

March 8, 2006

As promised, I am responding to your e-mail dated February 14, 2006 that was forwarded to me via the Southeast Christian Church website. You indicated that you were interested in some verification that the Bible condones spanking of children. I am attempting to provide you with that in this letter. These letters can be difficult to write, and to receive, because all I'm doing is presenting counter argument to your points and that does not necessarily win friends, but since you sent your e-mail to the Southeast Website, Southeast expects me to respond to your e-mail and I trust you wrote us expecting a response as well. My response follows the order of your e-mail, a copy of which is enclosed for your convenience. Your comments to which I am responding are in a box preceding my comments.

I see two issues that required a response: One, the issue of spanking and two, the issue of the Ezzos. I will address first the issue of spanking.

I am referencing the opinions of four highly esteemed men on the subject of spanking. Since you include Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. James Dobson as those whose opinion you obviously respect, I thought you'd also respect their opinion on spanking from a biblical perspective. I trust you know who Dr. MacArthur and Dr. Dobson are so I've not included a bio on either men. The third opinion is from Dr. Albert Mohler, the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the largest seminaries in the world. The fourth opinion is that of Gary Ezzo. To include Mr. Ezzo's opinion on the subject is important as it brings context to your allegations. I find his opinion to be balanced with the most grace. All of these opinions are excerpts from a larger document which is enclosed so you can gather the full context of their points.

Dobson

Dobson advocates the spanking of children of up to eight years old when they misbehave, but warns that "Corporal punishment should not be a frequent occurrence" and that "discipline must not be harsh and destructive to the child's spirit." He does not advocate harsh spanking: "It is not necessary to beat the child into submission; a little bit of pain goes a long way for a young child. However, the spanking should be of sufficient magnitude to cause the child to cry genuinely." (Dare to Discipline p.7)

MacArthur

Another book written by a medical doctor also takes a somewhat sarcastic approach to this and suggests how to create a tragic child. First, here are ten easy steps for developing your normal healthy baby into a drug addict, or alcoholic. Here they are, ten steps. One, spoil him, give him everything he wants if you can afford it. Two, when he does wrong you may nag him but never spank him.

Then he suggests, here's how to develop your normal child into a sociopathic criminal. One, start with the same ten easy steps the alcoholic's mother uses with the following exceptions and additions. Never spank your child. Physical punishment is a thing of the past. In fact, spanking is now considered immoral. By the way, it's against the law in Sweden which also has the highest teen-age suicide rate in the world.

How to have a hyperkinetic child. Don't ever spank and have an absent father. And so it goes.

Any father who really loves and delights in his son will discipline him, will reprove him, will correct him. Proverbs chapter 10 verse 13, here's the means, verse 13 says in the last part of the verse, "But a rod is for the back of him who lacks understanding." Now in this modern culture we would say, "No, a computer is for him who lacks understanding...or an encyclopedia for him who..." No, a rod is for the back side of

him who lacks understanding. And what he means here is not that they don't have information but they don't apply it. If you have a child who demonstrates a lack of wisdom in living, get out a rod and use it on his backside, or her backside. That's what the Bible says.

Chapter 22 of Proverbs and verse 15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," that is right. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart, the rod of discipline will remove it far from him." You see, again corporal punishment is the consequence for disobedience which modifies behavior...painful, immediate consequence alter behavior. Proverbs 23:13 and 14, "Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod he will not die." He'll tell you he's dying but he's not. He won't die. "You shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from Sheol." You're not talking now about only saving his life, you're talking about saving his soul...the whole person, when you use that rod.

Let me make it simple. The Bible simply says if you correct him, in other words, if you correct him with a rod and discipline him or her and make them live an obedient life, they will delight your soul. It isn't that tough. It isn't that complex. Set a standard, live by that standard and correct to that standard.

Al Mohler

The Bible presents a very clear and sober message about the absolute necessity of parental discipline. Parents are to teach and require obedience of their children. The issue of obedience is at the very center of the Bible's concern for submission to authority and instruction in godliness.

Parents bear an unavoidable responsibility to discipline their children even as they are raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Failure to require obedience is characterized in Scripture as a tragic parental failure. In effect, parents who do not require obedience of their children are themselves demonstrating disobedience to the command of God.

Does the Bible instruct parents to spank their children? The answer to that must be an emphatic, Yes. Though the words "spare the rod and spoil the child" do not appear in the biblical text, the Bible makes the same point in an unmistakable way. "Do not hold back discipline from the child. Although you strike him with the rod, he will not die," instructs Proverbs 23:13. The very next verse teaches that the use of physical discipline may actually rescue the child's soul from hell.

