

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

TO SPANK THE CHILD  
OR  
NOT TO SPANK THE CHILD

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN THE BIBLE AND ITS THEOLOGICAL  
CHALLENGES

MASTER'S THESIS  
MASTER IN THEOLOGY

BY  
JOSEPH BABY

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## Dedication

I affectionately dedicate this thesis to my dear wife Marianne Baby. Without her love and support it would not have been possible for me to complete my studies and Master Thesis. You are awesome!!

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AD     | Anno Domini  |
| CTM    | Child Theology Movement                              |
| UNCRC  | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                       |

## **BIBLE TRANSLATION**

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from The New International Version (NIV), 1973-2011 published by Biblical, Inc.

# Chapter One

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

If we read through the Bible, we will never find the word “corporal punishment”. However, what we *will* find is several instruments used to inflict the human body. In fact, we will find the “knife”, “rod” and the “whip” mentioned as much as 81 times all together. Without having mentioned one concrete bible verse yet, still, we see the challenges and emotionally, heavy-laden discussions coming. Did God intend us to use these instruments to discipline our children? And if, how should we use them and for what age group of children? Or maybe the Bible’s texts has to be read and understood from a redemptive perspective which does not allow us to use any form of corporal punishment in the disciplining of our children? According to Webb, “as contemporary Christians read and ponder the biblical instructions pertaining to the rod, the whip and the heavy knife, they are likely to struggle with what they find” (2011, 7).

It is exactly this struggle and challenge this thesis is all about: should we spank the child or should we not spank the child. From the first writers on this topic and up to today, there has been huge divisive tendencies on whether we should use corporal punishment to discipline our children, or not. In the early days St. Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius debated on this topic (see Cunningham 2005). Today William J. Webb and Andreas Köstenberger keep the debate going. This is just to mention a few. In the next chapters, more writers, scholars and theologians will be mentioned. Also, a few stories will be mentioned. Here in the introduction I will in the following share two of the stories. The first story is in fact my own story. Here it goes.



### *1.1.1 My own Story*

It is no secret that corporal punishment is widely being practiced around the Christian world. In this scenario I think it would be unfair if I do not share my story here. I do not intend to already be judgmental here and draw the conclusion that all kinds of corporal punishment should be banned, cause we still have not found out what the Bible is saying about corporal punishment. However, my story is an example on how corporal punishment could go wrong.

I was born and brought up in a Christian family in India. My parents called themselves Christians and we attended church as well. But as far as I can remember there is not a single day that I was not beaten by my parents. I was beaten all the time. When I say beaten, it was not just a two light smack on my buttock rather it was more severe, words could probably not describe it. I was beaten to the extent that I started bleeding and parts of my body was swollen and bleeding. These all else than simple spankings left bruises and scars on my body. I remember crying out as loud as I could to stop beating me, I even remember few occasion I almost even fainted. This kind of beating continued until I was twelve or thirteen, as far as I can remember. And, I did not learn much from the beatings, only fear and insecurity. It was such a hard life for me, I never felt peace in my life. Actually, I cannot explain that feelings I had – I would say it was a horrible experience for me as a child.

I could only imagine my story happened and still happening in many so-called Christian families in India and around the world. Where did my parents get this idea of beating and spanking me? Of course from the Bible verses on corporal punishment. How did they come to understand that beating is the right method to discipline a child? Of course from the church we went. There the preachers took the Bible verses on corporal punishment and preached that a child needs to be beaten with a stick or a rod to be properly disciplined. But does the Bible say that you need to beat your child to submission or beat him or her to the extent he or she faint? Then what does the Bible mean when it says do not withhold discipline from your child or if you use rod your child will not die. The most important thing is how we interpret these Bible verses. According to Webb (2011) these Bible passages where we read about the rod and disciplining are just imagery or metaphors. However, we

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shall see the teaching and interpretation style of Webb more in detail later on. I believe with all my heart that the Bible does not say that, or admonish the parents to discipline their children in that kind of manner as I have experienced. Actually many people, and many Christian parents are failing when it comes to discipline their children. As a matter of fact, some of my friends have worse experience than me where their parents have burnt an iron bar and placed it on their body or other cruel way of punishing, thinking that their children will be disciplined and live in a good way. This is similar to the story presented in the first chapter about the Indian parents in Norway who were put in jail for disciplining their son with a burnt spoon.

Now as an adult when I look back at my childhood and others' childhood(s) I feel pity for all the parents who practiced corporal punishment this way and still practice this way. Without being biased or pre-judgmental I wish to say that this kind of corporal punishment has nothing to do with the Bible verses on corporal punishment in the Bible, rather all these parents who practice corporal punishment are misguided by wrong interpretation of the Bible verses on corporal punishment.

But what is the right way of disciplining according to the Bible? We will come back to the core of this debate in chapter four.

### *1.1.2 A More Recent Story*

These days we often read in the news papers how parents have used various forms of corporal punishment as their main disciplinary method and ended up in jail. One of the recent incidents which has been portrayed globally in media, took place in Oslo, Norway, and read the headlines: "Roasted son with a spoon, parents sentenced to jail for abuse", and "An Indian man and his wife are in the Oslo City Court sentenced respectively to 18 and 15 months in prison for abuse of his son" (English translation of NRK Nyheter 2012). This very incident has raised many eye brows within Norway as well as throughout India. According to the Norwegian law, the authorities believe the action that was taken against the Indian couple was right well within the law but in India the feelings were mixed. Some people think, the Norwegian authority was extremely harsh towards the Indian couple and they justify the

Indian couple, saying that children needs to be disciplined in such a manner if they do not behave. Even Christians in India support this Indian couple, saying that a naughty child deserves harsh physical punishment.

This story nor my story will be in focus of this thesis, but my story and the recent incident that took place in Norway motivated me to write this thesis and the latter has raised further questions and concerns over what is, and should be the criteria for disciplining children around the world in social contexts but also in theological contexts.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As the world is becoming more and more globalized, the topic of corporal punishment is also being discussed widely as an intercultural challenge. Taking a little dig into the recent Child Theology Movement and The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which has been ratified by all the countries in the world except two, we are fast to see that corporal punishment is a hot burning topic *and* issue around the world. This has also implications for theology in that it opts us to find out what the Bible really is saying regarding how we should discipline our children, and also, to find out how it is possible to move from ancient Bible texts to an application of those texts in our intercultural society.

We live in an intercultural, globalized society where things are learnt and practiced differently. But the question is: can we only draw conclusions from our cultural and social experiences and practices, or is there a criteria beyond that? It is only apt to see what the Bible says about corporal punishment and the theological challenges that follows. To spank or not to spank. To spank just a little bit, or not to spank at all. To spank in a certain way, for a certain age group and on a certain place on the body. The challenges already seem to be endless. What kind of hermeneutic is the most biblical hermeneutic to use?

Although I am using the word “spanking”, there are several other ways of physically punishing a child. Still, I have chosen to use the word “spanking”, and to refer to spanking most of the time because spanking tend to be the most common method to use when it comes

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to corporal punishment. For instance, and according to Banks (2002), more than 90 percent of American families use spanking as a form of discipline for toddlers.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

#### *1.3.1 General Objective*

This study aims to explore corporal punishment in the Bible and its theological challenges.

#### *1.3.2 Specific Objectives/research questions*

- To explore how Bible verses on corporal punishment are interpreted and applied throughout the history of the Church.
- To examine what the Bible really says about corporal punishment.
- To explore the different theological challenges we face when it comes to corporal punishment in the Bible, and to look at the possibilities of dealing with the theological challenges in new and fruitful ways.

### **1.4 Importance, Extent and Limitation of the Research**

This study will be a contribution towards a deeper understanding on how God intended us to interpret and apply the different bible verses that touches upon the topic of corporal punishment. Even though there has been much written and studied about corporal punishment through ages, still there is a huge void in theological contexts. Here is where this project is believed to fill in the gap, using the Bible as the rule of thumb together with old and new challenges on this important topic. I have already mentioned in the background paragraph that the instruments of corporal punishment is mentioned 81 times in the Bible. However, all these 81 verses will not be mentioned in this thesis and some of the Bible verses on this topic will be given extra weight according to the weight it has been given in ancient and contemporary debates. In this thesis, a special emphasis will therefore be put on those verses that have most frequently been used in favor of corporal punishment and in the favor of spanking. And Proverbs 23:13-14 is one of the “top verses”. In these verses the Bible says if you punish your child with a rod he or she will not die and then in the next verse it says, if

you punish your child you save him or her from death. What do these verses actually mean? Does the Bible promote corporal punishment in any way, or is the Bible advising parents in such a way that they have to take disciplining their child seriously? From what I understand, and from many others understanding these verses does not say that parents should abuse their children physically rather discipline their children because the parents love them. According to Dobson (1992), parents should punish their children in love. But what does that imply? And how can we discuss all the different opinions, writings and interpretations of the Bible when it comes to the topic of corporal punishment without taking stand with anyone? In the next following chapters we shall discuss about these challenges and see what solutions we can find to these centuries old debates; if there are any solutions.

### **1.5 Outline of the Thesis**

This master thesis consist of five chapters. A short introduction is included in every one of them.

***Chapter One: Introduction.*** Covers this chapter, and is presenting the background of this study, the research topic and summarizes the main objectives of the study.

***Chapter Two: How the different Bible verses on corporal punishment are interpreted and applied throughout the history of the church.*** The aim of this chapter is to find out how these verses are interpreted and applied through history and in different cultures.

***Chapter Three: Theories & Research approaches.*** This chapter briefly, present and describe the theological approaches and the “glasses” or hermeneutics I have chosen as the theoretical framework to base my study on.

***Chapter Four: To Spank the Child or Not to Spank the Child: Theological Challenges.*** This chapter deals with the theological challenges when it comes to corporal punishment in the Bible.

***Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks.*** Briefly encapsulates the major findings, conclusions and further recommendations.

## Chapter Two

# HOW THE DIFFERENT BIBLE VERSES ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENT ARE INTERPRETED AND APPLIED THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

### 2.1 Introduction

We have quite a few Bible verses on corporal punishment, and the aim of this chapter is to find out how these verses are interpreted and applied through history and in different cultures. The interpretation and misinterpretation of these verses on corporal punishment have indeed created so much confusion in the history of Christianity and in the lives of so many parents. As a researcher I feel it is high time to have a clear understanding and a clear interpretation of the scriptures on corporal punishment. Children are the backbone of any society and it is of paramount importance how we discipline and train our children. A wrong method or manner of discipline can leave irreparable damage on a child, and as result we will have to produce a generation of emotionally and mentally handicapped children. This chapter shows how important it is to interpret the Bible passages on corporal punishment and how significant it is for parents and caregivers to understand these scriptures from the eyes of love, and practice it on a daily basis. There is an enormous responsibility on the parents and other caregivers, and this chapter perhaps gives a foretaste for the sense of responsibility that lies on the shoulders of the one who is in charge or in control. Starting from history, and looking into the two different theologians St. Augustine and Pelagius, two different ways of interpreting the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment, two different ways to view the child and childhood and the two different ways of applying these verses (to spank or not to spank?). However, we ought not to forget that not all theologians set themselves within one of these two categories. Still, this is a starting point and it is of vast importance to look into the divisions from the history and onwards in order to take our responsibility as adults and caregivers serious and finally be able to treat children the way the Bible asks us to treat them.

## **2.2 Corporal Punishment in the Christian History- Special Focus on St. Augustine and Pelagius**

Corporal punishment in the Christian history has been there since the beginning of the centuries. Perhaps St. Augustine of Hippo is the one we need to think first and foremost about when we talk about corporal punishment in the Christian history. Especially in his work “Confessions” (1991), originally written in AD 397-398, Augustine narrates about his childhood and how children needed to be treated. When it comes to corporal punishment, Augustine had a dual or contradictory approach in the sense he encouraged beatings of the children, but he treated his own son with exceptional care (Bunge, 2001). Additionally, it should be mentioned that Augustine could not overlook the many beatings he had received as a child himself, and as an adult he thought that children should not be treated as harshly as he himself had been treated. For instance he wrote in “Confessions”: “The school master who caned me was behaving no better than I was” (quoted in Bunge 2001, 84). It is interesting how Augustine wanted to move away from the harsh beatings, and rather punish children along a smoother line of beatings.

He, in fact, made several remarkable comments regarding corporal punishment and he mainly drawn his inspirations and teachings about corporal punishment from the book of Proverbs. Especially from Proverbs 3:11-12 and Hebrews 12:5-8 where he frequently built his arguments (Garnsey 1996). Since this chapter purely deals with how the Bible verses on corporal punishment has been interpreted and applied, it is only appropriate to look in to what Augustine said about corporal punishment in the Bible. From the Christian history, and through many other literature, what we will come to understand is that Augustine was *for* spanking, although not harshly spanking, and he was of the view that corporal punishment is one of the good ways to discipline a child.

Having said that, was Augustine “correct” in his interpretation of the Bible verses on corporal punishment? In fact, he endorsed corporal punishment which means to spank a child to discipline. What exactly influenced his interpretation of the Bible verses on corporal punishment? Was it the culture and time in which he lived or his deep understanding of the

Bible? If it was his deep understanding of the Bible that made him to endorse corporal punishment, we have to double check on that. On the other hand, if it was the culture and time that influenced him the way he interpreted the Bible verses on corporal punishment, that also need to be checked. Because his interpretation of the Bible verses on corporal punishment has obviously impacted the Christian church.

Today, corporal punishment is still accepted and practiced many places around the world both in Western countries (like USA) and countries in the South (for in stance India). Where did they get this understanding of the Bible verses, or how did they arrive in the conclusion that children need to be spanked, or in their conclusion that the Bible verses on discipline exactly talk about corporal punishment? Is it from their undivided devotion to these Bible verses on corporal punishment or mere influence from the time of Augustine and others? It is not right to spank the children on the basis of the influence from the history, if the Bible is telling us to do something else. And it is also not right if we do not spank our children if that is what the Bible tells us to do.

