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Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child

13: 20-25

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

Walk with the wise and become wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm (13:20 NIV). As Tremper Longman III relates in his commentary on *Proverbs*, this **proverb** observes that one will be like the company that he or she keeps. Those who associate with **the wise** will be **wise**, and those who associate with **fools** will be **foolish** and have a disastrous end. The most natural way of understanding this verse is that the virtues or vices of those whom one associates with will rub off on that person. But perhaps people are attracted to those who are like them, so then this observation is simply on the natural order of things. Like attracts like. **Lady Wisdom (to see link click Am - Lady Wisdom's Rebuke of the Foolish) herself** keeps company with virtues like prudence (**1:4**), knowledge, and discretion; **she** avoids contact with pride, arrogance, **evil**, and perverse speech. **Paul** reminds us: **Don't be fooled. "Bad company ruins good character" (First Corinthians 15:33).** The influence of **good** and **bad** associations is a common theme in **Proverbs (1:10-11, 2:12, 4:14-17, 16:29, 22:24-25, 23:20-21, and 28:7).**

Calamity pursues sinners, but prosperity will reward the righteous (13:21 Hebrew). In the final analysis, this **proverb** is about consequences. **Evil (calamity) pursues sinners** like an animal chasing him. **He** can't escape. On the other hand, **the righteous** get a **good** reward. **They** do not have to **pursue** a **good reward**; it comes naturally to **them** as a result of **their righteousness**. This is another frequent theme in **Proverbs (3:2, 8:18, 10:6 and 22, 21:21, 29:25).** It is important to remember that **proverbs** are not promises; **they** are generally true principles, all other things being equal.

A good person leaves an inheritance for their children, but a sinner's

wealth is stored up for the righteous (13:22 NIV). This is one way in which **Solomon** understood how the bad person, whether characterized as being **foolish** or **wicked**, could have any material **wealth**. After all, it is **the wise** who should have **wealth**, and **the fool** should be **poor (14:24)**, though there are **proverbs** that show an awareness of **the fool** having **wealth**. One way of resolving the tension was by understanding that **the wealth** of **the fool** is only temporary. Here, the idea is that **the good man's wealth** doesn't only last for **their** lifetime, but into future generations. But, **sinners' wealth** will also get handed down, not to **their** family line but from **sinners** to **the righteous**. Though **the Teacher** in **Ecclesiastes 6:1-2** seems to share this perspective about **the good person, he** also points out that **the sinners' wealth** may get passed down to **a stranger: I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind. God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that his heart lacks nothing at all, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead.**

A poor person's farm may produce much food; but injustice, figuratively sweeps it all away (13:23 NLT). Typically, **Proverbs** attributes **poverty** to some form of **foolishness**. While according to **Proverbs, the foolish** behavior most commonly resulting in **poverty** is **laziness** (see **Be - Don't be Lazy**), other reasons for **poverty** are also given, including **living in luxury**. But, here, **foolishness** is not in view at all; but rather, **poverty** is a result of some form of **injustice** committed against **the poor**. The assumption is that someone has worked hard and done the ethical things necessary to gain material **wealth** only to have forces beyond their control rob them of it. This verse doesn't go into any specifics because **injustice** can come in so many different forms. This verse is notable because it acknowledges that it is not only **the godless fool** who can suffer **poverty**.²⁷⁰



Those who spare the rod spoil the child, but those who love their children care enough to discipline them (13:24 Hebrew). The word **discipline** (Hebrew: *musar*, sometimes translated *instruction*) and its frequent word pair **correction** (Hebrew: *tokahat*) may at times imply physical force in the service of education or growth in wisdom; but here, we are looking at those passages that explicitly mention physical **discipline (3:11-12, 10:13, 13:24, 17:10, 19:18 and 25, 20:30, 22:15, 23:13-14, 26:3, 29:15, 17 and 19)**. And this is signaled by the Hebrew word *sebet*, which translates as **rod**. **The rod** is not to be taken metaphorically in **Proverbs**, but rather as a tool of physical **discipline**. However, there are passages that do not specifically mention **the rod** and yet also clearly have to do with physical punishment (**19:18**).

