

Excerpt from  
Thy Rod  
And Thy Staff  
They Comfort Me

Christians and the  
Spanking Controversy

By

Samuel Martin

This volume is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Ernest L. Martin (1932-2002) and Helen R. Martin.  
Thank you for your love and for your desire for me to be a part of your family.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.  
Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath:  
for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.  
Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:  
for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.  
Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

--- Romans 12:17-21

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### **Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying**

In the last chapter, we discussed the subject of the use of the word “*sh’ol*” in Proverbs 23:13-14 and the problems associated with the interpretation that is applied to this verse by many religious teachers who are advocating smacking. This verse in Proverbs 23:13-14 is not the only verse relating to smacking, however, that poses some serious problems when we look at the actual meaning in the original languages. Another key verse along this same line is found in Proverbs 19:18 and is the title for this chapter. Let us look at it. It says: “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.”

On the basis of this verse cited above, numerous advocates of smacking have developed complex doctrines concerning the need for children to cry during and after being spanked. For example, one pastor in his book on child rearing points out that: “The smacking should be administered firmly. It should be painful and it should last until the child’s will is broken. It should last until the child is *crying*, not tears of anger but tears of a broken will. Another author follows the same line of thinking: “After correction, a parent needs to allow a child to cry for a reasonably short amount of time. Then a child should be told to stop *crying* and be brought under control.” Probably one of the most prominent religious advocates of smacking children puts the same thought this way. He says: “Real *crying* usually lasts two minutes or less, but may continue for five. After that point, the child is merely complaining, and the change can be recognized in the tone and intensity of his voice. I would require him to stop the protest crying, usually by offering him a little more of what caused the original tears.”

There is one theme that is common throughout the last three quotes that I have given above. It is the word “*crying*.” These advocates of smacking, by using this word, are specifically referring to this passage in the book of Proverbs as their justification for this suggestion. There can be no doubt that this is the case. They are not alone in suggesting this idea. Thousands of pastors and Bible

teachers suggest exactly the same thing on the basis of using this single verse as their Biblical authority. There is, however, a problem with this whole idea. Let us look at this verse in Proverbs 19 in greater detail. Before we do that, however, let us place the question of “crying” as it is laid out in the book of Proverbs as a whole in context.

### **The use of the word “*crying*” in the book of Proverbs**

The book of Proverbs mentions the concept of “*crying*” on 10 different occasions. Let us look at these individually. First, we find the three usages of the Hebrew word “*rah-nan*.” These are as follows and the corresponding English word is italicised in these texts: “Wisdom *crieth* without; she uttereth her voice in the streets.” Next, note the next usage: “She *crieth* at the gates...” Finally, the last usage of this word in Proverbs: “In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth *sing* and rejoice.”

What we find these contexts and the others featuring this word Hebrew “*rah-nan*,” is that this word is most often translated into English by the words “*sing*,” “*shout*,” “*sang*,” “*cry out*,” “*rejoice*,” “*shout aloud for joy*,” “*triumph*,” and “*shouteth*.” At no time in any text, neither in Proverbs, nor any other Biblical book where this word is used, does this word ever refer to crying in the sense of tears, either of joy or pain.

Next, we find four instances where the concept of “*crying*” is again mentioned in Proverbs. This concerns the use of the Hebrew word “*hab-mah*.” Let us look at them now. First, we have the following: “She *crieth* in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates:” Next, we have two texts speaking of impious women: “She is *loud* and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house.” We also have the following: “A foolish woman is *clamorous*; she is simple, and knoweth nothing.” Finally, note this text: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is *raging*...” Now what is interesting about these four texts is that while the original word in Hebrew “*hab-mah*” is translated by four different

words in English that are italicised in the texts above (*crieth*, *loud*, *clamorous* and *raging*), none of these words or texts relate to the idea of “*crying*” which brings tears.