Pelagius is the other name which is drawn from Christian history and the corporal punishment issue. In fact, the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius is a famous one (Cunningham 2005). Augustine believed that human beings are born with original sin inherited from Adam whereas his contemporary Pelagius who argued that children are born with a clean slate and salvation comes from a good life. From this, what we understand is that Augustine and Pelagius had quite different views on corporal punishment (ibid).

So from here, the only way to go is to take a deeper look into how both St. Augustine and Pelagius interpreted the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment. St. Augustine's view of the child as inherently evil and Pelagius view of childhood as a time of innocence will be of much interest in understanding why they interpreted the Bible the way they did. Scholars after them such as St. Anselm, Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox would also be mentioned.



*2.2.1 St. Augustine of Hippo and Children as Inherently Evil*

St. Augustine, as mentioned above, advocated spanking and he built his arguments especially upon Proverbs 3:11-12 and Hebrews 12:5-8:

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:11-12).

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says,

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all (Hebrews 12:5-8).

Reading these verses, we understand that God as a perfect father disciplines his children, so therefore should we. In section 2.4.1 it is also mentioned how theologians today (Köstenberger and Dobson for instance) are using this theological analogy to support their view and justification of corporal punishment. There is no doubt that these theologians today also have been influenced by the teachings of St. Augustine which often involved a very literal interpretation of the Bible. Although these verses talk about discipline and does not say anything at all about spanking, St. Augustine, according to Sajkowska and Wojtasik (2004) justified all forms of corporal punishment of children for the sake of correcting what is deformed and evil. He believed that the child was a creature of will and even a sinner while in his/her mother's womb, “a view which persisted well into the seventeenth century and beyond” (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003, 62).

He developed his arguments about original sin and that children are utterly evil and predestined through his interest in children, his reason (developed from Aristotle) and his readings of Paul (Bunge, 2001). In fact, his ideas about children as evil dominated him until

he died, “but his low view of children still lives today” (ibid, 58). Further in the same paragraph Bunge interestingly asks:

One wonders what would have happened if Augustine had picked up the baby he reported observing and gently rocked the little one? What if he had patted the baby's back and the baby burped? (2011, 58).

But he did not do that. He instead he viewed and treated children as inherently evil. Of course we can not hold him a hundred percent responsible for today's views of the child as evil and in need of physical discipline. But the view or discourse of the child and childhood as evil and a time of wildness did at least influence other theologians after him such as Martin Luther. Luther once said that he would rather have a dead son than a rebellious son. Luther believed parents could use extreme measures, even death when children were disobedient (Pate and Gould 2012, 62). Deuteronomy 21:18-21 for sure tells us the story about the parents who had a rebellious son and that stoning was the solution:

If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

Here we clearly, *literally* read that the solution for a stubborn and rebellious son who still won't listen to his parents even after being disciplined should be stoned to death. But does that mean that we should take these old testament verses word by word and literally follow what is being said in that verse? Where did Luther get this understanding of the scripture? According to Hendrix, Luther was also influenced by the teaching of St. Augustine, reading Augustine more for the understanding of Bible than for Augustine himself, and for instance “in 1518 he named Augustine the most trustworthy interpreter of Paul” (2009, 15). Additionally, and according to history, Luther was obviously guided by Proverbs 23:13-14

when he justified his view of corporal punishment. He in fact interpreted those verses from a literal point of view. I am wondering if Luther was also influenced by his culture and time, or only influenced by St. Augustine. If he was influenced by his culture and time I am not very surprised by the way he interpreted the Bible verses on corporal punishment. Although he wanted to work within the one Catholic Church, still, in his time, the protestant church was more powerful and they controlled the affairs of the home and church. In truth, the church decided what needed to be practiced and what needs not to be practiced. Can we say what the church practiced was right in terms of corporal punishment? When Jesus showed by example to love and respect children, how did Luther or the church in his time get the idea of still putting emphasis on Deuteronomy – rather having a dead son than a rebellious son? This is just a rhetoric question with the aim to make us think. I have still not come to the conclusion of whether it is right to spank the child or not according to the Bible, but as we come further down the road on this journey to find out what the Bible really says about this topic, it is important to note these breathtaking paradoxes along the way. With due respect to Luther, I would say probably he was influenced by the culture in interpreting the way he did. According Cunningham (2005), in Luther's time and culture children were seen as a source of joy, but also as a source of anxiety. Parents therefore had serious duties to discipline and teach their child to be obedient.

After him came also John Calvin and John Knox to mention a few. I will not go in depth on what all of them said and how they interpreted the Bible, other than saying that they had a several things in common. They all interpreted the Bible in a very literal way, and they all based their interpretation of the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment from the notion of “original sin”. The children are viewed as totally wicked without morality, and the idea that “the devil needs to be beaten out of them (the children)” is not foreign to their views. No wonder most of them professed a harsh and brutal treatment of the children, reading the words on corporal punishment in the Bible very literally and towards the view they hold of the child. For in stance, John Robinson, the pastor for the Pilgrim Fathers stated that:

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Surely there is in all children a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must, in the first place, be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractableness, other virtues may, in their time, be built thereon. For beating, and keeping down his stubbornness parents must provide carefully...that the children's wills and wilfulness be restrained and repressed, and that, in time (quoted in Demos 1970, 134-5).

### *2.2.2 Pelagius and Childhood as a time of Innocence*

Pelagius's thinking was different from St. Augustine's and his successors. Pelagius taught that children are born with a clean state and that childhood is a time of innocence (Cunningham, 2005). Is Augustine right in his teaching or Pelagius right in his teaching? Notwithstanding who is right or wrong here, the important thing is the potential misunderstanding of the Bible verses on corporal punishment throughout the history and onwards. Of course St. Augustine was more known and respected because of his profound teaching and understanding of the Bible than his contemporary Pelagius was. Pelagius, according to Anderson, taught that there is “no such thing as 'original sin' passed down from Adam, but each child is born innocent, with the ability not to sin” (2011, 14). He surely received a lot of opposition for his view, especially from Augustine saying that he (Pelagius) denied the sovereignty of God in that he meant that children's will was totally free from God and they were not dependent on the grace of God since they were born innocent with no need for God's grace.

Unfortunately we do not have much records of how Pelagius exactly interpreted the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment. However, as we know he was the “opponent” to St. Augustine, and that he viewed children as innocent, one can assume that he did not advocate corporal punishment of the children as did St. Augustine. What we know is that Pelagius was more optimistic about children and growth than Augustine was; an interesting difference because Augustine lived with a child and Pelagius did not. In fact, and according to Bunge (2001), there is no evidence that Pelagius spent much time with children, and what he wrote concerning children was more vague. So how then can we exactly know how he advocated and practiced corporal punishment? At least we know that many theologians have acquired a Pelagian or optimistic view about children (although they were mainly influenced

by St. Augustine), and worth mentioning among them are Thomas Aquinas and John Wesley (see Rees in Bunge, 2001). And we know that Thomas Aquinas stated that a parent can lawfully strike his child (1265-1274, 2680) and John Wesley's writings (Wesley in Kulkarni & Sommer, 1927) strongly recommend the breaking of the child's will and this breaking of the will should include beatings, if needed. It is interesting how these theologians have a more Pelagian and optimistic view of the child than what Augustine has, but still they encouraged beatings. This makes us to understand that there is not always a direct link between the view of the child, and the view of how children should be treated. From Mercer's (2005) book we understand that most Christian theologians would view the child as opposite from innocent, and with the original sin, and that children need to be disciplined and their will needs to be bended. Not many theologians would view the child as innocent and born with a completely clean slate. However, some may view children more innocent than evil (but still born in this world with original sin).

On the same note as mentioned above, not many theologians have advocated a more softer line when it comes to the disciplining of children which is compatible with the romantic view of the child, or the so called romantic discourse. But St. Anselm who believed that children were born with original sin asked this question: "Are they (children) not human, are they not flesh and blood like you?" (quoted un deMause, 2006). St. Anselm did not recommend beatings of children, and he was far in advance of his time by asking an abbot to beat the children gently (see deMause, 2006). The history does not even tell us clearly at all how St. Anselm interpreted the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment, but we could understand from the quote above is that he did not read the Bible literally, but allegorically when it comes to this topic. Having said that, I do not aim to draw any false conclusions.

The romantic discourse is quite opposite of viewing children as inherent evil and wicked in that the romantic view of the child implies that children are innocent and that childhood is a time of innocence. In this regard we may mention Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the french philosopher who radically argued that children were innocent and inherently good and had the right to grow up in accordance with nature and without the imposition upon of moral rules and learning (Cunningham, 2005).

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Still, and as we have read above, and also according to Woodhead and Montgomery (2003) many theologians have said negative things about children seeing them as only sinful and wicked. But despite of this, the image of the innocent child is central to the New Testament (whether they are viewed as born with or without original sin) and Jesus has often been depicted as their protector. Matthew 18:1-4 is a good example of that. (We will come back to this contradicting issue in chapter five).

However, and according to Bunge (2001), there are many clear cases in the history of Christianity in which original sin plays a role in supporting the harsh and even brutal treatment of children. Unfortunately we did not find any clear explanation of these theologians interpretation of the Bible on corporal punishment, but what we have come to understand is that these different theologians have paved the way for today's two main different views of the child and how the children should be treated according to the Bible. As innocent with no spanking, or as evil with plenty of spanking. But we should also not forget that these two views may be blurred and mixed, and that the different views of children and the different views of what the Bible says about corporal punishment can all co-exist. Take Anselm for in stance. He followed Augustine on original sin, but not on corporal punishment.

As we have now seen in section 2.2, St. Augustine developed his argument when it comes to corporal punishment through the view of the child as evil because of the original sin we all are born into. Pelagius on the other hand developed his argument from the notion that all children are born innocent. But we have also seen that there does not have to be a direct link between the understanding of original sin and the understanding of corporal punishment. However, it is of paramount importance to see the two different views of the child and how these two views have developed. In that way we know what has been going on in the history and up to today. Woodhead and Montgomery (2003) states that “children as potentially evil or wicked is a prevalent image in European Christian cultures”, and that “an important source of this view is the Christian belief that since the fall of Adam and Eve all humans are born sinful” (p. 62). This implies that this view of the child that the child is born sinful and is potentially evil is the most common view of the child both from the history and up to now

(“corporal punishment today” will be dealt with in sub-chapter 3.4). But does that mean that we have to beat our children, and that the Bible is in fact promoting spanking of the children? The view of children as potentially evil or wicked is also a prevalent view in other Christian cultures around the world.

### **2.3 Corporal Punishment around the Christian World**

As we try to find out how the Bible verses on corporal punishment is interpreted and applied through time and space it is only apt to give some room for corporal punishment around the Christian world. That is, looking at different practices of corporal punishment from several corners of the world for the sake of seeing different stories and be introduced to different ways of practicing corporal punishment among Christians in our time. My aim is not to compare any culture, but to present “Corporal Punishment around the Christian World”.

#### *2.3.1 The South: Stories on Corporal Punishment*

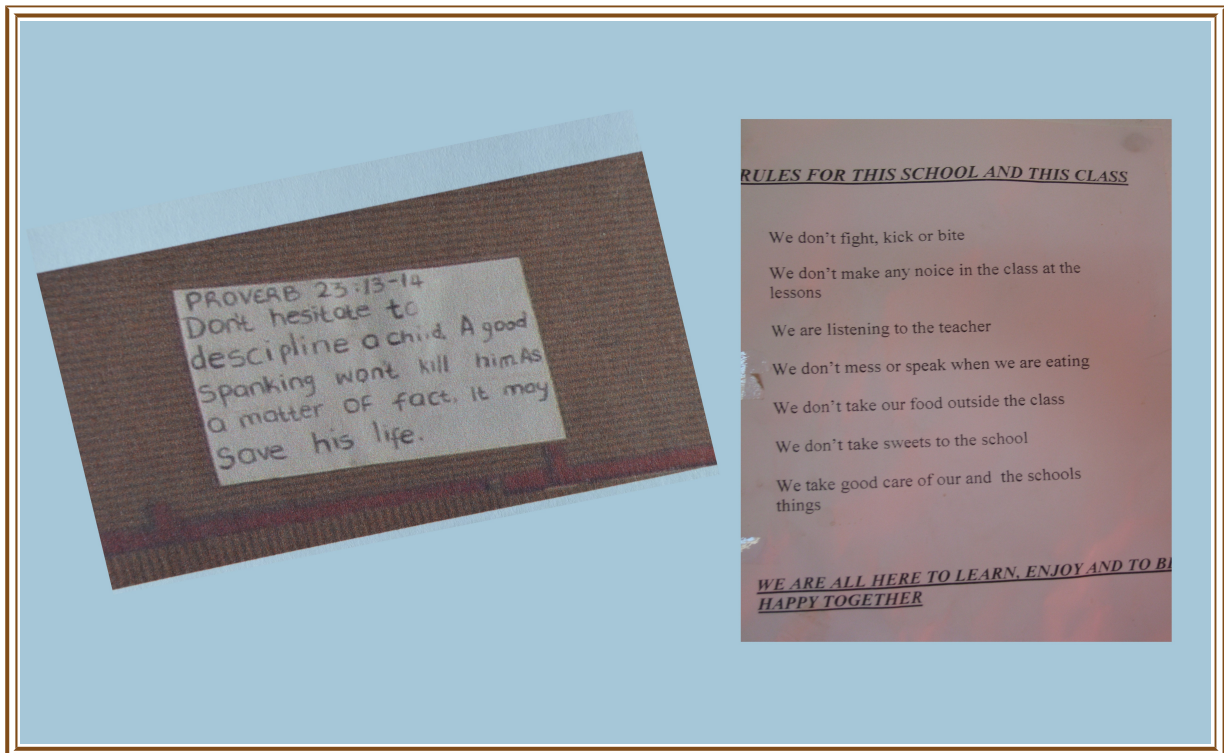
Now if we talk about corporal punishment around the world, it is very interesting to see that corporal punishment is practiced around the world very differently. For example, the countries in the South practice corporal punishment more harshly than countries in the West. For instance, in India corporal punishment is very much prevalent even though in the year 2000 the supreme court of India has passed an amendment which says that corporal punishment in schools should be banned (Pate and Gould 2012, 84). Some of the Indian schools do not use corporal punishment any longer, but it is still seen that the teachers usually threatens the children with corporal punishment for the sake of a quiet atmosphere in the class room. But at homes the corporal punishment is still prevalent. Some parents brutally punish their children and leaves scars on their body, even in some homes the children abscond as a result of parents punishment.