Discipline was critically important to the sages, and people who didn't want discipline for themselves were immediately suspected of being **fools**. The wise want to be corrected no matter what the cost. The alternative would be to live in ignorance and continue wrong behavior and mistaken beliefs. Yet one can imagine how a parent who understood the importance of **discipline** for oneself might yet hesitate to apply it to their **child**. After all, it's difficult to inflict pain of any kind on **a child** that one loves. However, this warning points out that more harm is done to **a child** by withholding **discipline** than by applying it. **Solomon** would understand the reluctance to apply **discipline**, whether physical or verbal, to be **child** neglect or **child** abuse.²⁷¹

In this case, since **the rod** is mentioned, **the discipline** in mind must be physical. However, one should not think that the Bible is condoning severe beatings. Just as

the parents' words were kind and merciful, so were the blows they administered. In this day of appropriate concern for destructive and hateful physical abuse of **children**, there is an understandable hesitation about **proverbs** like this one that advocate physical **discipline**. Still, as is typical in such instances, there has been an equally harmful decision to refrain from any kind of verbal or physical correction for bad behavior, which is arguably not helping **children** either.²⁷²

Two groups are mentioned as the legitimate recipients of **the rod**; **children** and **fools**. Yet, there is more hope for the former than the latter. **Foolishness fills the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away (22:15). Lady Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but the rod is found on the back of those who lack understanding (10:13).** The use of **discipline** is for the positive end of teaching **the person wisdom. To discipline a child produces wisdom, but a mother is disgraced by an undisciplined child (29:15).** Such physical punishment is not to be severe, and these passages should never be used to legitimize any form of **child** abuse. **Don't fail to discipline your children; the rod of punishment won't kill them. Punish them with the rod and save them from death (23:13-14).** And again, it must be kept in mind that the application of any **proverb** depends on the people involved as well as the situation. These **proverbs** do not imply that parents **MUST** apply physical punishment when a simple verbal reprimand will do. **Discipline** is never to be done out of anger or hate or a desire to harm, but out of love and a desire that **the child** improve behavior. In this way, the parent follows the model of **ADONAI** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz – God Disciplines His Children**).²⁷³ Lastly, we need to remember that this instruction is **God's Word** and those who chose to ignore it, like ignoring any other part of **God's Word**, will do so at their own peril.

The righteous eat to their heart's content, but the stomach of the wicked goes hungry (13:25 NIV). This **proverb** has some similarity with the bold statement in **10:3**, where we read: **ADONAI will not let the godly go hungry, but He refuses to satisfy the cravings of the wicked.** All things being equal, **God** will satisfy the hunger of **the righteous of the TaNaKh**, but **the wicked** (a common variation of **the fool**) will **go hungry. The fool is lazy** or easygoing: **Those who love pleasure become poor; those who love wine and luxury will never be rich (21:17).** As a result, **they** lack the means necessary to grow or acquire food. However, all things are not always equal. One may **be poor** and not have anything to eat not because of their own **wickedness**, but because of someone else's **wicked** actions (see **13:23** above).²⁷⁴

Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that **You** are so **wise** and kind in **Your** discipline. **My son, do not take lightly the discipline of Adonai or lose heart when you are corrected by Him, because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts.” (Hebrews 12:5-6). You wisely match the severity of your discipline with the results of the heart. If the heart listens to You, softens and repents- then discipline has completed its work; but if the heart hardens and resists Your correction then Your discipline gets harsher. Now if in spite of these things you will not be chastened by Me, but walk contrary to Me instead, then I will also walk contrary to you. Then I will strike you, I Myself, seven times for your sins (Leviticus 26:23-24).** Parents who love and care for their children, desiring them to grow wise, will not ignore wrongs but will **discipline** in a manner that follows **Your** example.

No one ever likes **discipline**; but the results of learning from **it** make the correction well worth it. **Now all discipline seems painful at the moment - not joyful. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).** Sometimes **You** use **discipline** to make those who are **abiding in You** to be even more **fruitful**. Sometimes **You** have to cut away selfishness/unfruitfulness in my life so I can produce more **fruit**. **Yeshua** said: **Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. The branch cannot itself produce fruit, unless it abides on the vine. Likewise, you cannot produce fruit unless you abide in Me (John 15:4).** Thank **You** for being such a wonderful heavenly **Father**, who **disciplines wisely** out of love for me, with the goal to produce **the fruit of righteousness**. In **Messiah Yeshua’s Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen