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ALIGNMENT WITH CHRIST

Alignment with Christ...you know, cars need good alignment. If not, your wheels will pull the car one way or the other. Our own lives need to be aligned with Christ. How? Obey and live in Christ. We need Jesus. His blood forgives our sins. We need Jesus to change our lives. Why? Because our own flesh has a hard time obeying God. But, with Jesus in our hearts, we can be changed and obey God. Of course, we will not be perfect, but we can progress and improve with Jesus. That's why we need to ask Jesus to forgive us and change us constantly.

It's the same for children. They need to learn that alignment with God is achieved through Jesus Christ. They need to obey God. And, when they make mistakes and sin, they need to understand that with Jesus in their heart they may change. But, many children, especially those young of age, may not fully understand God. The best way for them to understand God is through obeying their own parents.

In order to teach children about God, we must first discipline and teach them to obey their parents. Let's watch Ephesians 6:1-4 from the ASL Bible:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Did you see what was just signed? Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. This is talking about obedience. Obedience. You will notice this passage talks about obeying and honoring your parents. If you do this, then things may go well with you and you may enjoy long life on the earth. This verse was written to children. It instructs children to obey their parents in the Lord.

When children rebel against parents, they rebel against God, too. Obedience to parents means obedience to God, too. Obey parents and obey God. Rebel against parents and rebel against God.

Obedience is a very important part of training children. It is important to obey. Parents must first establish obedience in their children. Make it very clear to your children they are to obey you because you are their parents. Give them consequences for disobedience. Teach them that rebelling is a sin.

If your children do not obey you, how do you expect to train them? How will you teach them about Jesus and love? If they are in a constant state of rebellion, it is very difficult to teach them. They won't obey what you are trying to tell them. Then, as they grow up, it will become more difficult to teach and control them. The issue of disobedience must be dealt with immediately. At the moment they rebel, be swift with appropriate consequences.

It is very important to discipline with love. Ephesians 6:4 says, *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children..."* Our intention with discipline should not be to exasperate or anger our children. If you constantly yell at them, they may rebel against your discipline. Rebuking harshly or kicking them may create anger in them and cause them to resent you. Screaming excessively, hitting them, or hitting a table hard because you are out of control are the kinds of things you do not want your children to learn from you and act out themselves. Or, getting extremely upset over little things, like your children accidentally spilling a glass of milk, and calling your children "idiots" or "stupid" are excessive. Really, a spilled glass of milk is more of a careless thing and they just need to learn to be more careful. This is not an issue of rebelling against God or disobedience. Or, maybe your child fidgets. You need to figure out whether this is an issue of rebellion or misbehavior. Be careful in figuring out whether your child is rebelling or not.

Now, let's continue looking at Ephesians 6:4, *"...bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* It's important to bring them up in the training and discipline of the Lord. How? Teach your children the Bible. This is God's Word. Apply truths from the Bible to their lives.

Discipline should be focused on your children's sins, such as rebellion and wrong actions. Discipline should be done for the purpose of helping your children realize they are living for God. Yes, they need to obey parents, but ultimately we want them to obey God. As they learn to obey parents, they will understand more how to obey God. When they become older, they will know how to obey God and understand one way to do that is through reading the Bible.

Again, discipline begins with training our children to obey parents. Once this is established, then you can train your children. If children disobey, it's harder to teach them.

Now, let's talk about how to deal with rebellion and disobedience. This is the third area I want to focus on now – dealing with disobedience. There are many verses that deal with discipline. I would like to share one with you now. Proverbs 13:24 says, *"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."*

This is interesting. If you love, then you will not spare the rod. If you spare the rod, you do not love. We'll analyze using "the rod" for discipline. What is the rod? Basically, it is a stick. It may be anything used for appropriate punishment. I'm not talking about a giant club or other tools used for excessive punishment or torture.

Some Bible translations use the word "spanking" instead of rod. Other translations use words that convey the concept of discipline. But, in the Hebrew language it means rod. This rod was often used for discipline like spanking. Use your judgment in applying this verse for

appropriate discipline. I personally use a rubber ruler. Some people use the leather, not the metal, part of a belt for discipline. It's important to remember that.

Now, I've hit myself with a rubber ruler on my arm. It stung. It wasn't a gentle feeling. It wasn't awful like someone being hit by a baseball bat and breaking his or her bones. The hit of a rubber ruler is uncomfortable. I believe this is appropriate for discipline. Children will understand that rebellion leads to painful consequences.

The Bible doesn't specifically state how often or in what situations the rod should be used. Yet, we know the rod is part of discipline. From my own personal conviction and reading other books, I understand that the rod should be used for rebellion and disobedience. God commands children to obey parents. So, when children disobey, we should use the rod to teach children that rebellion is not an option. Rebellion is not funny and it does not honor God. They need to understand that rebellion has serious consequences. Using the rod will help them understand this. Also, the rod may be used for punishing children when they steal or lie, which are listed as part of the Ten Commandments. They need to know that their parents will not tolerate or accept stealing and lying. Consequences need to be immediate. Teach them to stop lying and tell the truth.

I remember years ago when I was young, my dad used his belt for discipline. He punished me for stealing candy from a store. I knew I was wrong. I'm not sure how my dad knew I had stolen candy. Maybe the owner told him. My dad sent me to my bedroom. I had to pull my pants down. Then, he spanked me with the belt. Do you think I stole candy again? After that, I knew it was serious business. My father taught me a lesson very well.