Coming back to the corporal punishment in schools, as a former teacher in different Bible schools, I used to visit several schools. There is a couple of schools that I personally know where they still use corporal punishment. In fact, there is a widely use of beating harshly with a belt. Those children in the schools are orphans, and before they came to this

school they experienced harm. Dobson (1992) who encourages spanking in children and especially the two-smack approach says that it is unwise to use corporal punishment in these groups of children. Remember this school is a Christian school. The person who runs this school is a pastor and he teaches and preaches the Bible most of the time during the week, and he cannot say that he does not know what the Bible says about spanking a child. Of course the Bible says that “do not withhold discipline from your child”, but does the Bible say that you have to use a belt and leave scar or wounds on the child's body? May be the pastor or the founder of this school takes the Bible verses from the Bible more in a literal way. And once he told me: “I just have to discipline them in this way, or else they wont listen”. This is something that often happens around the Christian world; children are being beaten and spanked because of their parents or caregivers impatience and lack of time. They do not have time to discipline them with non-corporal methods. It is not a secret that a beating takes less time than words of guidance and love. Interestingly this pastor and teacher mentioned in this paragraph treated his own children with exceptional care, exactly the same contradiction St. Augustine involved himself in during his time.

Here, in this case, I would like to draw in one more example of another Christian school in the South. Although I am focusing mostly on corporal punishment within the home and family, this is still a noteworthy example to take with us along the way. Here are two photos in order to present how their practice of corporal punishment could be a challenge:





Before I say something on how this could be a challenge, I will just say a few things about what the teacher there told me. She said that they unfortunately did not have time to use other methods of discipline (like she knew it was wrong to discipline them the way she did). Also she said that this was what the Bible taught, and that even the children knew this. On many occasions while I visited this school, she threatened the children with her wooden stick. Saying that “I’ll go and get my stick”. Even this one photo (to the left) is a threat in itself to the children. Making them aware that they could be spanked. But the children here did not view it in a pleasant way; or in a way that the teacher is actually saving their life by beating them with a long hard wooden stick. Does the Bible really say that the children should be beaten with a long wooden stick, and can that be called a good spanking? The interesting thing, or challenge here is that these two posters were both on the school's main classroom wall. The one to the left (Proverbs 23:13-14) was frequently used by the teacher in justifying there many beatings of their children. The poster to the right was to inform children that there should be no fighting in this school among other things. This raises a challenge and a contradiction concerning spanking, probably best illustrated by Webb (2011):

One classic argument against spanking is that it raises a contradiction about hitting people. The argument goes like this. Parents teach children, by their example, that it is okay for a parent (big person) to hit them and cause physical pain. In the next breath a child is instructed to go and play with friends, and they are told not to hit other kids. Perhaps this contradiction is most intensely felt when the parent hits the child as an act of discipline after the child has (wrongly) hit a brother or sister (p. 128)

This was also something that frequently happened at the school mentioned above. And I even heard one girl say: “I don't like to fight those who are older than me. They will fight me harshly back. But it is ok to beat the younger children. They are young and don't know anything”. We can just imagine where she got this view of younger children from. And we can also wonder if in this case adults were a good example to the children. I would dare to add to the famous poem “Children learn What the Live” written by Dorothy Law Note that “Children live with beatings, they will learn to beat”. This was actually what the young girl in this school said. This leads us to the next sub-chapter and even more of children's views when it comes to corporal punishment.

### *2.3.2 Children's own views on Corporal Punishment in the South*

As a matter of fact, my wife did a qualitative research on how children in an Indian school viewed religion (not the same school as mentioned above) in 2011. In that regard, because I was my wife's research assistant I was allowed to ask the children a few questions also concerning other things we observed. After observing several incidences of corporal punishment everyday throughout the fieldwork period, it became natural to ask the children what they thought about this practice. Of course my wife was relating this practice to their view of religion, but in this thesis, I am going to use it as examples of how children themselves viewed the use of corporal punishment. I have already mentioned in the introduction how I viewed corporal punishment as a kid, but in this school there was different opinions. As a matter of fact, one 11-year old girl stated: “They (adults) have to advise me first and not scold or beat me”. Another girl also 11 years old said: “If somebody beats me for no reason I don't like it, but if someone wants to beat me for correcting me, I like it”. Yet another 11-year old girl said: “If adults beat me, I think why they are born (!). When adults

beat me I scold them after that I think, they are correcting me for my betterment and then I will say sorry to them but I don't like beating at all". One of the oldest girls (13) we met at the school said that she liked to correct herself, and that she disliked adults correcting her. She would rather prefer that adults corrected them lovingly. What we understood from children's views on corporal punishment is that they do not like beatings and spankings. They prefer being corrected in love, but that adults as their elders have the right to spank them the second time if they did not listen the first time. It was a little interesting how the boys we met did not have as many views on corporal punishment at all. They all agreed that they did not liked to be spanked a lot, but it seemed like they thought they deserved it more than the girls.

According to Council of Europe research studies of children's views on corporal punishment were presented in November 2002 when the Council of Europe's forum on Children and families involved children and young people in a seminar on "Corporal punishment in the family". James Anderson & Laura Dent presented some of the findings which clearly indicated that children see corporal punishment in a very different way from adults; for example:

Most adults say that smacking doesn't really hurt, but children have said things like "It feels as if someone banged you with a hammer". Adults also use special words like "smacking" for corporal punishment, but in fact most children see a smack as a hit (2007, 79).

When it comes to children's own views on corporal punishment, is that something that should be taken into consideration when we are trying to find out whether the Bible says we should spank the children or not? According to the Bible, is it Biblical to take children's voices seriously? Should we really listen to them about how they want to be disciplined? If we want to follow the authorities, we should listen to the children. In the United Nations Convention of the Right of the Child (UNCRC), it is clearly stated that "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child" (article 12a). And this is also what God as a father is doing to us; He loves us so much and is indeed eager for us to express ourselves while He is

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listening to us. Taking the metaphor that God as a perfect father disciplines his children and so should we. In the same way, God as a perfect father who listens to his children (when we pray), so should fathers (and mothers) down on this earth listen to his children when they come sincerely and honestly to us and share about their earnest wishes and ideas on how they in the best way are being disciplined so that they (the children) can learn from their mistake(s). For what are the aim of being disciplined? According to the Bible and Proverbs 23:13-14 (among other verses) the aim is to learn from our mistakes and to be saved from hell.

Back to the how the boys viewed corporal punishment. This “gender-issue” when it comes to corporal punishment is also mentioned in different literature. Pate and Gould (2012) especially are demonstrating how boys in many different countries in the South are being physically punished more often and more severely than girls. Even in Christian settings, and especially in the South (as we have seen), boys are more frequently being spanked. We all know that most countries in the South are a lot more paternalistic countries than in the West. Maybe that's one of the reasons boys are being spanked more, because they focus more on the discipline and the education of boys than girls? But what does the Bible say? Should boys be more spanked and disciplined than the girls? This is also an issue that we will turn to in the discussions about what the Bible really is saying on corporal punishment (through the eight points where non-spankers and pro-spankers tend to disagree in chapter four). Some of these stories from the South are meant as examples and to fuel up the need to do further investigation of spanking or not in chapter four and five.

### *2.3.3 The West: Corporal Punishment*

When we talk about corporal punishment in the West, the first thing to note is that Sweden was the first country to ban corporal punishment in all settings (home and school) and this took place in 1979 (Pate and Gould, 2012, 65). This happened after a father beat his child so severely so that she ended up in hospital (Ibid). After Sweden past its law in 1979, 32 country have now followed with a full abolition of corporal punishment both in home and school

([www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org) 2012). Most of the countries on the list are European or Western countries. However, recently, several other countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan to mention a few have been added to the list. The United States of America, a Western country, however, is not to be found on the list. According to a survey done in 2000, corporal punishment is widely approved among the parents in the USA (Reaves 2000). And also, many of the States, especially the Southern states of the USA, or what is called the “Bible belt” in the USA, it is still legal to spank the children in the classrooms. This is in very stark contrast with how it is in another Western and Christian country, take for instance Norway. Adults today still remember how they were used to be beaten at school, but if their children were beaten by their teachers (or parents) today, they may even be put in jail! Yes, even in the homes it is strictly prohibited with all forms of corporal punishment. (Remember the news article from December 2012 which motivated me to write this thesis). However, and according to Montgomery (2009) there is a strong evidence that corporal punishment *has* been an accepted form of socialization in both homes and schools in the West. As we saw under the heading of “Corporal Punishment in the Christian History”, corporal punishment in the Christian history in the West was frequently employed, justified with original sin and literal ways of interpreting the Bible. But now, and especially from the last three decades things have changed, and things are changing.

Lloyd deMause have in his book gone as far as to proclaim that “childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten terrorized, and sexually abused” (2006, 1). So in other words, corporal punishment in the West is for most countries something that belongs to the past and to history. Even if the Bible may say in Proverbs 23:13-14 (in many translations) “that a good spanking wont kill him”, Christian parents in most countries of the West are not free to practice that verse. According to [endcorporalpunishment.org](http://endcorporalpunishment.org), The European Commission of Human Rights rejected and application in 1982 by Swedish Parents who did not agree upon a totally ban of corporal punishment in the home saying that this ban breached their right to

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respect for family life and their freedom of religion. The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights argues that:

Vocal opposition to banning all corporal punishment comes in some countries from minority religious groups, quoting texts which, they believe, give them a right or even a duty to discipline their children with violence. While freedom of religious belief should be respected, such beliefs cannot justify practices which breach the rights of others, including children's rights to respect for their physical integrity and human dignity (Council of Europe, 2008).

Despite of the Scandinavian' and most other European countries totally abolition of corporal punishment in all settings, the USA and the UK continue to allow parents to beat their children in their homes looking more at it as a private affair. But the practice of corporal punishment in the other Western countries seems to be something that belongs to the past. Hence, we see the main difference between the South and most European countries. This study does not aim to compare how different countries or regions in the world are interpreting and applying Bible verses on corporal punishment, but to share their different stories and opinions. It is well-worth to note that the interpretation and application of the Bible verses varies according to the social setting and contexts around the world.

#### *2.3.4 Interpretation of the Bible in different Cultures*

Then the question is can we interpret the scripture according to our time and culture? Or is it right to interpret the scripture in a way so that it will fit with our culture? What is the criteria for interpreting the scripture? No matter how we apply the scripture, be it in the Western part of the world or Southern part, it is not that important but what is most important is, in order to interpret the Bible is to look at the real context or original context. According to Zuck, to interpret God's word properly, one must understand what those customs in the Bible were and what they meant (1991, 80). In that case, when we talk about corporal punishment around the Christian world it is also important to remember that every culture, in, and around the world is shaped by its history, and the culture is also again shaping as to how they view or viewed

the children. This does in fact have an impact on the way they interpreted and the way we interpret the Bible verses on corporal punishment today. Because a genuine and adequate understanding of what really happened through history and how a Bible verse has developed through history can bridge the original context with today's context.

King Solomon who wrote the book of Proverbs might have meant the words in the Bible verses in different ways in his time than how we should understand the same verses today. For example the word discipline or the word rod, he did not mean that you have to beat your children or abuse them, but rather from the original text what we find is that he says we need to guide our children or lead them in the right direction. Today when the translators translated from the original language to the vernacular language there could have been errors in the translation.

If the Bible really tells us to beat the children for the sake of submission and discipline, it would still be hard for a “non-spanker” to interpret a Bible verse in such a way. And on the other hand, if the Bible does not promote spanking, it would still be hard for a person growing up in circumstances where they promote spanking to apply non-corporal discipline methods.

The reason I mention corporal punishment around the world in a thesis that talks about corporal punishment in the Bible, is that the Holy Bible has been the most influential book in the history of mankind til today. Therefore it is only worth noting the corporal punishment in and around the world and in the different cultures and contexts. Even in many Christian countries around the world people do not know that corporal punishment is damaging to a child if it is not applied correctly.

## **2.4 Corporal Punishment Today**

Corporal punishment today, as we also have seen in the paragraph above “corporal punishment around the world”, varies, even within the same cultures. According to Woodhead and Montgomery (2003), it is actually possible to hold several different and contradictory views of children and childhood at the same time, and all these complex ideas

about children and childhood are inherited from past philosophical, artistic and scientific discourses. Or as Jenks states it:

Whether to regard children as pure, bestial, innocent, corrupt, charges with potential, tabula rasa (a blank state), or even as we view our adult selves; whether they think and reason as we do, are immersed in a receding tide of inadequacy, or are possessors of clarity of vision which we have through experience lost; whether their forms of language, games and conventions are alternatives to our own, imitations or crude precursors of our own now outgrown, or simply transitory impenetrable trivia which are amusing to witness and recollect; whether they are constrained and we have achieved freedom, or we have assumed constraint and they are truly free- all these considerations and more, continue to exercise our theorizing about the child in social life (Jenks 1996, 2).

Here Jenks states that all these view of the child continue to exercise our theorizing about the child in social life. So up to today, the different views of the child as either evil, innocent or both derived from our forefathers continue to influence how we look at the child in social life. What is the role of the child in our social life? How should we guide and discipline the child out from our views of the child? And according to the Bible, should we spank the children, or not spank the children in our disciplining of them in our social lives? Even today the discussions and debates on what the Bible really says when it comes to how we should discipline our children, and if we should spank or not, are still going strong within scholarly theology with a huge gap or division between those who think the Bible says that we should spank (the “pro-spankers”) vs. those who think the Bible is clear in saying that it is wrong to spank our children (the “non-spankers”). In what follows, a brief introduction of these two different groups today are presented before we in chapter four take their discussions a step ahead to really see what the Bible is trying to teach us when it comes to the issue of “to spank the child, or not to spank the child”.