The biblical worldview begins with an assumption diametrically opposed to today's secular mindset. Influenced by humanistic psychology, most Americans assume that a child is born essentially innocent of all sin and blame any subsequent transgressions on the deleterious effects of socialization and bad influences. Of course, the Bible teaches that children emerge from the womb as sinners who throughout life will require discipline. In the case of children, this means physical discipline and corporal punishment. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child," declares Proverbs 22:15. "The rod of discipline will remove it far from him," the text advises.

Today's outbreak of out-of-control children can be directly traced to the failure of parents to discipline their children. Modern advocates of "timeouts" and similar forms of discipline miss the essential point that God intends spanking to underline the cause-and-effect relationship of disobedience and punishment. Swift and firm parental punishment is the necessary means of teaching children that their disobedience will not be allowed, and that they will be brought into obedience, one way or the other.

Of course, the Bible refers to punitive corporal punishment, not to injurious abuse. Parents should learn the method of judicial spanking, never using spanking as a demonstration of anger or wrath. As a judicial act, the spanking should be administered in a serious, private, and sober way by a parent who teaches the child that this punishment is necessary for the specific act of disobedience. Spanking is judicial in the sense that it is not the result of a parental loss of temper, nor of a parent's whim, but of moral necessity.

Of course, parents should inflict sufficient pain to make the point clear, and to make certain that the child fears the punishment. The very act of spanking affirms parental discipline, and humbles the spirit of the child. The pain is real, but temporary. The lesson must be equally real--and far more enduring.

Ezzo

Spanking does not constitute biblical discipline but it is one element within the entire scheme of things. It is not a goal, but a means to a greater goal. Discipline by loving and nurturing parents is what gives biblical spanking its context. Most parents think only of punishment when they think of discipline, but discipline is the process of training and learning that fosters moral development. It is a development that leads ultimately to the formation of Christ-like character in the child. The purpose of biblical discipline is to teach morally responsible behavior, shaping Christ-like keepers of God's moral mandates – kingdom-builders who live out the fruit of the Spirit and touch others with the character of Jesus.

We do not believe the Bible commands spanking, but it commends it, starting in the Old and continuing in the New Testament (Proverbs 13:24, 22:15, 23:13-14, 29:15; Heb. 12:6, 11; 1 Cor. 4:21). We accept its validity because the wisdom literature affirms its use in conjunction with righteous training. Can a parent raise a well mannered and respectful child without spanking? Yes they can, but only when they pay due diligence to the process of moral training and creating a healthy otherness-centered environment.

Babywise advice linked to dehydration, failure to thrive

by Matthew Aney, M.D.

(<http://Aney/aneyaap.htm>)

"Expectant parents often fear the changes a new baby will bring, especially sleepless nights. What new parent wouldn't want a how-to book that promises their baby will be sleeping through the night by three to eight weeks?"

I'm not exactly sure what we're addressing here. I am familiar with Dr. Aney, but his credentials do not give credibility to criticism of the Ezzos. He is an M.D., but not board certified, not a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He graduated from an autonomous University in Guadalajara with a strong prejudice toward Attachment Parenting.

One such book, On Becoming Babywise, has raised concern among pediatricians because it outlines an infant feeding program that has been associated with failure to thrive (FTT), poor weight gain, dehydration, breast milk supply failure, and involuntary early weaning. A Forsyth Medical Hospital Review Committee, in Winston-Salem N.C., has listed 11 areas in which the program is inadequately supported by conventional medical practice. The Child Abuse Prevention Council of Orange County, Calif., stated its concern after physicians called them with reports of dehydration, slow growth and development, and FTT associated with the program. And on Feb. 8, AAP District IV passed a resolution asking the Academy to investigate "Babywise," determine the extent of its effects on infant health and alert its members, other organizations and parents of its findings."

Though their name sounds official, the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Orange County (CAPCOC) is not a government agency, nor is it affiliated with any state, county, or local government entity. It is a secular (non-Christian), anti-spanking advocacy group.

We've had thousands of families go through this program at Southeast over the past fifteen years and not one person has come to me claiming that this program produced a baby with failure-to-thrive. I don't

know this for sure, but I imagine if you took the same number of people who had *not* taken this program you might find a greater number of failure-to-thrive and underweight infants among them. The *Infant Way* program provides a significant amount of information including reasons for and safe-guards against failure-to-thrive. I would be happy to provide you with a copy of *Along the Infant Way* so you could take a close look at the section entitled *Signs of Adequate Nutrition* as well as the *Healthy Baby Growth Chart*. Please just let me know if you are interested and I'll send you a complimentary copy.