When speaking of the rod, some suggest using your hands for spanking. From reading different books, I suggest you avoid using your hands. The reason for that is your hands should be used for showing love through touching, hugging, encouraging, communicating, and signing, "I love you." Use your hands to comfort children. When your children see your hands, they will know you are demonstrating your love to them.

Then, as you use the rod, they will know it is used for the purpose of discipline. The rod will help them know they have sinned and rebelled against God and their parents. When they see you grabbing the rod and using your hands to punish them with the rod, they will see "discipline with love" in action.

Once again, my advice is not to use your hands for discipline. Also, using your hands may be more painful and cause excessive bodily harm. Whereas a ruler is not the same as hands, yet it is painful.

Now, I will focus on the application of "the rod." When a child has disobeyed, be swift with the rod. It's important that the punishment is immediate.

Let me give you an example. When a child has unintentionally rebelled, teach them that what he or she just did was wrong. However, when a child purposefully rebels, immediately

send him to his room or somewhere private. Sit down with him and get your ruler. Explain to him what he has done wrong and that he has rebelled against you. Take time to explain what he has done. And, be sure he understands how he has rebelled. Also, explain that you must punish him for what he has done. Teach him that God has commanded children to obey their parents and because he has rebelled, he must be punished with the rod. Be clear that punishment comes from God. This is one way to show you are “aligned with God.” Make sure your child understands that he is being punished because he has rebelled against God. It’s very important to remain calm. If you’re out of control, you will not teach him. Help him to understand the connection between his sins and the punishment. It is not about your mood or preference. He needs to know he was wrong.

Then, spank him with the belt three times or as many times as you deem appropriate. After this, hug him. Immediately hug him to show your mercy. Teach him to ask God for forgiveness. It’s important for him to understand to ask God for forgiveness after he has sinned. He needs to know that Jesus forgives him because Jesus died on a cross to make this possible. So, expect him to ask you, as the parent, for forgiveness. Expect him to be specific, such as asking you to forgive him for lying. Be sure he understands that he has rebelled.

Sometimes children will focus on what they did wrong, such as not sitting on a chair when you requested that, instead of focusing on the fact that they rebelled against you. Be sure they understand they have rebelled. Help them understand you are punishing them not because they went to the wrong room, but because they rebelled against or disobeyed you.

After your child has asked you for forgiveness, instruct him to ask Jesus for forgiveness. Help him look to Jesus. Teach him that he needs Jesus to forgive him because we have all rebelled against God. And, when we rebel against God, we need to ask Jesus for forgiveness and to change us. Children need to learn to ask Jesus to help them obey Him. Allow Jesus to work in their hearts. They will understand that Jesus died on a cross for their sins and, hopefully, they will follow Him.

Pray with your child before you end your discipline session. Be consistent and calm with discipline. Be firm and loving. In the long run, your child will be thankful.

In the beginning, while your child is young, discipline may be more frequent. But, as he grows older and discipline becomes more established, you will not need to use the rod as much. Then, you can invest more of your time in teaching and training him. You may invest your time in helping him think through his decisions, especially in how he will live for Christ. The more established your discipline is, the less you will need to use the rod. You may focus on his character development.

The rod used in punishment will help children understand sin and rebellion. Don’t just punish your children all the time. Be sure your children understand why they are being punished. Help them understand why they need Jesus. When punishing, take time to explain why they are being punished, even when this interrupts your schedule or normal routine.

I would like to share two illustrations with cookies. Maybe you're hungry just looking at these cookies.

Here's the first illustration. One little girl asks her mother for a cookie. The girl hasn't been trained to obey yet. Now, this illustration will not follow what I've taught from the Bible.

The mother answers, "No."

The girl answers, "Please...I want a cookie!"

"No, we're saving these cookies for dinner," the mother says.

Soon, they go back and forth. A power struggle ensues. They argue back and forth until one of two things happens. The mother gives up and lets the girl have a cookie. Or, she sends her daughter to her room. Maybe she spansks her girl harshly. The girl cries while the mother remains upset. Will the girl learn anything? She will probably not learn anything, including obedience. Instead, she may learn that she may persist until she gets her way, win or lose.

In the second illustration, Biblical discipline is followed. The girl has been trained to obey. She understands there is punishment for rebellion.

The girl asks her mother for a cookie. The mother answers, "No." The girl immediately accepts her mother's answer and walks away. This is possible when children know that rebellion and disobedience leads to swift punishment.

If the girl had rebelled, her mother wouldn't have to yell. All the mother had to do was simply tell her daughter to go to her room. Don't leave any room or time for argument. The mother must stick with her words and plan for discipline – rebellion means punishment. It's important to be consistent.

In closing, it is very important for parents to live "in alignment with Christ." Live according to and obey His Word in the Bible. Of course, we are not perfect. That's why we need Jesus to dwell in our hearts and change us. Continue to seek His forgiveness for your sins. Keep your lives "tuned-up" to Him. Teach your children to obey their parents and God. Help them understand that when they obey you, they obey God, too. Show them that you, as parents, obey God, too.

As your children become more aligned with you, teach them how to be aligned with God through a relationship with Jesus. As they grow up, entrust them to God's hands and encourage them to obey Him. Parents are responsible for teaching their children to obey God. Once you establish discipline, then you may focus your time and energy on teaching and training your children.

I'm going to enjoy my cookies now!



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