### 2.4.1 Pro-Spankers

James Dobson and many other pro-spankers claim that all their teachings and convictions are rooted in the Bible, and that a true biblical obedience means that adults should dare to follow God's instructions on corporal punishment. For them, there is no doubt that the Bible is teaching us to discipline our children using corporal methods, citing the most known and classic verses on spanking using a rod. For instance, these two:

Who ever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. (Proverbs 13:24)

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death. (Proverbs 23:13-14)

A notable spokesperson in the evangelical realm who recommends spanking is James Dobson. According to Dobson, true biblical obedience means daring to follow God's instruction about corporal punishment. Christian pro-spankers claim that the Bible is on their side. Corporal punishment is taught in the Bible, say the pro-spankers. Another theologian, Grudem, argues for corporal punishment in that he says that corporal punishment should be implemented in homes and society. He goes on to argue that if Christian parents do not discipline their children with corporal punishment they undermine the biblical authority (2010, 256-60). Another theologian in the category of pro-spankers is Köstenberger. He argues that spanking may not work well with older children, and as children advance in age: reasoning ought to replace spanking (Köstenberger 2010, 161). In chapter four, I will look more into what the Bible is saying about corporal punishment and age. Wegner (2005) argues that wise parents use the least amount of corporal punishment to discipline their children, operating with eight levels of discipline. However, he believes that corporal punishment should be done as one of the last resorts (level six, seven and eight) if there is no other option. Although he argues that spanking should be the last option of discipline, he is still a pro-spanker in that he implement spanking as a method of discipline at all.

Children need to learn the consequences of wrong behavior, and the pro-spankers therefore think that spanking can be a useful means to convey that lesson. Additionally, pro-

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spankers think that by implementing corporal punishment we obey the principles of the Bible. Some of them also argue that there is no other way to let a child know of his mistakes other than through spanking. Dobson (1992) argues that spanking is an effective way for some children but not for all the children. It depends on the child's personality. There are children who do not need spanking because they very well respond to loving instructions from the parents, but there are children who need spanking. In fact the pro-spankers do not get agree or promote that one needs to abuse a child through spanking or leave mark or scars on a child's body. But rather they say that it is biblically correct to spank a child if the person who is spanking is not angry. Pro-spankers also believe that if a person is angry they should not spank the child at all. What the Bible is saying when it comes to spanking in anger or not will also be touched upon in chapter four.

#### *2.4.2 Non-Spankers*

The non-spankers on the other hand believe that the Bible does *not* teach us to discipline our children using corporal methods, spanking included. When it comes to the question to spank or not to spank the children, and what the Bible really teaches us regarding this issue – there seems to be more pro-spankers around the world than non-spankers. At least of those who have expressed their view on this topic in an academic and researched manner. There are different people who have their own web sites or blogs, like Vasquez (2007) who claims that there are no examples of children being spanked in the Bible and therefore it is not right for us to spank our children. Like a few other, she has done a study on what the “rod”, or the “shebet” really implies going back to its Hebrew roots. I will also have a closer look at the rod in chapter four, but for now my intention is to briefly introduce the most influential work when it comes to the group of non-spankers. Besides the small-scale studies done by different non-denominational individuals, the most noteworthy and about one and only large-scale study is done by the evangelical Christian William Webb. He used to be a spanker so he writes that it was a surprise for him to discover that the Bible does not teach us to spank our children: “...much to our surprise we discovered that the spanking-type discipline we were

practicing had very little correlation to what the Bible actually taught about corporal punishment” (Webb, 2011, 21).

Non-spankers including Webb, firmly believe that spanking a child is not acceptable at all, and that the Bible does not say that we should spank children. According to the non-spankers, the pro-spankers think that spanking is an effective method to discipline a child and they base their argument on the Bible verses found in the book of Proverbs. However, and according to non-spankers, a child can be disciplined and raised effectively through non-spanking methods of discipline. We do not need to spank a child to discipline a child, rather there are many other ways to discipline a child. In fact, by spanking a child the child loses respect for the person who is spanking some of the non-spankers argue. Alice Miller goes so far to suggest that Hitler and his followers were a byproduct of corporal punishment as children, and she is even mentioning that 90 percent of Americans in jail were physically abused as children! (Miller, 2000). And other Bible scholars like Gillogly (1981) and Oosterhuis (1993) whom agree with non-spanking argues that Jesus' way of lovingly acceptance of children has set forward a new paradigm of viewing children.

These are just some of the things the non-spankers argue against spanking children in addition to their view that the Bible does not ask parents to spank at all. Chapter four will continue to focus on these two opposite views of pro-spanking and non-spanking with especially focus on what the Bible says about the issue.

In this chapter we have now “contextualized” or given an extensive background for the topic “To spank the child, or not to spank the child”, starting from history and then onwards in different cultures around the world. We have indeed seen how Bible verses on corporal punishment are interpreted and applied through the history of the Church and then toward the contemporary debates between the pro-spankers and non-spankers. By placing the topic within history and within the Christian church we get a full understanding of how the topic of corporal punishment in the Bible has been developed and understood throughout the ages and the different cultures; ending up with the contemporary debates concerning this issue today.

The contemporary debates (especially between Webb, Köstenberger and also Dobson) will be dealt with straightforward and detailed in chapter four, but first of all my theoretical framework will be presented. It is crucial with a theoretical framework which describes the method(s) used and which also contains different approaches on how to deal with the debate between the non-spankers and the pro-spankers in the most reliable and fruitful way.



## Chapter Three

### THEORIES & RESEARCH APPROACHES

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Since my study is involving an investigation of the centuries old debate and the ongoing debate on what the Bible really says about corporal punishment, a thorough review of existing and relevant literature will play a crucial role in answering my research questions introduced in chapter one. Thus, my thesis is based on non-empirical research methods through an extensive use of different literature; the Bible, text-books, journals, conference papers, dissertations and different articles from the internet. While reading and studying all these literature, it has been- and it is my intention- to see the Bible with the most suitable and honest “glasses” as possible. According to Spykman (1992), we all wear “glasses” of one kind or another in searching and interpreting the Scriptures. In the following I will, as briefly as I can, present and describe the theological approaches and the “glasses” or hermeneutics I have chosen as the theoretical framework to base my study on.

#### **3.2 Theological Approaches to Corporal Punishment**

Lonergan (1971) argues that Christian theologians disagree on both the interpretation of biblical texts and the areas relevant to theological research, but that every theologian should therefore find one or more areas relevant to their theological research. In this research where I aim to find out whether the Bible say we should spank the children or not, I have decided to approach this topic within the Bible from a biblical theological viewpoint, a practical theological viewpoint and a child theological viewpoint. To me, these are the three most relevant approaches when it comes to the question of spanking. “Corporal punishment in the Bible” is for sure interpreted differently by various theologians and Bible scholars, and because of that, I see the importance of presenting briefly the most relevant approaches and hermeneutics and then connect my writings on the topic up to my chosen theoretical

framework. By doing this, I do not aim to take any sides whether it being sympathizing with the non-spankers or sympathizing with the pro-spankers, but to remain neutral during the discussions and only using my approaches and theoretical framework in a way that objectively captures the Bible's subjectivity and what the Bible really has to tell us on this topic. This is also in accordance with Spykman who states that:

The most crucial question is whether the glasses we wear in Biblical interpretation have been borrowed from Scripture itself, whether they are true to Scripture, whether they have been ground and polished by constant interaction with Scripture itself, whether they can therefore stand the test of Scripture (1992, 121).

In the following, as mentioned above, my approaches to study corporal punishment in the Bible will briefly be presented.

### *3.2.1 Biblical Theology*

When studying the Bible and finding out what the Bible really says when it comes to a certain topic, it is obvious to draw upon a biblical theological point of view. Especially when it comes to studying corporal punishment in the Bible and using Lawrence (2010) broad definition of biblical theology: “Biblical theology is not only concerned with what the Bible teaches but how that teaching is progressively revealed and progressively develops over the course of history” (ch. 4). From a biblical theological perspective we can learn how the doctrine of corporal punishment was developed. This approach help us or enable us to find out what the author is trying to emphasize in a particular scripture verse. In this context for instance, it is very important to find out what Solomon, the writer of Proverbs is really trying to emphasize through the verses related to corporal punishment and how these verses have been revealed, developed and applied through history. We have already seen in the chapter above how some of these verses have been revealed, developed and applied throughout the history of the Christian church. In chapter four we are going to look more detailed into what Solomon is trying to tell through the verses on corporal punishment and especially when it comes to the use of the rod.

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Biblical theology is an interesting discipline in that it obviously captures aspects of systematic, historical and dogmatic theology. Thus, biblical theology has given me, and will give me a further advantage in shedding light on a very much welcomed interdisciplinarity where boundary lines between these various discipline frequently overlap, and parts of one study within Biblical theology is blending into the next. Everything starts with the Bible, or a biblical theology. The Church Fathers and the theologians mentioned in chapter two were all biblical theologians and studied the Bible systematically on various topics including the topic of discipline and punishment. This part of the history of the church (as we saw in the chapter above) had and have implications for the practice of corporal punishment around the world. Here is where a practical theology comes into the picture.

### *3.2.2 Practical Theology*

The next theology to draw upon in this study when approaching corporal punishment in the Bible is practical theology. According to Mercer practical theology is “concerned with truth, in so far as it seeks to offer a valid and adequate account of the praxis of Christian faith in a particular context in which human beings strives to live lives in relation to God's reign” (2005, 11). In this context of finding out what the Bible says on corporal punishment and spanking, practical theology will help us to shed light on this valid and adequate account of the praxis of both pro-spankers and non-spankers effort to live in relation to God's reign; or lets say within the will of God when it comes to this challenging topic. When we use practical theology to approach corporal punishment in the Bible, and finding out whether we should spank or not, it gives us therefore a unique perspective in looking at corporal punishment in a non-judgmental way. Of course practical theology will compel us to ask the question “to spank, or not to spank?”, and to find out how God wants us to apply the verses on corporal punishment into our lives. What practice then better expresses our obedience to God and our faith in God? The practice of spanking our children, or the practice of non-corporal discipline methods? Or both? This thesis does not aim to find out whether it is pro-spankers or non-spankers who are more obedient to God and have more faith in God. I do believe that both groups are driven by a strong faith and love for God when it comes to how they are practicing



and applying the Bible in their daily lives. According to Poling (2011) practical theology is the attempt of believers to practice their faith according to their understanding of the Bible and its interpretation. So I am only raising the above heart-felt questions in order to make us think and in order to make us see that Christians have different understandings and interpretation of the Bible based on their immeasurable faith in God. We could say that faith is measured in obedience, but both pro-spankers' and non-spankers' practice and application of the Bible is both driven by their motivation to be obedient to God in everything and to take His word and commands seriously. This is indeed an important aspect while-worth to note us while digging deeper into the question “to spank or not to spank?” with a humble, neutral and non-judgmental thinking on how other Christians have practiced and is practicing the Bible verses on corporal punishment.

### *3.2.3 Child Theology*

The last theology I am drawing upon when approaching corporal punishment in the Bible is Child theology. Writing my thesis on whether we should spank children or not, I suggest that it is essential to include a theology that involves children and focusing on the child. According to the CTM (Child Theology Movement), child theology can give us clues to the essential truths that we are missing. Did Jesus spank the children in the Bible? Can we use the metaphor of God disciplining his children in our application and justification on corporal punishment of children today?

In the Bible we see that when Jesus and his disciples had a theological argument or lets say debate, Jesus put the child in the center to show the greatness in the kingdom of God. That shows how children were important to Jesus. In Matthew 19:14 we can read Jesus' words: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”. If children were so important to Jesus how would he discipline them? Would he spank them or beat them? Or would he only spank them after a certain age when they are more mature? Of course, here in Matthew 19:14 he clearly says “little” children. So what age group does Jesus mean? These are all questions raised to see where and why child theology becomes crucial in my theoretical approach. Child theology is

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more of a practical theology because we deal with children everyday, and therefore as theologians interested in children's well-being we should be asking the question of how we can discipline the children in the most biblical *and* loving way on a day-to-day basis. This prompts us to think seriously on whether it is more biblical and right to practice corporal punishment or non-corporal discipline methods in the lives of the children; both little children and bigger children. Again, what would Jesus do? Would Jesus beat the children at all?

So far, we understand that child theology is a practical theology. But does it have elements from other theologies? Some child theologians like Mercer for in stance would argue that it does not have much to do with systematic theology in that children often 'get lost' in the system of systematic theologies and that it is “a small area of concern within the entire and vast universe of theological thought” (2005, 6). And according to DeVries “until very recently, the field of systematic theology in the twentieth century has been largely silent on the question of children” (2001, 162). There is no clear answer for why this is so, but we may assume that many theologians fear to loose the focus on God when they start focusing on the child within theology. Here is where The Child Theology Movement has come into existence through their understanding of a theology that put the child in the midst (placed by Jesus) and that is *always* directed to God in Christ (see [childtheology.org](http://childtheology.org)). Thus, the representatives of CTM focuses on God by practicing what Christ did in Matthew 19:14. This is interesting because by doing so, I would suggest that they have found a legitimate place for children within biblical theology included systematic theology and this is exactly what we need when we are studying what the Bible says when it comes to whether the children should be spanked or not.

According to, Richards & Privett a child is an immature form of human being a “not-yet-adult” or an “adult-to-be” (2009, 5). The point I am driving home here is children need love, understanding and guidance on their way to become matured persons. If this guidance should or should not involve spanking I am trying to find out through this study. The interesting paradox is that in studies that focuses on children and childhood, for instance childhood studies and the new social studies of childhood, children are now regarded as social actors on the same line as adults and acknowledged as social beings rather than adult-

becomings (Qvortrup, 1994). This is interesting because the new movement within childhood studies wants us to look at children on line with adults, but at the same time the scholars on children and childhood require us to treat children differently than adults for instance through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Again, what would Jesus want us to do? How would he want us to guide our children whether we look at them as social beings, adult-becomings or both? Here a child theology will help us. Not by putting the child in the middle of everything and make it “unbiblical”. But to use child theology in a positive sense and as a theological clue to open doors and new thinking to challenging Bible verses. As Collier states it: “The child set in the midst by Jesus tells us something of great importance: it is a clue to the kingdom of God” and the kingdom of God is important because “it is God's *kingdom* – God over all and for all” (2009, 22).