Not only that but his prime source of teaching seems to be spanking (or "chastisement" as he calls it). Where in the Bible does Jesus physically spank his disciples? I realize that it is often said that to "spare the rod is to spoil the child." However, a rod was used by shepherds to GUIDE their sheep not beat them.

I'm not sure who you are quoting here, but whoever wrote this comment is clearly not familiar with the Ezzos' teaching. The video curriculum, *Along the Virtuous Way (Growing Kids God's Way)* is a comprehensive, biblically-based, theologically sound 20-week curriculum that gives all of 14 minutes to biblical chastisement. That's it. Take a look for yourself at the Table of Contents direct from the *GKGW* text.

<u>Session</u>	<u>Subject</u>
Introduction	Foundations
One:	How to Raise a Moral Child
Two:	Right Beginnings
Three:	Touch points of Love
Four:	The Father's Mandate
Five:	Your Child's Conscience
Six:	Character Development: Respect for Authority and Parents
Seven:	Character Development: Respect for Age
Eight:	Character Development: Respect for Peers, Property, and Nature
Nine:	Principles of Obedience
Ten:	Discipline with Encouragement
Eleven:	Discipline with Correction
Twelve:	Consequences and Punishment
Thirteen:	Repentance, Forgiveness, and Restoration
Fourteen:	Discipline Issues (Part One)
Fifteen:	Discipline Issues (Part Two)
Sixteen:	The Appeal Process
Seventeen:	Building a Healthy Family

In addition, I've included every page the Ezzos write on spanking from their *Virtuous Way* curriculum. It amounts to 19 pages out of 352. I think you will find that it soundly addresses all the questions you pose regarding spanking. Again, I am happy to provide you with a complimentary copy of this curriculum, just let me know.

On his website, world-famous author and pediatrician Dr. William Sears, MD, comments on Prov. 22:15, 13:24, 29:15....

*"At first reading, these passages might seem to support spanking. But this is not the only way to interpret them. The term rod is used throughout the Bible in connection with the shepherd's staff: "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4). **The shepherd's staff is, in fact, used to guide wandering sheep along the right path, not to hit sheep who stray.** So a compassionate reader could interpret the Bible as saying that parents must lead and guide their children but not harm them. This teaching is developed beautifully in the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm, 23*, by Philip Keller.*

Finally, note that references to the "rod" are found primarily in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Christ preaches compassion, love, and understanding, as does Paul. We would hope that all parents, hearing teachers warn about sparing the rod remember Paul's words in 1 Corinthians: 'Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?'"

Dr. William Sears' name does not lend credibility to your concern. Attachment Parenting in balance is not necessarily a bad practice. It's the extreme position that Sears (and others you name in this e-mail) that make your concerns less of a concern to me. I'm sure you are aware that Dr. Sears is a strong advocate of shared sleep. Even with the American Academy of Pediatrics specifically disavowing the practice of shared sleep (<http://www.aap.org/advocacy/archives/septsleep.htm>). Sears, rather than realigning his advice with what the experts, actually debates the study and questions it's validity (<http://www.askdrsears.com/html/10/t102200.asp>). My supervisor, Rusty Russell joined his brother who is on the Louisville Police force for a 'ride along' last year. One of the calls they made in the middle of the night was to a home where the mother who practiced shared sleep had rolled over and suffocated her infant.

I've thoroughly addressed the issue of spanking above, but just as you indicated that Mr. Ezzo is not a medical professional, neither is Dr. Sears a scholar of the Bible. I do not know of a respected theologian that would agree with his interpretation of the word 'rod' as it pertains to spanking.

Regarding the Old and New Testament, theologians will agree that it is a hermeneutical mistake to take isolated quotes and elevate them above the whole Bible. We believe the entire Bible to be inspired by Jesus' Holy Spirit as it claims to be. Therefore, all the inspired Word is to be taken into consideration when we seek to understand God's will in any subject. We believe Jesus to have inspired every word of the Old and New Testaments. Though the New Testament is the New Covenant and therefore trumps the *requirements* of the Old Law, we still have much to learn about wise and righteous living and about the character of God from the Old Testament.

