

36 Spare the Rod

THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE TEACHES the proverb “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” In fact most countries practise physical punishment on naughty children, in the belief that it makes the child good.

This belief in corporal punishment raises a very sensitive question. Many parents consider children to be their personal property, and no one has the right to advise them how to discipline them. However, nowadays there are laws to protect children from cruel treatment by their parents or others. Besides, does corporal punishment really change naughty children into good children?

I have been a teacher throughout my career, and I still hesitate to answer that question. At the same time, I feel very upset when I see a child being beaten. My natural reaction is to sympathise with the child.

I once saw a woman in Wong Tai Sin beating a very tiny child on the body with a rattan cane. On seeing the little fellow screaming with pain, I rushed to the scene and held the cane, begging the mother not to beat him. Surprised, she looked at me but said nothing. I suspect she had lost her temper and suddenly felt sorry for what she was doing.

I taught in one school in England where there were two

very naughty boys, brothers, aged about twelve and fourteen. Quite often the headmaster would make these two boys bend over a desk and beat them on the buttocks with a cane. Usually this headmaster was a kind person, but he always lost his temper with those boys. As for the boys, they did not cry – neither did their behaviour improve.

One of the lessons I learned at that time was that we should never beat a child while in a fit of temper. Once we lose our tempers, we lose control of ourselves, and in that situation, it is possible to inflict serious injury, not only on a child’s body but also on his mind. We may make him hate school, hate study, or even hate the parent or teacher who beat him.

I must admit that, on one occasion, I lost my temper when I saw a big boy beat his small friend. I don’t like to see big boys bullying small boys just because they feel stronger and able to frighten smaller children. On that occasion I slapped the big boy, not enough to hurt him, but it was enough to make me feel ashamed for losing my temper. I immediately apologised to the bigger boy, and at the same time, explained how wrong it is for a strong person to beat a weaker one.

I believe that a child will respond more if an adult gently explains what he has done wrong. Shouting and constant nagging can be just as cruel as beating. Training a child is not easy. It requires great patience, and above all, love and care.