#### *3.2.4 A combined Approach*

Combining biblical theology, practical theology and child theology is useful in the sense that a combination between biblical theology and practical theology may culminate in child theology when it comes to the topic of corporal punishment. The combination between these different theologies would help us to see the development of the doctrines on corporal punishment and how these bible verses have been applied and is being applied. This is probably nothing new when it comes to studying what the Bible really says about corporal punishment, but when combining biblical theology and practical theology with child theology it would open doors to new thinking and application of challenging bible verses – as indicated above. A child theology, as we have just seen, helps us to see, guide and discipline the child according to what Jesus would have done which would force us to take new considerations of *and* re-read the Bible verses on corporal punishment with the eyes of Jesus who set the child in the midst.

### 3.3 Different Hermeneutics of the Bible

Hermeneutics, or the art of interpretation has always been a challenge in the exegesis of stimulatingly difficult Bible passages. For how should we in the best way draw out the correct meaning from such passages of the Bible? Above in the previous three sections we have seen how we can make use of different theologies to approach God's word. But in that approaching of His word, we also need to have done some reflections on how we in the best way(s) can interpret specific Bible verses. What “glasses” should we wear? By the rise of the nineteenth century and the rise of critical biblical scholars of that time such as Schleiermacher, the hermeneutical problems was focused on both the literary context and the wider situation where the text(s) were written. According to Ferguson (1986) understanding the scripture required the study of:

- (1) the structure and idioms of biblical language, (2) the type of literature presented, i. e., prose or poetry, history or allegory, literal or symbolic, or perhaps a particular genre found in the Bible, such as apocalyptic, (3) the historical background, (4) the geographical conditions, and (5) the life setting (p. 4).

However, and according to Braaten & Jenson (2011) Schleiermacher, as the father of modern hermeneutical theory, he realized that “more is involved in biblical interpretation than the application of a set of principles” (ch. 1). That is to say that the gap between what a text meant in its own context and what it means now in a new context and in a new period of time must be bridged somehow (ibid). In other words, for in stance, we have to find out what Proverbs 23:13-14 meant in its own context (Solomon's time) and what it means now in a new context. These questions of contextualization will be given the most correct answers through a hermeneutic that has the potential to connect the two completely different contexts.

Using Schleiermacher's tradition of hermeneutics as a starting point for my topic “Corporal Punishment in the Bible”, make us think and reflect upon what kind of hermeneutics will give us the most accurate understanding and application of the Bible passages on corporal punishment. And, are there different hermeneutics when it comes to interpreting the Bible passages on corporal punishment? If so, which is the most accurate

hermeneutics we can use in the case of interpreting the passages on corporal punishment? Obviously we should choose a hermeneutic(s) that would bring the most accurate interpretation of the passages *and* a hermeneutic that is also relevant in today's context. When it comes to the topic of corporal punishment in the Bible, I would suggest that there are two main and broad ways of interpretation. In the following we shall see the two different hermeneutics; literal and allegorical interpretations that can be used and have been used in interpreting the Bible passages on corporal punishment.

### *3.3.1 Literal & Allegorical Interpretation*

The first hermeneutics we shall see is the literal hermeneutics, which means taking a Bible verse and interpreting it literally or in the literal sense. Some of the writers on corporal punishment who falls in this category of hermeneutics are namely, James Dobson, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Paul Wegner. They all interpreted the corporal punishment passages from a literal hermeneutics viewpoint using theological analogy to support their interpretation. In this case, when it comes to corporal punishment, the theological analogy is involving around the argument that God who is a perfect father disciplines his children, and therefore, so should we. Many people, including the scholars and theologians Köstenberger and Wegner (as mentioned above) base their pro-spanking views on this analogy, using especially Proverbs 3:11-12 and Hebrews 12:5-11 as an ethical ground. (See Köstenberger, 2010). Pro-spankers therefore understand the text just as it is stated – in a very direct sense without the use of symbols or metaphors, as opposed to an 'allegorical' way of interpretation. According to Barr:

“Literal” in this sense can be opposed to 'allegorical'. Allegorical is also referential in its scope; the differences is that the referent is other than that suggested by the direct sense of the language, being in fact known by an indirect process working from hints and hidden signals in the language (1976, 171).

From this we understand that an allegorical interpretation of the Bible differs from a literal interpretation of the Bible in that for instance Dobson, Köstenberger and Wegner would see

the “rod” in Proverbs 23:13-14 in a literal sense: the use of a physical rod to discipline a child through spanking, whereas non-spankers would see the rod in the same passages in an allegorical sense: the rod is a metaphor we should use to guide our children in a non-corporal method of discipline in the same way as the Lord as our shepherd is guiding us – his sheep-towards the right directions in life. However, some non-spankers think that we cannot always use an allegorical interpretation. William Webb, the most notable non-spanker in our time believe that Proverbs 23:13-14 do talk about a real rod which was used for beating, but that through a redemptive-movement hermeneutic these beatings-with-rod texts have to be understood in collaboration with a reapplied redemptive spirit. That means that even if the Bible talks about beating the children with a rod, this does not apply to us today because, as Webb (2011) states it when he presents his redemptive-movement hermeneutic: “it is a trajectory or logical extension of the Bible's redemptive spirit or redemptive trend that carries Christians towards an ultimate ethical application of Scripture” (p. 58). According to Virkler (2007) the redemptive-movement hermeneutic recognizes:

That the biblical commands express a redemptive attitude towards slaves when compared to the original cultural setting, and it also perceives within canonical progression additional development in the direction of redemption. As a result, Webb believes such 'movement was sufficient enough to signal a clear direction in terms of the possibility of further improvements for later generations' (p. 201).

Webb himself states in his book “Corporal Punishment in the Bible-. A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic for Troubling Texts” that “in broad terms Christians often tend toward one of two ways of approaching Scripture. And that is either; 1) the above-mentioned redemptive-movement appropriation of Scripture or 2), a more unmoving or a fixed appropriation of scripture and thus understands the words of the Bible verses separately from their cultural, historical and canonical contexts. It would seem like the first way is more of an allegorical way of approaching the Bible, whereas the second way to approach the Bible is a more literal way. However, within these two broad ways it may still be disagreements, like for instance, Webb as a non-spanker believes that the Proverbs 23:13-14 do talk about a real rod to beat the child with whereas other non-spankers may say that this is an allegory and

should be seen as a rod of guidance. Still, I am to take note of these broad and different ways of interpreting when it comes to what the Bible really says on corporal punishment *together* with the consideration of the other principles of interpreting passages in the Bible: biblical idioms in the language, historical background, geographical conditions and the life setting (see above – Schleiermacher). Additionally, it would also be more than wise of us to think in terms of how Jesus would have interpreted these verses, and more specially – how he did interpret and read the Old Testament. Greidanus argues that there is a hermeneutic circle that we need to keep in mind, namely this; “we can only understand Christ in the light of the Old testament, and we can only understand the Old Testament in the light of Christ” (1999, 201). This implies, when we are trying to make sense of passages from the Old Testament, we need to put on Jesus' lenses. How would He see and understand the passages on corporal punishment in the Old testament? How would He have explained those verses to us? We know from Matthew 7:28 and Luke 20:39 that Jesus interpreted and taught the Old testament with such an authority that impressed both his followers and his opponents (see also *ibid*, 201). However, Jesus did not mention anything about corporal punishment, but Paul said in Colossians 3:21: “Parents, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged”. And where did Paul get this from? Of course, Paul got this teaching from Jesus. And from this we understand that Jesus did not say anything about spanking or beating, but that we should not embitter our children or make them resentful. If Jesus' readings and interpretation of the corporal punishment verses in the Old Testament would conclude with the importance of spanking children, would he not mention exhortations about spanking children in his teachings? This question is of great significance in understanding the importance of acquiring a “correct” method of interpreting challenging Bible verses. We have seen through this section (3.3) that there are two broad ways of interpreting the Bible (literal or allegorical) which both should be considered together with Schleiermacher's five principles for interpreting the Bible (see above). But here, towards the end of section 3.3 I have also showed the necessity and importance for Christians to read the Bible focusing on Christ – independently on the method of interpretation that we have chosen; or as Williams says it: “Reading the Bible through the Jesus lens is reading it the way it was intended. It keeps our

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reading, understanding, teaching, and preaching properly focused on God's grand redemptive program that centers on his own son" (2012, 9). Thus, let us interpret the Bible both literal, allegorical and keeping in mind the five principles – but most importantly – doing so with the eyes of Jesus and let God's redemptive program be in focus through our readings and interpretations of the Holy Scriptures.

### **3.4 Corporal Punishment in the Bible as a Scope of Research**

An innumerable articles, books, conventions, researches have been done and written on corporal punishment. The main theme(s) are usually whether corporal punishment is an effective method of discipline, or whether it is right to spank the child at all. For instance, an American psychologist Elizabeth Thompson Gershoff has done a large-scale meta-analysis of 88 different studies on corporal punishment, collected from a span of 62 years, and she has been looking at both positive and negative behaviors in children that were associated with corporal punishment (American Psychological Association, 2002).

These days, we can actually read about the pros and cons of corporal punishment pages up and pages down. However, these days there are more written about the cons; how corporal punishment is harmful for children and that it should be totally eliminated. But for Christians and Christian theologians and scholars it is still most apt to see what the Bible really says about corporal punishment as a method of disciplining children. Several studies have also been done on corporal punishment *in the Bible*. The interest in studying corporal punishment in the Bible have probably come through the Bible passages that talk about child discipline. As we have seen in chapter two, it began with Augustine who was a Church Father in the early century. Since all human beings were the descendants of Adam and Eve and born with original sin it was only rational for Augustine to think in terms of the endorsement of corporal punishment. In those days, children were considered to be mere immature tools so Augustine thought corporal punishment is the only way to discipline a child. Nevertheless, he did not favor punishing children as severely as adults (Stortz, 2001). And as time went by the concept of corporal punishment in the Bible began to trigger the thoughts of people. For



example Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox to mention a few, they all endorsed corporal punishment in the Bible one way or the other.

Maybe the endorsement of corporal punishment by important figures in the history of Christianity have left most of the parents hanging in the air when it comes to corporal punishment. Some parents even went to the extent of physically abusing their children in the name of corporal punishment in the Bible. As a result, Sweden was the first country in the world to ban corporal punishment in 1979. Thereafter, different studies have been done on corporal punishment in the Bible from a different angle or viewpoint. For example William Webb has come up with a new and more challenging method when it comes to corporal punishment in the Bible (see Webb, 2011). Even though all these different studies have been done on the subject of corporal punishment in the Bible, still there seems to be conflicts unresolved when it comes to this topic. However, in my research I am not going to argue for corporal punishment in the Bible nor for non-corporal punishment in the Bible. Rather I would like to make an effort in finding out what exactly the Bible says about corporal punishment and if that means we can spank the children or not spank the children. Irrespective of the answer, I would like to walk gently through this sensitive topic not withstanding what has already been done on this topic.

### **3.5 The Concept of Corporal Punishment**

The phrase corporal punishment is mentioned several times in this project. Usually, corporal punishment is being divided into three types; corporal punishment in the homes (domestic; within the family), corporal punishment in schools and corporal punishment as a part of criminal sentence. In this study, corporal punishment in the Bible is most of the time being discussed in light of the corporal punishment which takes place in the home.

In the coming sections we will take a further and concise look at what the concept of corporal punishment imply, and how it is applied in this research. Corporal punishment in the Bible is the main focus here, even though the question “to spank or not to spank?” is also a part of my study. In this connection I will just briefly mention that the words “spanking” and “beating” is used interchangeably throughout this study, while also being totally aware of

their differences, especially in the past. “Beating” has more often been related to abuse, whereas “spanking” is not. However, both of the words are for sure “corporal punishment-words” and it is hard to draw the line between those two as a spank could also feel like a beating according to a child.

### *3.5.1 Defining Corporal Punishment*

According to the United Nation Committee on the Rights of the Child, corporal punishment is “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light”. This definition of corporal punishment is also in line with Straus' definition that corporal punishment is “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior” (1995, 60). This definition is a useful definition of corporal punishment for this study in that it captures the most important aspects on how and why parents or other adults use corporal punishment on children as a valid method of discipline. In the next section, a brief explanation of corporal punishment vs. discipline is presented.

### *3.5.2 Corporal Punishment vs. Discipline*

In a study on corporal punishment in the Bible it is also very important to look at the term discipline. If corporal punishment is inflicting pain on a child physically for the sake of correction, what is discipline? Does discipline involve any sort of physical pain or is it just ways to train a child? I have come to note that the word discipline is more frequently used in the setting of schools, and how to discipline the children in a classroom. Merriam-Webster (2013) define the verb discipline in the sense of training (someone) to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience. Here we see that punishment is used to correct misbehavior and disobedience. But it does not say anything about physical, or corporal punishment. Still, corporal punishment is often seen (an effective) means or method of disciplining children. The correlation between corporal punishment and discipline should therefore not be confused. According to Green, Lapsley, Miles & Verhey, “the writer for Hebrews captures the yield of discipline as “peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews

12:11)”, and that “discipline should not be confused with mere punishment” (2011, 235). However, I suggest that we should be careful not to polarize the two because we often see them mixed and used intertwined. Let us take an example. If a child has done something wrong, a pro-spanking parent would spank the child not only for punitive purposes but also for disciplinary purposes (to drive away foolishness and learning wisdom). This is also according to the Bible, and how Torah violators would not only be beaten with the rod not for punitive purposes only, but also to learn a lesson. But this is challenging according to a Western construct which propagates punishment as something that is related to corporal methods and is the opposite of disciplinary methods.

This touching issue whether discipline has anything to do with corporal punishment at all and vice versa will also be slightly touched upon through the discussions following this chapter.

