



Dear Editor

I was shocked at David Skinner's letter in the Summer 2004 issue of *ACT Now*. The instructions in the Old Testament were given for parents in the days of no schools; they are not intended for 21st Century teachers in a post-modern technological world! You can haul all sorts of Bible verses out of context to prove anything you want, but that is not wisely using the Bible – as Paul instructed Timothy to do.

If Mr Skinner thinks that the way to instil a respect for doing right is through fear he is sadly mistaken. Certainly history does not bear out the argument that beating children and causing fear leads to them obeying the law. Historically our prisons would have been empty for centuries if this were the case. Should children be fearing teachers anyway?

I speak as someone who started teaching in 1972 in Scotland. The first thing I bought was a leather belt (tawse) and yes, occasionally, I used it. I hated doing so. I saw it misused by many teachers, out of frustration, and, looking back now, on children who had learning and/or real behavioural/psychological difficulties.

I taught in an American Christian school where corporal punishment was used. I was horrified at the violence perpetrated against children with wooden spoons and trouser belts, depending on the age of the child. It made the children desperately unhappy or drove the bad behaviour underground and we had bullying in that school in a way I have rarely seen before or since.

There are several reasons why we cannot return to corporal punishment in schools.

- We would be breaking the law.
- If we are to love our neighbours and enemies as Jesus said, does hitting them not show lack of love? Hitting hurts physically and should we be causing such hurt?

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- We should live/teach by example – how can we tell children not to fight or hit one another if we are hitting them?
- We might well get hit back, if not by the child, by an older brother or sister, or by a parent. We might even find our family threatened.

Violence breeds violence. There are other ways to instil discipline without resorting to violence. To compare what a surgeon does to a teacher hitting a child is nonsense. They are not at all similar.

The problems we are reaping now stem from bad, inconsistent parenting. A child's nature is formed before they come to school – ask any child development psychologist. Children get mixed messages from what the parent says is acceptable and what the school says.

Actually, some of the worst behaviour I have witnessed has been from adults in their 30s and 40s! What is regarded as acceptable by some parents is not what schools would accept as civilised behaviour. Many of the worst behaved children I have taught and lived beside are those who have suffered strict (if not cruel) corporal punishment at home.

If Mr Skinner is so keen about following instructions in the Bible to the letter he should not eat prawns, lobster, crab, rabbit or pork, he ought to get himself and all males circumcised, he ought not allow female colleagues to work during their periods, women in church would need their hair covered at all times and, oh yes, he should treat his slaves well! You can obey the letter of the law and totally miss the spirit of the law. We don't live in Old Testament times.

Jesus brought new life and love into the world. He shows us all that there is another way.

Here's a little Scottish song we sang as children nearly fifty years ago, it may be even older:

'Oor school's the best wee school,
It's made wi' bricks an' plaster,
But the only thing that's wrong wi' it,
Is the baldy headed master,
He goes tae the pub on a Saturday night,
He goes tae church on Sunday,
He prays tae God tae gi' him strength,
Tae belt the weans on Monday!

Schools cannot cure the ills of society by corporal punishment. There is too much violence in this world already. Surely, as Christian teachers, we ought to follow the example of Jesus – and go out of our way to love those who are unloved, difficult, disturbed and even violent. We should return hate with love and, dare I say, be prepared to turn the other cheek.

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