children promptly and effectively when they are young. This will generally lead to infrequent use of the rod as they grow older. If you spank meaningfully, meekly and memorably, you may find that you will be spanking minimally over time.

Finally (and most importantly), as one of my fellow elders exhorted, we must pray for wisdom for parents as they seek to raise a godly seed, including the need to biblically discipline their children. Pray also for the removal of this law. But pray primarily for gospel progress. As sinners bow the need to the sovereign Saviour, sphere sovereignty and parental responsibility will get along just fine.