Chapter three has now given us a thorough overview of different approaches and hermeneutics to study this topic of corporal punishment in the most credible way. We have also attained insight knowledge on corporal punishment in the Bible as a scope of research and the concept of corporal punishment. Through reading this chapter we already see some of the implications concerning what the Bible really says when it comes to spanking or not. Still, in the next chapter, a more concise and systematic presentation on the debate between the two contemporary groups of non-spankers and pro-spankers with focus on the main points of disagreement and the challenges is relevant. Keeping the theoretical framework in mind, it is easier to clearly sift out the theological challenges (in chapter four) before concluding (in chapter five) the final implications and findings still keeping my theoretical framework in mind – as presented here in chapter three.

## Chapter Four

### TO SPANK OR NOT TO SPANK: THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

#### 4.1 Introduction

In chapter two we read that there indeed are disagreements on how we should read and apply the verses of corporal punishment in the Bible. Through history starting from the time of St. Augustine and Pelagius there has been a remarkable and divisive tendency when it comes to understanding what the Bible is teaching us; to spank the child or not to spank the child? This divisive tendency is still existing into the contemporary debates. This prompts us to understand that there are challenges on how we should deal with these verses in the most biblical way. Maybe both views, the pro-spanking view and the non-spanking view are biblical, it just depends on how we look at it? And could we be both spankers, and non-spankers at the same time only depending on situation and on the personality of the child?

But why then do these two different groupings still keep the debate going, and why are there still so many discussions and unsettled questions on the question of spanking or not spanking? Will the Christian world ever come to an agreement? In the following I am going to look a little more systematically on the debate of corporal punishment within the Christian theological world, focusing mostly on the West and using Webb (2011) seven main points on where non-spankers tend to disagree with pro-spankers. In addition I have added an eighth point. Namely, the issue of gender. It is not my intention to use Webb's points so that the non-spankers can have an advantage in bringing their message through, but I aim to use them in a non-judgmental way. Looking at Webb's seven points and my point when it comes to gender with neutral glasses I aim to see what 1) the pro-spankers say about the different points, 2) the non-spankers, and 3) what the Bible say. Additionally we will see if these eight points and the “pro-spanker – non-spanker – debate” may have any direct link to the past and the ways in which St. Augustine and Pelagius developed their stands.

Furthermore, through these eight points, section 4.3 “William Webb vs. Andreas Köstenberger” and 4.4 “Other challenges”, several theological challenges will become

obvious. In section 4.5 we find the headline “Are there any agreements at all?”, before we in chapter five summarize and deal with the major findings of this study.

## **4.2 The Eight Main Theological Challenges on the topic: -Spanking or not-**

The non-spanker Webb (2011) claim that the pro-spankers go beyond the specific teaching about corporal punishment in the Bible in seven different ways being the question of (1) age limitation, (2) the number of strokes or spanks, (3) where on the body a person should be beaten, (4) the resultant bruises and marks, (5) what instruments to use, (6) the frequency of the beatings or spankings, and (7) the emotive disposition of the parent (see p. 28). In addition, I have added one point to Webb's seven points and that is the (8), the issue of gender. In the following I do not intend to repeat what Webb has said about his seven points, but to take a deeper look at Webb's discovery of the seven points where non-spankers and pro-spankers tend to disagree. I also aim to find out more about the pro-spankers views and arguments on the different questions (age, numbers, location, bruises or not, frequency, the parental disposition and gender) in addition to finding out more of the Bible's teachings.

### *4.2.1 Age Limitations*

In the debate on whether spanking the child is biblical or not, the appropriate *age* of the child is a frequent question with several different answers. Many pro-spankers included Köstenberger (2010) argue that spanking ought to be age-appropriate and that spanking may not go well together with all kinds of ages. When the child is younger, spanking is preferred – and when the child is older, it becomes more crucial to reason with the child. Like how Jesus' parents did with him when he was in the temple at the age of 12 (Luke 2, 51-52). But according to pro-spankers, the ages when we ought to start and stop spanking varies – it also depends on the individual child's personality and his or her needs of being disciplined in order to understand the lessons in life and get rid of foolishness. However, Dobson (1992) firmly states that “there is no excuse for spanking babies or children younger than fifteen to eighteen months of age”, and as a general guideline he would suggest that “most corporal punishment be finished prior to the first grade (six years old)” (p. 65). We may wonder where

he got this view from, and we may also want to find out both Augustine and Pelagius views on the most appropriate age for beatings. It is hard to trace back what both of them thought concerning something so specific as age in the corporal punishment debate. We do know that Pelagius did not say much about corporal punishment at all, except for the fact that he argued that children were born innocent. And St. Augustine believed that the child was a sinner even in his/hers mother's womb! But could we then conclude that an unborn baby may deserve spanking according to St. Augustine's view? Probably not, but we can draw the conclusion that a child according to St. Augustine's view should be spanked as early as needed and as early as possible. Hence, we see the connection between the past and the arguments today when it comes to pro-spankers and age. However, it is also apparent from St. Augustine's view that the baby's crying was punishment enough for the baby: “.the baby cries, the school child is beaten” (Clark 1993, 58). But how old the schoolchild is, or ought to be, we do not know anything about.

Quite contradictory to contemporary pro-spanking (and most likely also St. Augustine), Jewish scholars believe that spankings should be used only for boys and only for those boys who are 12 years and older *and* only as the very last option (Martin, 2006). But non-spankers obviously disagree with all this, as they do not advocate spanking at all even regardless of children's age.

Webb (2011) states that age limitations are rather inappropriate; why should we stop beating children at any age if the beatings get rid of foolishness for both children and adults? Additionally, he mentions about Deuteronomy 21:18-21 where a severely rebellious teenager is being stoned to death. This is from the Bible, but we are not practicing it today. So in addition to the age-issue here, Webb makes us to ponder upon why we should follow the Proverbs on corporal punishment and not Deuteronomy? And also, why does the pro-spankers advice us to stop physically disciplining the children around the age of six, when the Bible show forth examples of corporal punishment after the age of six and into the teenaged years? Here is where the question and understanding of a biblical contextualization is needed. Why for in stance was it accepted to stone a teenager to death in the time of the Mosaic law

and today it is not even accepted to spank a teenager? The issues on contextualization will be mentioned in chapter five.

It is in fact very interesting how Webb has discovered an authentic argument against the pro-spankers and that the Bible does not say anything about at what age the spanking or corporal punishment of children should stop. In this research as I try to find out what the Bible say about spanking, Webb's point of age limitation becomes very crucial because it is my genuine desire also to find out what the Bible exactly says. In Proverbs 23:13-14 where disciplining with the rod is mentioned, the Bible says that we should not “withhold discipline from a child” (verse 13). From this verse we understand that we should discipline our child, but it does not say anything about the age limitation and when we should stop or start spanking. For what is a child? Rene (2005) states that word for child in Hebrew is *na'ar* and is referring to a young man in between the age 12 and 19 who is studying the Old Testament law and who is ready to marry. But many Christians around the world who does not know Hebrew language and might read the Bible “as-it-is” should they then rely on a secular and global document like the UNCRC which states that a child is any person between 0-18 years old? When the Bible does not mention anything about age limitations when it comes to spanking a child (the English word for child), should we just guess the appropriate ages (when it comes to spanking) out from a scholarly and a paediatrician’s view(s)? These questions make us understand that there are no concrete and straight forward prescription and concrete age limitations mentioned in the Bible and that we therefore ought to be careful in our attempt in setting the age limits from our human understanding.

#### *4.2.2 Number of Spankings*

The second point of disagreement is the numbers of spankings. Most pro-spanking Christians put a maximum allowance of two spanks, and these two spanks should be located on the buttocks. But what does the non-spankers say? Of course, that this is not correct according to the Bible, referring to Deuteronomy 25:3 where the maximum limits of spanking is set to forty strokes for Torah violators. Of course, this is what the Bible is saying for the maximum numbers of spanking, not mentioning anything about a maximum two-allowance spanking

and not mentioning in fact anything about how many spankings should be maximum for a child. In the Bible we therefore do not find anything that says that we have to confine our spanking to two and that it should be confined to the child's buttocks. Again we have to go back to Jesus' teaching. Did he say that we have to give a child two spankings and that it should be on the bottom? The answer is explicitly no! So Webb's point becomes relevant here. Not having to agree with Webb, but from a biblical point of view there are no place the Bible mentions that we have to spank the child twice.

In the history, it seems like the focus is not on the numbers of spankings, but what was more important, was that a child that deserved to be punished was punished with corporal methods independent of any numbers of spankings. But, according to Tucker (1998), St. Augustine argued that every sinner deserves many blows. We understand that this would also apply to children as they were seen as sinful even before the birth. Even if a pro-spanker today would argue that a naughty child deserves many spankings, they have moved away from the maximum of forty strokes as mentioned in the Bible.

#### *4.2.3 Bodily Locations of the Spankings*

The third point Webb comes up with is the bodily location of the spanking. According to Dobson, "it (spanking) should be confined to the buttocks area, where permanent damage is very unlikely" (Dobson, p. 63). But according to the Bible, the spankings of a Tora-violater should be done on the back or on the sides of the body and not on the buttocks: "And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault by a certain number" (Deuteronomy 25:2, KJV). And additionally Webb (2011) is stating Sirach 30:12 in which says that a child should be beaten on the sides. Webb argues that the move from the back or sides in the Bible and to the buttocks is not a minor move and that it represent a very much improved practice of discipline beyond what is found in the Bible. Here also Jesus teaching on children becomes relevant. Jesus never said or practiced during his teaching ministry on the earth that we have to beat children neither on the bottom or sides.



#### *4.2.4 Bodily Marks and Bodily “Outcome” of the Spankings*

The next point Webb comes up with is the bodily marks and bodily “outcome” of the spankings. When we think about the resultant bruises and the corporal “outcome” of spanking children, most people will immediately get shivers down their spines and think in terms of abuse. Bruises and bodily marks after corporal punishment is very often used as a well-documented case of abuse. This is also why most pro-spankers also consider any marks or/and bruises derived from corporal punishment as unacceptable: “it (spanking) should never be done in such a way as to bruise the child” (Focus on the Family, 2013). This view could probably have been derived from St. Augustine who remembered his own boyhood beatings like this: “adult people, including even my parents, who wished no evil to come upon me, used to laugh at my stripes, which were at that time a great and painful evil to me” (397-398, 11). We do not know whether it was the laughing or the stripes which were painful to him, or maybe both. For why should they laugh when bruises that comes from beatings (as we will see under) are seen as a virtue? St. Augustine wanted to treat children more gently than he himself had be treated and this would probably include the “outcomes” of the spankings, and hence, we see the connection between the past and pro-spankers today.

But according to Webb (2011), the concept of “leaving no marks” is foreign to the Bible; stating that “the bruises that come from beatings are seen as a virtue” (p. 38). If we go to the Bible we find that the Bible say in Proverbs 20:30 that “blows and wounds (bruises) scrub away evil, and beatings purge the innermost being”. So here what the Bible actually is saying is that wounds or bruises from beatings is something that is actually good cause it “purge the innermost being”. The challenge here is therefore that the Bible see bruises from discipline as a virtue, but in the world today it is being viewed as abuse.

#### *4.2.5 Devices used for spanking*

As Webb points out, the fifth point to the argument of not spanking the children – he is asking: does the Bible say what instrument or devices we need to use when it comes to spanking the children? According to Proverbs 23:13-14, the word rod is used as an instrument of discipline. The interesting thing to note here with the word “rod” in corporal

discipline passages, is that this word often goes along with the Hebrew word *nakah* which means to beat or hit. Now the question is if the word used in Proverbs 23:13-14 connotes to beating or hitting. Is the Bible advocating corporal punishment with the use of the rod for beating, or is just Solomon reflecting the way he disciplined his own son Rehoboam? Because, according to the Bible, Rehoboam was a rebellious person. This is a question of contextualization. And in that original context of Proverbs, how did they define a child? In the original texts of the Proverbs, we find the word *na'ar*. According to Renn (2005) the word for child (as we have also seen under section 4.2.1) in Hebrew is *na'ar* and is referring to a young man in between the age 12 and 19 who is studying the Old Testament law and who is ready to marry. Here we for real see the importance of the right interpretation of the scripture together with the right contextualization of the scripture. If we fail to do so, we would be in danger of spanking the wrong person (young child) with a wrong instrument (a paddle or hand instead of a rod). Talking about the rod, the word for “rod” in proverbs is translated as *shebet* in Hebrew. This word means a scepter or staff. A scepter was a large ornately carved staff that was a symbol of authority.

Some non-spankers would interpret the rod in the Proverbs as a rod of shepherding. But Webb would argue that “these anti-spankers wrongly drag material from one context into another just because they share the same word” (p. 45). Further on he makes clear that pro-spankers rightly argue that the rod in the Proverbs passages is used to hit the children. However, and even if the Bible say that we should use the rod to spank, pro-spankers are moving away from using the rod and rather resort to instruments that would be less damaging to the child. For in stance a flat paddle or a hand. Still, on many occasions, we have also heard stories or seen spanking parents who use whatever instrument they may have available in their hand at the moment of the child's misbehavior. The father who pulled out his leather belt, or the mother who had a spatula in her hand. Or opposite. But here we could also argue that at Solomon's time, shepherding was a prevalent profession and that a rod was something that the father had convenient at hand most of the time.

Going back to the move from the rod to the paddle or hand. So why have they (pro-spankers) moved away from what the Bible says in these disciplining- with- rod- texts? Webb

(2011) believes that this is a good move, and an attempt to find higher moral grounds. I would argue that it is not only because of moral reasons, but also because of convenience. Is not it more convenient using a hand in which you have available at all times than an instrument that you sometimes might have to search for? Even in the past and in St. Augustine's time, the rod was not used – but a cane in which the school master probably already held conveniently in his hand. Still, we could ask ourselves if the pro-spankers' move is a biblical move.

#### *4.2.6 The Frequency of Beating or Spanking*

The next point Webb brings up is the frequency of beating or spanking. According to Webb many of the pro- spankers (including Köstenberger) advocate that spanking should be the last resort and as children get older it should become infrequent (Webb, 2011). But does the Bible say how often we have to beat or spank our children? Through Proverbs 13:24 we can understand that we should not spare the rod but be constant in its use. That surely implies that we should spank frequently (if the Bible teaches us to spank at all!). Köstenberger (2010) argues that discipline must be consistent in order to be effective, but as a matter of fact he contradicts himself when it comes to the consistency or frequency of corporal punishment methods.