Cindy Webb, *B.S.*, states in her article "**Is the Babywise Method Right For You? What You Should Know About Babywise and Growing Kids God's Way**" that Ezzo "feels that children are are morally depraved from birth – that they are born with a "sin nature." But, while many evangelical professionals believe in the concept of original sin, they don't embrace Ezzo's interpretation as he applies it to children. In fact, evangelical Christians are some of Ezzo's most staunch and vocal critics. In "Growing Kid's God's Way," Ezzo writes: "A child's nature is intrinsically self-oriented, self-legislative, self-serving, and void of moral qualities..." (p. 267) He believes that "Children will become progressively more sinful unless brought under control by the early training of their parents."

There's just not a lot that I disagree with here. It is a basic tenant of Christianity that we are born with a sin nature. Romans 5 speaks clearly to the depraved nature of man as a result of 'original sin.'

Matt Perman says, "R.C. Sproul very clearly explains one of the very important truths that original sin teaches us: 'We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.' People do not come into this world good and then get a sinful nature upon their first willful sin that they commit. Rather, we come into the world with a sin nature and all of our sins are a *result* of having that sin nature. We act according to our natures. So because of our sin nature, we do sinful actions. A cow does not become a cow by mooing, but moos because he is a cow. Likewise we do not become sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners."

This is further supported in Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:2-3, Job 14:4; Proverbs 22:15, Jeremiah 17:9 . . . in truth, the list goes on and on.

I am not alone in my concern about Ezzo's teachings. A partial list of those who have publically voiced their concerns regarding his teachings includes:

Steven Arterburn, founder of New Life Ministries, response to questions on New Life radio show.

Rich Buhler, radio pastor and counselor: commentary on radio broadcast.

Dr. Randy Carlson, President, Family Life Communications, response to questions on Parent Talk radio show, January, 2002

I have no idea where you are gathering this information. It's my understanding that Steve Arterburn is a personal friend and supporter of the Ezzos. Rich Buhler hasn't been on the radio for years, and I don't remember him quoting against their material. I don't know anything about Randy Carlson's comments. I would appreciate any information substantiating these names as being in opposition to the Ezzos.

Dr. James Dobson, President, Focus on the Family, Radio Broadcast August 25, 1999: in response to on-air question. <http://www.ezzo.info/Focus/dobsontranscript.htm>

Focus on the Family: letter of concern regarding GFI, original letter 1993 with revisions at varying intervals, current revision released August 20, 1999. Although the wording of Focus on the Family's letter has varied, the organization has consistently stated that it does not recommend GFI's materials to its constituents. <http://www.ezzo.info/Focus/FOTFstatement.htm>

I am familiar with this response from Focus on the Family. I know they get a lot of questions about the Ezzo's material and usually send out a standard response that has not changed much over the years. It's not all that critical, if you've ever seen it. They warn against using the material rigidly. So do the Ezzos.

Dr. Dobson made a comment on air about the exclusive sound to the title, *Growing Kids God's Way*. He made that comment before he came out with his recent book, *The Focus on the Family Complete Book of Baby and Childcare* whose advertising trailer was, *Everything You Need to Know in Parenting*. One of the five core values we hold to as staff at Southeast includes *trusting positive intentions*. I trust that Dr.

Dobson did not intend for his title nor his trailer to sound as exclusivistic as it could be interpreted. I choose to believe that Dr. Dobson intended for the reader to know that his book is comprehensive; that it covers most of the bases in parenting. He has earned the benefit of that doubt. I believe Mr. Ezzo has earned the same.

*Grace Community Church: "A Statement Regarding Gary Ezzo and Growing Families International by the board of elders of Grace Community Church." Gary Ezzo developed his materials while a staff member at Grace. The church has publicly disavowed all association with GFI. Original statement issued October 16, 1997: <http://messageboards.ivillage.com/iv-ppezso/?msg=3231.6>
Revised version: <http://www.ezzo.info/GCC/revisedgrace.htm>*

Your documentation sites two statements. The entire history as to how this revised statement came about is available and quite telling (<http://www.ezzotruth.com/macarthur.html>), but I thought you might find it of interest that GCC's significantly reduced and revised statement contained 3 points of disagreement. The first one they list is their concern that the Ezzos do not address the issue of the depravity of the child with sufficient emphasis. GCC's position on the sin nature of a child is in direct opposition to Cindy Webb's discussed above. I guess you have to pick one source or the other, otherwise they contradict each other.

Rev. Doug Haag, pastor of family ministries, Evangelical Free Church, Fullerton (California): theological review in "Religious Parenting Programs: Their relationship to Child Abuse Prevention," presented by the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Orange County Parenting Program Review Committee (listed under "child Development/Psychology," above).