We also have two other examples of “*crying*” found in Proverbs. They are found in the following text. “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the *cry* of the poor, he also shall *cry* himself, but shall not be heard.” The first word translated “*cry*” is in Hebrew “*z-gab-keh*.” This word does occasionally refer to crying, even of children. The second word translated “*cry*” is the Hebrew word “*gab-nah*.” This word is translated numerous ways in the Hebrew Bible, but never in the sense of “*crying*” with tears.

So we are left with one final verse that refers to “*crying*” and it is the verse that this chapter is named after. It is Proverbs 19:18. Let us look at it once again. “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his *crying*.” Once again, I have italicised the word “*crying*” in the King James Version and it is this verse that, as I said previously, provides the justification for smacking proponents to strongly recommend that children who are spanked be brought to the state of crying with tears.

There is only one problem with this interpretation. It doesn’t hold up to even the most simple of examinations of the meaning of the Hebrew words. The word translated “*crying*” in Proverbs 19:18 is the Hebrew word “*mooth*.” This word is used well over 500 times in the Hebrew Bible and is translated by about 40 different cognate words that all refer and are translated by words relating, without ambiguity or exception (except for this single verse we are here discussing) to the concept of death! Only in this verse did the King James Version translators render this word by the English word “*crying*.” This word has nothing even remotely related to crying that brings tears at all. What we have here is a very bad mistranslation. Modern Bible scholars recognize this fact almost universally. First, the Revised Standard Version, in reference to this verse says: “do not set your heart on his destruction. J. B Rotherman’s excellent translation renders it as follows: “Correct thy

son, because there is hope, Yet not so as to slay him ...” Finally, in the Interlinear Bible, we have the following: “Chasten your son while there is hope; and do not set your soul on making him die.” By correcting the translation, a whole different meaning to the verse arises. The feeling shifts away from harsh, legalistic judgment to one of moderation. It shows that there are actions that parents can and should take to correct behaviour of a wayward child. [within the environment of the Law of Moses as pointed out before.] However, these actions should not be taken to extremes. This is clearly implied by the meaning of this verse. This verse could be argued to be against aggressive forms of punishment. When we look at this verse, the use of the word “hope” is most important. We get a strong indication that the latter portion of the verse points to a situation where hope is now lost. This is certainly in evidence if an uncorrected life leads one down the path of crime, which in the Mosiac system could lead to the death penalty. This seems a much more clear interpretation based upon the context and it is this idea that most Christian authorities assign to this verse. Certainly, no parent would lose hope in a child due to his crying, but one certainly would find oneself in a hopeless situation if his or her child were moving down the path towards death.

Additionally, we find that while there are over 20 Hebrew words that relate to “*crying out*,” “*crying aloud*,” “*to cry*”, etc. not one of these words is found in the whole book of Proverbs.

Not only that, there are six different Hebrew words that refer to the concept of “*weeping*” which involves tears on numerous occasions. In actual fact, a careful examination of these words will show that they rarely refer to children. One example where one of them does refer to a child concerns the discovery of the baby Moses by Pharaoh’s daughter. The text says: “And when she had opened it (the box in which Moses lay), she saw the child: and, behold, a weeping boy.” More often though you find these words describing weeping having to do with people weeping over the deaths of loved ones, over deaths in battle, over deaths of holy men or kings and similar situations. The important thing to point out in this context, however, is that these words are conspicuous in the

book of Proverbs: conspicuous for their absence! These six Hebrew words translated by “weeping,” “wept” and “weep” are not found once in Proverbs.

Finally, there is only one word in the Bible that is translated and means exactly without exception “tears.” This is the Hebrew word “*dim-gah*.” This word means “tears” (as a result from crying or weeping) exactly and this word also does not appear in the whole book of Proverbs even one time.

In summary, looking at the evidence as a whole, the concepts of “crying,” “weeping” and “tears” are not discussed within the pages of the book of Proverbs. Based on this evidence, the idea that the Biblical book of Proverbs advises parents or any other person to spank children to induce crying and bring forth tears is without any foundation or basis according to the data found in the Biblical texts.