In the past, Augustine also argued about the frequency of beatings: “You are not to suppose that you love your servant when you do not beat him, or love your son when you relax your discipline over him. That is not charity, but weakness” (397-398, 318). Thus, Augustine argued *for* frequent beatings in that one should not “relax” the discipline over the son. But interestingly the pro-spankers of today have moved away from this Augustinian practice of frequency of spankings.

#### *4.2.7 Parental Disposition*

Parental disposition has to do with the parents' attitude or temperament when administering the spanking or beating of a child. According to Webb many pro-spankers advocate that we should not spank the children in anger. For example Köstenberger in his book *God, Marriage*

and the Family says that physical discipline should be administered in love and not in anger (p. 161). But is this in line with what the Bible says? Does the Bible say that we have to spank the children in love? The answer is no. If we read in Psalms 6:1, the Psalmist says that: “Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath” which means that the Lord discipline His children in anger. Then, why do not we discipline our children in anger? As a matter of fact, St. Augustine advocated that discipline should be done in anger. At least some anger:

Is there one that does not correct his son, or any son who does not receive discipline from his father? Yet there must be an appearance there of anger. Love can be angry, charity can be angry, with a kind of anger in which there is no gall, like the dove's and not the raven's (397-398, 318).

Webb also points out that it is more biblical to use righteous anger when pro-spankers use the rod rather than the notion of “love but no anger”. But it may prove hard for man to practice righteous anger as the anger of a man may fall out of control (and may lead to abuse) compared to God's righteous anger who is in control of everything no matter what happens. In Colossians 3:21 we read that: “Parents do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged”.

#### 4.2.8 Gender

The last point we shall see in the disagreement between pro-spankers and non-spankers is the issue of gender. Under section 2.3.2 we saw that boys are being spanked more than girls, but what does the pro-spankers and non-spankers say about this issue in the contemporary debates? And what does the Bible say? According to Samuel Martin (2006) the Jewish scholars believe that spankings are for boys 12 years and above. There are few other non-spankers who are mentioning the issue of gender in their writings at all. However, some pro-spankers do; Dobson for instance has written two different books – one for raising girls and one for raising boys: “Bringing up Girls” and “Bringing up Boys”. He argues that boys and girls are differently both biologically and emotionally and therefore they have to be raised in different ways. But he does not mention anything about corporal punishment in this regard.

What he does say is: "...fathers know intuitively that their boys require special attention, discipline, and leadership, but they are often unaware of how desperately their daughters also need them" (ch. 9). Having said this, it seems like the gender-issue is not a big deal to those who are arguing for or against corporal punishment and what the Bible teaches about it. However, we know that the Bible and the Church Fathers has an extra emphasis on the masculine gender and this may have implications for those who advocate spanking of children in that they believe that boys should be spanked and not girls as seen in section 2.3.2. According to James & James (2008), the concept of gender is believed to be both socially and culturally constructed, and therefore, we cannot see the concept of gender separately from the context in which it has been constructed. The issue of gender and whether both girls and boys should be disciplined in the same ways is a topic which would deserve a separate and thorough study.

From these sub-sections we understand that it is indeed challenging to understand what the Bible is trying to teach us when it comes to using corporal methods in the disciplining of our children. And these challenges applies to both non-spankers and pro-spankers, although we might have come to see that non-spankers (especially Webb) has found several ways in which pro-spankers depart from the Bible. However, as we have seen that the pro-spankers have moved away from the past in that they advocate gentler forms of corporal punishment than in the past, as such we know that the non-spankers have totally moved away from past practices. Webb even stated in his book that he was a pro-spanker before: "I came to realize that at the level of concrete-specific instructions in the Scripture, my beloved two-smacks-max parenting method had very little correlation to what the Bible actually teaches about corporal punishment" (2011, 26). He has not mentioned how he came to this move, other that he had a "hermeneutical journey". His thorough dig into issues of interpretation made him move more and more before he finally had made the huge step: Coming to the understanding and conviction that the Bible does not at all say that we should spank our children. So we understand that even Webb was influenced from past views on corporal punishment, but that *his own* hermeneutical journey with the aim to find out what the Bible really teaches on corporal punishment left him "surprised and dumbfounded at

times” (p. 26). Thus, it is harder to see the connections between the past and Webb as it is clear that Webb has made his own hermeneutical journey independent on earlier views. Additionally, Webb is not mentioning anything about his views on children as many other theologians has done when they talk about corporal punishment; for in stance Köstenberger: “Fundamentally, children, like all people, ought to be considered spiritual individuals who are uniquely created by God and yet are fallen sinners...” (2010, ch 6).

### 4.3 William Webb vs. Andreas Köstenberger

The pro-spankers do not accept this claim mentioned above (that they have departed from the Bible) and especially Köstenberger (2010) argues that William Webb has fell prey to three fallacies in his first paper “Rod, Whip and meat cleaver: Spanking kids and cutting off a wife's hand” (2007). These three fallacies mentioned by Köstenberger (2010) are: 1) 'Straw man logical fallacy' meaning that Webb thought that pro-spankers understood the Bible using a fundamentalist hermeneutics which implies a very literal interpretation of the scripture – and therefore he is mischaracterizing the hermeneutics of his opponents. 2) Köstenberger states that “Webb failed to account adequately for the genre distinctions between legal torah texts and wisdom literature, treating these different types texts on equal terms” and 3), “Webb tended to make sweeping generalizations regarding language and application of corporal punishment text in the old testament, failing to distinguish between punishment and discipline” (p. 342-343).

To the first objection towards him, Webb (2011) raises two interesting questions: 1) “Why do they (pro-spankers) move away from various harsh aspects of corporal punishment instructions in the Proverbs but stay with hitting children?”, and 2): “Why do they herald the two-smacks-max position as upholding biblical authority and conversely view an alternative-discipline-only position as undermining biblical authority?” (p. 175). Webb writes in his response to Köstenberger that Köstenberger has failed to answer these two questions in a convincing way, and to name Webb's view as “straw man logical fallacy” show that he has missed or avoided Webb's point.

To the second objection he (Webb) is also giving several questions to Köstenberger, and one of them is this: “Why must we tie an element of literal hitting to biblical authority and object that those who do not do these sort of literal hitting undermining the biblical authority?” (p.180). Through the third objection towards Webb, he was criticized of not distinguishing between punishment and discipline. Webb respond saying he *is* distinguishing between punishment and discipline because “one ought to work with a composite picture derived from all four categories: Torah violators, fools, and children. None of these categories are identical in all aspects, but they exhibit significant overlap (p.180-181).

Here we see clearly that there are several disagreements between Webb and Köstenberger, and Köstenberger even mentions that they are opponents. In other words, their debate is about how Webb has demonstrated how the pro-spankers have moved away from the original text and departed from the Bible, and then, the objections towards Webb that he has no ground to claim that the pro-spankers have departed from the Bible. These objections are raised because, according to Köstenberger, Webb has for sure mischaracterized the hermeneutics of his opponents. And to that, Webb is responding that Köstenberger and other evangelical pro-spankers have not even explained their hermeneutic. From this we understand that William Webb has many opponents (evangelical pro-spankers), and his opponents have not explained the way they interpret the Bible when it comes to corporal punishment. Webb is therefore stating towards the end of his response: “A careful reading of his (Köstenberger) critique raises serious questions about his own (Köstenberger's) “not rigid literalism” hermeneutic works. This may imply that he (Köstenberger) is interpreting the Bible literally, but in a flexible way – *his* own terms and this is why Webb is concluding that he and other pro-spankers depart from the Bible although they are most of the time literal interpreters of the Bible. It is not my task to answer the questions about how Köstenberger's and other pro-spankers' hermeneutics works, other than highlighting this obvious theological challenge of the “hermeneutic-problematics”. As mentioned in chapter three, we should use a hermeneutic(s) that would bring the most accurate interpretation of the passages *and* a hermeneutic that is most relevant in today's context.

#### 4.4 Other Challenges

But that might be easier said than done. While non-spankers still claim that the pro-spankers have departed from the Bible, so does the pro-spankers with the non-spankers. And when the Bible clearly mentions about the rod and the whip, so why should we stop using them as examples of corporal punishment at all? Is that really the most biblical? Should we go by tradition, experience or by the spirit? There are so many questions arising from this scholarly theological debate on corporal punishment in the Bible. In addition to that, what about all the challenges we meet in intercultural encounters; both secular intercultural encounters and Christian intercultural encounters? I have already presented some of the stories in chapter two. How can we go about to diminish these challenges? The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) have been believed to gone far when it comes to having *one* measure regarding corporal punishment; namely the totally abolishing of corporal punishment of children. According to the Council of Europe (2007), the UNCRC has “emphasized that human rights require the elimination of all corporal punishment, however light, and all other cruel and degrading punishment” (p. 7). I will not go into the discussion whether the UNCRC are made for the West or also the Global South. (Of course it is made for both regions, but several discussions have been raised, whether or not this framework of children’s right is only coined towards the Western cultures). According to Mercer (2005) still some child protection experts “would argue for a firm standard for mistreatment of a child that applies across all boundaries” (p. 143). Additionally, UNICEF argues that corporal punishment is just one of the wrong ways to discipline a child. The aim is not to substitute corporal punishment with psychological abuse but to discipline without using violence at all.

But for Christians, is it right to blindly follow these global conventions that are not based on the Bible but rather human ethics? Of course, we all know that the Bible also talks about being nice to your neighbor and that we should do to others what we wish others to do to us (Luke 6:31). Also, the Bible, in Romans 13:1-5 and in Titus 3:1 among other verses, say that we should follow authorities. And for non-spankers, the global conventions should be easy to follow and implement in one’s everyday life. But pro-spankers will have a problem



with such conventions in that they will violate the convention by spanking their own children with a two-spank approach once in a while.

#### **4.5 Are There Any Agreements at All?**

As we have winded up the different scholarly and contemporary views on “to spank the child or not to spank the child” when it comes to these seven points and various challenges as mentioned in the sub-sections above, the question is: Are there any agreements at all between the pro-spankers and non-spankers? We have seen that the two groups disagree on all points when it comes to spanking. The pro-spankers believe that children need discipline and that the discipline should also consist of corporal punishment, whereas the non-spankers also believe that the children need discipline but the discipline should only consist of non-corporal methods. So here we see that there is a huge gap between the pro-spankers and the non-spankers and their convictions when it comes to what the Bible is teaching them concerning spanking (or not). Many pro-spankers read the Bible in a literal way, not taking a deeper dig into the contextual issues of the biblical time. And many non-spankers tend to read many of the verses on corporal punishment as symbols and metaphors. For in stance, taking the rod of discipline and convert it into the rod of guidance. In the next chapter, the main implications concerning corporal punishment in the Bible when it comes to disciplining children will be elaborated on focusing on the most important findings.

First of all, are there only disagreements between pro-spankers and non-spankers? In fact, there are more agreements than we could think of. For in stance, they both agree that children should be disciplined in love and not be abused. And according to Webb (2011) both pro-spankers and non-spankers have moved beyond what the scripture originally said by advocating a much improved practice of discipline than what is found in the Bible. We have seen that pro-spankers have found a gentler way of disciplining children with corporal methods than what they used to do in the past and also than what described in the Bible. And non-spankers have totally moved away from all forms of corporal punishment. How can both pro-spankers and non-spankers say that they are in truth doing what the Bible says when both groups have departed so noticeably from the Bible?

However, it is not about who departed from what – what is more important is to go beyond these centuries old and ongoing debate(s) and rather come to the point where we are able to focus on the Bible as a holy *and* living scripture to find God's will for us today. This in turn will enable us to see the Bible and its teachings from a different point of view rather than being purely critical and tied up in all the debates. Because we know that the corporal punishment debate does not follow a specific pattern that we can be able to trace back from the history anyway. According to Pate and Gould “corporal punishment through the ages of humanity is not a monotonic phenomenon. Corporal punishment are as varied as the civilizations that have employed them” (2012, 3).

Yet, and in this connection it is still worth to note the significance of the centuries old debates and the ongoing debates on how the Bible really wants us to apply the verses on corporal punishment in our daily disciplining of our children – as an opportunity in terms of clearly seeing the theological challenges in order to contextualize them in the most biblical way as possible.



## Chapter Five

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will consist of the concluding remarks. It will also encapsulate major findings, where the main implications will be briefly discussed and dealt with before the section on conclusions and then recommendations follow.

#### **5.2 Summary & Implications of Major Findings**

This master thesis has explored corporal punishment in the Bible and whether the Bible teaches us to spank our children or not. The focus has mainly been held on the divisive tendencies through history and up to our contemporary time – on whether we should use corporal punishment to discipline our children, or not.

##### *5.2.1 Findings Related to the First Specific Objective*

The first specific objective of the study was to explore how Bible verses on corporal punishment are interpreted and applied through the history of the Church. It was found that the Bible verses on corporal punishment were interpreted and applied in various ways throughout the history of Church and in different cultures. The different interpretations and the different applications of the Bible verses on spanking often had its root in how one viewed the child. The view of the child as evil and born sinful has been the most common view of the child both from history and up to today, although the portraying of the child as innocent is becoming more and more prevalent in the Western societies. Looking at history, St. Augustine and others who believe that children are born with original sin would conclude that the children are in need of strict discipline including spanking and therefore would interpret and apply the Bible verses on corporal punishment toward this view they hold of the child. And those who believe that children are born with a clean state and innocent would likewise interpret and apply the Bible verses on spanking in favor of their view. However, I

have found that there is not always a direct link between the view of the child, and the view of how children should be treated. For instance, as we saw in chapter two, St. Anselm followed St. Augustine on original sin, but not on corporal punishment.