Doug Haag is one of those who is affiliated with the Orange County anti-spanking advocacy group, as is Hanegraaff, and Sears (who is Hanegraaff's pediatrician). Again, all three of these individuals are advocates of a rather extreme attachment parenting philosophy. Their accusations and claims are obsolete, were never substantiated, and their credibility regarding the Ezzo's ministry is negligent.

Hank Hanegraaff, president, Christian Research Institute: commentary on radio broadcast of The Bible Answer Man, July 28, 1998, October 6, 1998, October 8-9, 1998, October 26, 1998, October 27, 1998, March 25-26, 1999.

I'm guessing you are not familiar with the heat under which Hank Hanegraaff has come. Enclosed is a document that will give you a sampling of some of the recent issues with which he's dealing. In addition, you can connect to this link for more information about the dispute between the original founders of CRI and Hank Hanegraaff <http://www.cultlink.com/ar/darlenemartin.htm>. The fact that GFI attempted no less than seven times to contact Hanegraaff is well documented. To understand the character of this man is to understand how he could go to the length that he did to slander Gary Ezzo and then hide from the man he accused.

There are many wonderful, Christian-based alternatives to the teachings of Gary Ezzo. I am not even suggesting the classes be completely stopped at Southeast. Instead, I recommend that these alternatives to Ezzo's teachings be researched, considered and offered to the Southeast Christian Church family. A list of these alternatives can be found on the following website: <http://www.ezzo.info/alternatives.htm>

We have offered and will continue to offer several other programs at Southeast in addition to those provided by *Growing Families International*. Some of these programs include: *Parental Guidance Required* by Andy Stanley; *Parenting with Love and Logic*, by Foster Cline and Jim Fay; *Bringing Up Boys*, by James Dobson; *Effective Parenting*, by Chip Ingram. Southeast isn't closed-minded to any parenting program, and I will review most anything with the hope and anticipation that we can offer that curriculum to our congregation. There are several parenting curricula that upon review haven't met the criteria of our church, either due to their theology (or lack of it) or the quality of their presentation.

Perhaps you are blessed to have a family with a father in the home. Perhaps this is and will be the only marriage you will ever have. I hope that is the case for you. Perhaps you have not adopted or are not fostering any of your two young children. Perhaps you don't know of a young father struggling to care for his infant daughter after his girlfriend abandoned her child 3 hours after giving birth, signing away all rights. I don't know. But here in Family Ministry we work hard with all types of family situations: Single parents, some who have never been married before and have never had a healthy family modeled for them; blended families who are falling apart because they can't get on the same page with their parenting; adoptive families who are experiencing Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and want to give the child back they'd recently brought into their home because they didn't know it would be so hard; parents who are struggling with children with ADD, ADHD, ODD, autism, downs, and other forms of behavior problems and disabilities. Sometimes our work is with (what would appear to be) normal families with healthy children, yet the common event of adding a child to their family has so rocked their world that they lose all ability to function normally without help. Situations like these are just "a day in the life" of Family Ministry at Southeast Christian Church. And helping them is our heartbeat; it's what we do. Many of these families have been transformed and marriages saved as a direct result of their application of the principles taught by Mr. Ezzo. You are welcome to see the numerous surveys and testimonies that continually support that.

Finally, even though we may need to agree to disagree on infant feeding and child rearing philosophy, it doesn't mean that you won't have children that are obedient, respectful, and come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It does mean, however, that you might get there in a different way than others. We are blessed to live in a country that gives us the freedom to raise our children in a manner that returns them to the mark, Jesus Christ. We are certainly not going to be divisive within the church body as to how we will accomplish that.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this further or would like to have a complimentary copy of the resources I mention above.

Sincerely,

Susan St. Clair
Parenting Ministry Coordinator
sstclair@secc.org

Enclosures:

Your e-mail dated February 14, 2006

Dr. James Dobson's: [Views on corporal punishment and authority](#)

Dr. John MacArthur: [Shade for our Children](#)

Dr. Albert Mohler: [Should Spanking Be Banned? Parental Authority Under Assault](#)

Gary Ezzo: [Along the Virtuous Way, excerpt from Chapter 12, Consequences and Punishment](#)

Gary Ezzo: [Along the Virtuous Way, Appendix 4, Cultural Spanking Theories](#)

Christianity Today: [Christian Research Institute Accused of 'Naive' Bookkeeping](#)