

## What Our Child Discipline Philosophy Teaches Kids About God



**I think one of the toughest aspects of parenting is not lack of sleep or abundance of dirty diapers; it's wrestling through how to discipline a child *effectively*, but with *great love*.**

That, my friends, is a tricky balance.

**Certainly we've probably all given thought to how we discipline: when to intervene, when to punish, when to redirect. But have we given enough thought to the effects of our discipline?**

Recently I came across some ideas that challenged me to re-think the issues I discipline in my own kids. I was prompted to think ***less about behaviors I SEE and more about heart issues.***

In other words, instead of riding my kid for speaking too loudly at the dinner table or for yelling when friends come over, I should address the fact that he's not being *respectful* of others because the rest of the group can't finish their conversations.

Instead of scolding my child for not sharing or for tearing a ball out of his sister's hands, I should concentrate on his spirit of *selfishness* and confront him with that.

**Can you see how addressing the *heart issue behind the offense* offers a reason for your discipline?** Rather than simply spouting, "I told you to stop that!", it also creates an atmosphere where you can say to your child, "What matters most to God is your heart, and I want to see your heart grow in love and worship--not selfishness."

**The danger with coming down on your children for their *actions only* is that:**

- **It teaches that love is conditional on their good behavior.** (If I want mommy to be happy, I have to be really good.)
- **It teaches perfectionism.** (I'm always getting in trouble because nothing I ever do is good enough to please my mom.)
- **It increases the likelihood that your child will become a people-pleaser worried more about maintaining the status quo than *doing the right thing in tough situations*.**
- **As your child grows in understanding, it can lend support to work-based theology rather than grace-based living.**
- **It gives roots to the idea that *what we DO matters more than WHO WE ARE*.**

**Let's put this conversation in the context of OUR ADULT RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD.**

How often do you or someone you know feel you have to "prove" your love for God by maintaining a rigorous Bible study schedule? How often do you feel that you are "nothing like that missionary who moved to Sudan...I'm just a mom" -- or I'm just a (fill in the blank)?

**Do you feel *less than* because you perceive you're not *doing enough*?**

***Sister in Christ,***

- God's love for us is not conditional upon whether we wake up at 5 am to read Scripture.
- God's love does not shine brighter on families that minister to distant tribes than it does on moms who minister to their children in the kitchen.
- It is not contingent upon how often we bring cookies to the sick in our congregations.

- We don't get extra credit for being on committees at church.
- We don't get docked "points" for failing to volunteer in the nursery.

**God's love for us is pure and perfect and UNCONDITIONAL when we are in Christ Jesus.**

"Therefore, there is now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

Are we helping our children to understand this spirit of *no condemnation*?

Are we helping them grow in a spirit of love and *heart transformation*?

Or are we continuing in the power of our sinful flesh, encouraging them to **behave to our standards?**

Do we inadvertently send a message that we just **need to do better?**

May God give grace abundantly as we try to nurture little disciples of Jesus who care more about the condition of their heart and the posture of their worship than about actions measured by man.