This suggests that there does not have to be a direct link between the understanding of original sin and the understanding of what the Bible is teaching us when it comes to corporal punishment. We should therefore keep in mind that these two different views on corporal punishment from history and onwards may be blurred and mixed, and that the different views of children and the different views of what the Bible says about corporal punishment can all co-exist. It is also well-worth to note that the interpretation and application of the Bible verses varies according to the social setting and contexts around the world. This finding has implications for us in that it emphasizes the importance of understanding a specific context. Both the original context and the development up to the context of today.

Through writing the second chapter, I found that it was easy to be biased on who might be wrong and who might be right in interpreting and applying the Bible verses on corporal punishment according to what the Bible really is saying. But the practical theological approach has helped in giving support to the finding that Christians have different understandings and interpretation of the Bible based on their immeasurable faith in God.

### *5.2.2 Findings Related to the Second Specific Objective*

The second specific objective was to examine what the Bible really says about corporal punishment. This is a wide research question, because the aim of the entire thesis has been to find out whether the Bible says we should spank or not spank. However, this specific objective has had its goal in finding concrete examples on what the Bible really says concerning spanking or not using the eight points where Christians tend to misinterpret and “misapply” the Bible. I will just briefly summarize the findings regarding what the Bible says on the eight points:

- 
- Age limitations: Spankings are not for children, only young men 12 years and older and for the *na'ar* – a person between 12-19 years. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Number of spankings: According to Deuteronomy 25:3 the maximum limit is set to forty strokes for Torah violator. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Bodily locations: The beatings should be done with the face down and on the back or on the sides of the body. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Marks and outcome of the spankings: In Proverbs 20:30 we read that “bruises scrubs away evil, and beatings purge the innermost being”. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Devices used for spanking: When it comes to disciplining our children, the “shebet” - a staff or rod which was a symbol of authority- is most frequently mentioned. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Frequency of spanking: We should not spare the rod, but be constant in its use. Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Parental disposition: God as a father always used punishment in anger, or in his wrath (Psalm 6:1). Jesus said nothing about it.
  - Gender: The Bible has an extra emphasis on the masculine gender.

These straightforward and summarized findings from the Bible would imply that a boy older than 12 should frequently be spanked with a maximum of forty strokes on his back or sides by his angry parents with a rod that would leave marks on his body. This sentence may actually sound a bit unbiblical to many people, but this is actually what we find in the Bible. No wonder it is hard for both pro-spankers and non-spankers to apply what the Bible says on corporal punishment into their daily lives in today's context.

### *5.2.3 Findings Related to the Third Specific Objective*

The third specific objective was to explore the theological challenges we face when it comes to corporal punishment in the Bible, and to look at the possibilities of dealing with the theological challenges in new and fruitful ways. Under this section (5.2.3) the findings related

to the theological challenges we face when it comes to corporal punishment are briefly summarized, whereas recommendations on how we can look at the possibilities of dealing with these challenges in new and fruitful ways are presented in section 5.4.

The information obtained from the third objective suggests that there are several theological challenges. Especially through the eight disagreements between the pro-spankers, non-spankers and the Bible we clearly see the theological challenges being sifted out. For instance, when it comes to age, we understand that the main challenge is not the disagreements on the age-limitations but the theological challenge of *contextualization*; the probability of misunderstanding the original text and its meaning within its original context. Other findings related to the third objective: *Movements* away from the original texts, different *hermeneutical approaches*, and *contradictions* in the applications of the Bible verses on corporal punishment. However, it is interesting to see that all the theological challenges are in fact related to – and are revolving around the main theological challenge; namely the challenge of contextualization as mentioned above.

The findings from the third objective reveals that corporal punishment passages can easily be misinterpreted when we use the wrong hermeneutic to the wrong context and vice versa. For instance we will face challenges if we read the “spanking-with-the-rod-verses” in the Proverbs exactly how it was written in that different context to that different audience. Many pro-spankers read the Bible in this literal way, and many non-spankers tend to read many of the verses on corporal punishment in the opposite way; as symbols and metaphors. What both pro-spankers and non-spankers need to do is to take an even deeper dig into the contextual issues of the biblical time, and not be too occupied with their own and different styles of interpretation. Because my study has for sure revealed that there is real a “hermeneutic-problematic” in that it may be hard to draw “correct” lines between the literal and allegorical interpretation of a scripture and therefore we have to carefully discern (whether we agree with spanking or not) when it is most appropriate to use allegorical interpretation and when it is most appropriate to use literal interpretation. As mentioned in chapter three, we should use a hermeneutic(s) that would bring the most accurate interpretation of the passages *and* a hermeneutic that is most relevant in today's context. We

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cannot just apply some set of principles; either allegorical or literal principles, because as we saw in chapter three and what Schleiermacher argued: “More is involved in biblical interpretation than the application of a set of principles”. And that means that the gap between what a text meant in its own context and what it means now in a new context and in a new period of time must be bridged somehow (Ferguson, 1986, ch 1). Through my study it has been obvious that a genuine and adequate understanding of what really happened in the original text, together with looking at how a bible verse has developed through history can meaningfully bridge the original context with today's context.

However, in this process we may find that the bridge that we build in between the original context and today's context may be too long and the bridge may end up in moving too far from the original context. All the way from the beginning, Augustine wanted to move away from the harsh beatings, and rather punish children along a smoother line of beatings. This is also something that has been revealed later in my study in that both pro-spankers and non-spankers have departed far away from what the Bible said in its original context. We have seen that pro-spankers have found a gentler way of disciplining children with “softer” corporal methods than described in the Bible, and non-spankers have totally moved away from all forms of corporal punishment. With the redemptive-movement hermeneutic as especially proclaimed by William Webb, we get for sure the advantage of advancing human dignity for children in that “it (the redemptive-movement appropriation) encourages movement beyond its concrete-specific instructions in order to pursue an ultimate application of Scripture that yields a greater fulfillment of its redemptive spirit” (2011, 58). But is this move a biblical move? For in stance, in the Old Testament it was accepted to stone a rebellious teenager to death, but today it is not even accepted to *spank* a teenager. It sounds like a more good than bad move. However, it is not about whether it is a good or bad move – what is more important is to make a move that is right in accordance with the Scripture and that recognizes the Bible as a holy *and* living scripture to find God's will for us today.

In this connection when looking at *movements* as one of the main theological challenges, it is only apt to see that God himself made a move in sending his only begotten son to us so that we now do not have to live under the Law of Moses any longer, but under



the Law of Christ. This implies that the book of Proverbs was written under the Law of Moses, and we today live under the Law of Christ. So should we then still follow the book of Proverbs when it comes to corporal punishment? According to Paul we are now free from the Law because Christ himself freed us from the Law. The Law of Christ is grace, peace, mercy and love; for the Bible says in Galatians 5:18: “if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”.

My study has further revealed that corporal punishment in the Bible also has been a root cause to many contradictions. For in stance, St. Augustine did not spank his own son, but he could spank other children (see chapter section 2.2). And the pastor and teacher mentioned in chapter three treated his own children with exceptional care, while he could beat the students harshly with a belt. So how then could these two be an example unto others as to how other Christians should practice what the Bible teach regarding corporal punishment? In chapter two we also saw how it was possible to hold several different and contradictory views of children and childhood at the same time (Woodhead and Montgomery, 2003). And by knowing that, it becomes obvious to understand that some Bible scholars may easily fall into the trap of also having contradictory views and practices of corporal punishment. One of the most classic arguments against spanking was presented in chapter two and involved this contradiction: A parent who hits the child as an act of discipline after the child wrongly hit a brother or sister (see Webb, 2011). But there is also existing an argument against this non-spanking argument where it is being claimed that there is no contradiction in this at all. The question that is being raised is this: “Is the judge contradictory for sentencing a kidnapper to imprisonment?”(<http://www.fdn.org/reviews/review09.html>).

But again, we have for sure moved away from the Old Testament Mosaic Law in which said “eye for eye, tooth for a tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exodus, 21:24-25). Now we are under Christ and the Law of Christ:

You have heard that it was said, Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over

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your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:38-42).

If we want to teach our children the Law of Christ, and not the Old Testament Laws – this is the way to go. In the following we shall see more conclusions.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The question this thesis started with was: “To Spank the Child or Not to Spank the Child?” I am now going to end this thesis with the very same question, but this time I will be able to conclude with a very confident and Bible-rooted answer to that question. As a reader, you might have already guessed the answer to this important question, but still, I will ask and answer this same question again:

Q: To spank the child or not to spank the child?

A: Not to spank the child. Whether younger, or older children, whether girls and boys. And why? That is because of all of my findings as indicated above and which can be concluded with this:

*Jesus*. Most importantly, is knowing Jesus. What would He do? As soon as Jesus saw the children, and that the disciples tried to hinder them from coming to Him, He said:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it”. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them (Mark, 10:14).

He did not spank them even though they are born with sin, and maybe even some of the children who came to him already had done something bad in life. Rather than using his arms to spank them, He took them in his arms, blessed them and showed them love. This verse says “little children”, which is very likely to apply to a child younger than 12 since a “child”

in the biblical context is considered to be from age 12-19 (see section 4.2.1 Age). And as contradictory as it may seem, it is these same little children pro-spankers claim that the Bible teaches us to spank (see section 4.2.1).

So if Jesus did not spank the children, why should we? Jesus was well-versed in the Old Testament and he quoted many Scriptures from the Old Testament. However, we do not have any reference that says that Jesus quoted even a single verse from the Old Testament which talks about spanking children. Sermon on the Mount was something Jesus used for his teachings as mentioned in Matthew 5-7, but Jesus never mentions anything about spanking children. If spanking was a crucial part of disciplining children, I am sure he would have mentioned spanking in his teachings in which he is addressing to Christians.

In this connection we are compelled to ask; who is a Christian? A Christian is one who follows Christ and uses Him as his/hers example when facing practical and theological challenges in life; including whether we should spank children or not. If Christ did not beat children why should we beat them?

No matter our own views of children, as inherently evil or as innocent, and no matter how we interpret and read the Bible we as Christians should use Jesus Christ as an example and view the children like He views them. And then our understandings and views on whether we should spank or not will be strengthened in that our convictions will be strong-rooted in Christ himself. As we saw towards the end in the previous chapter, corporal punishment is not a monotonic phenomenon. It has been practiced, and it is still practiced in umpteen of different ways even among Christians. But if we as Christians can fix our eyes on Jesus, there is only one way to go when it comes to all challenges of life – including the issue of spanking. However, Christians may still see this one way differently because the understanding of the gospel of Christ is always of a contextual nature. (See Odyuyoye and Vroom, 2005). But here, as Christians, we get the wonderful opportunity to humbly fill in what another Christian brother and sister may lack of knowledge in order to fulfill the diverse but united body of Christ. In this regard I will conclude that my study has revealed that some scholars and theologians lack some crucial aspects on the topic of corporal punishment in order to get the full realization of whether the Bible teach us to spank our children or not. For

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in stance St. Augustine was teaching one thing about corporal punishment, and practicing the opposite by taking great care of his own son. Köstenberger has been too vague in explaining his hermeneutic, or in explaining why he believe that spanking is grounded in the Bible. Dobson is saying “dare to discipline”, which most likely (when we know what he stands for, and when we read his book) includes “dare to spank” - then what about if we could dare to read the Bible differently? And even though Webb has come far in reading the Bible differently and in his explanation about the redemptive movement and on why the Bible does not teach that we should spank our children, he did not write anything about his view of children – nor did he mention or even ponder upon what Christ would have done.

In this respect, my study is a contribution towards a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach in which welcomes impulses not only from biblical theology and practical theology, but making those two theologies come to its highest point by also welcoming a child theology that are much needed in helping us to see, guide and discipline the child according to what Jesus would have done. This would force us to take new considerations of and re-read the Bible verses on corporal punishment with the eyes of Jesus who set the child in the midst; as a guide to the kingdom of God.

#### **5.4 Further Recommendations**

By looking at the implications of my findings in section 5.2, we are being introduced to the possibilities of dealing with the theological challenges in new and fruitful ways: 1) Acquire a genuine, adequate and Christ-focused understanding of what really happened in the original text, together with looking at how a bible verse has developed through history can meaningfully bridge the original context with today's context, 2) coming to the full realization of the importance of making a move (if a move is needed) according to the Scripture and a move that recognizes the Bible as a holy *and* living scripture to find God's will for us today, and most importantly 3) teaching our children the Law of Christ.

In this thesis we have also learned that we can use a nontraditional child theology in a positive sense and as a theological clue to open doors and new thinking to challenging Bible verses and to challenging topics. Although this thesis is not a manual for how to bring up or

raise a child, it is still appropriate at this time to encourage parents, scholars and theologians to explore more creative and effective ways to train up the children in the way they should go. My study has revealed that spanking should be reconsidered, if we want to lead Christ-like lives and follow what the Bible really is saying.

Some of the pro-spankers have argued that there is no other way to let a child know of his mistakes other than through spanking. Of course children need to be disciplined, but disciplining could be done in so many other ways than through spanking. Keeping the Law of Christ in mind, I am sure there are many Christ-like ways in which we could discipline our children. As a recommendation I will therefore suggest that we adults should rather follow the example of Christ; spending *quality* time with them, listen to them, and parents should set an exemplary life style in the way they lovingly and respectfully talk and behave towards each other. In this way, the child will feel loved and a child who feels loved also feels safe and content – which in turn makes it easier for the child to respect, listen and obey the parents or other adults in everyday life *and* in times of adversity.

Despite this, if corporal punishment is still existing and not been able to prohibit, the only reason would be the misinterpretation of the “rod-passages”. This is where we need to have an even more redemptive understanding of the Scripture. We cannot interpret the Scripture from a peripheral understanding rather we need to have a deeper understanding of the Scripture in order to find out what exactly each bible passage talks about. But most importantly, let the Spirit of God move us. And this is how we can see how God's spirit has moved us: By our fruits which should be love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians, 5:22-23). This Christ-focused and Christ-centered discipline is the best discipline a child can get, because we must remember that “the apple never falls far from the tree”. That is to say: By living a Christ-centered life, children will also acquire this kind of life. No spanking would ever be needed, and it would also be easier than ever to see that the Bible does not say that we should spank our children. Thus, let's follow the Bible and not spank our children.

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