

Orthodox Parenting Conference
Saturday, September 19, 2020 at 12PM to 4PM EDT
Virtual conference on Orthodox Parenting
Difficult Conversations

EDT

12:00-Is God Real by Fr. Patrick Cardine

12:30-Sexuality by Fr. Raphael Barberg

01:00-When Parents Disagree by Kh. Kerry Pappas

01:30-The Influence of Friends by Fr. Michael Nassar

02:00-Sibling Rivalry by Kh. Gigi Shadid

02:30- **Discipline vs Anger by Fr. John Finley (1230p MDT)**

03:00- Difficult Conversations by Dr. Philip Mamalakis, Keynote Address

Discipline vs. Anger
by Fr. John Finley

Human beings are psycho-somatic beings, i.e. we are by nature soul and body united in a human person. As Christians we worship God in a two-fold way, i.e. we worship Him with our soul and our body. St. Nikolai of Zica says: “The more a child is insensitive to the spirit and conscience, it is more sensitive to the body.” This is why we sometimes have to reach into the soul of a child through bodily discipline. If you were to ask an athlete, he or she might tell you that many life lessons were learned through physically disciplining the body for contest, that might not otherwise have been learned.

When approaching the subject of the discipline of children, we might be tempted to separate, rather than simply distinguish these two aspects of human nature, directing disciplinary measures only toward the soul, i.e. the mind, the heart, and the will, rather than to both soul and body. We must not separate or create a false dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. We cannot say that the body, being physical, is therefore, not spiritual.

Was not Christ’s body spiritual? Did not Christ assume the soul and body of a man in order to save the whole man, not just his soul? We must direct the spiritual discipline of our children toward the salvation of both soul and body, so that the soul might subject and direct the body in a God-pleasing manner.

1. We partake of all the sacraments by physical means:
 - a. Baptism by immersion of the body in water
 - b. Chrismation by the anointing of various parts of the body with the Holy Chrism
 - c. Eucharist by receiving the body and blood of the Lord into our bodies.
 - d. Holy Unction by means of anointing with Holy Oil

- e. Confession/Repentance by confession with the mouth (Rom 10:9-10)¹ and the placing of the stole over the head
 - f. Holy Matrimony by the exchange of rings, the placing of the crowns, the partaking of the cup, and procession around the table
 - g. Holy Orders by the kneeling and the laying on of hands
2. We worship with the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet.
 3. We exercise the three disciplines of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting with
 - a. The eyes of compassion, restraining them from the improper glance
 - b. The tongue giving voice, directing our mind's to God
 - c. With the hands and the feet, obeying God's will
 - i. Through bodily restraint, especially the stomach

Why then, are some parents hesitant to employ corporal discipline, or outright against it, when it comes to molding and directing the hearts, minds, and wills of their children toward God?

Some might argue that sending a child to his room for a “time out”, or withholding dessert, or one’s favorite food, is a corporal discipline, thinking that an actual corporal “rod” of discipline might be seen as child abuse of some sort.

But child abuse can also be psychological, non-physical, verbal, negligent, demeaning, demoralizing, threatening, etc. without any corporal instrument of discipline. When such measures are taken against a child, especially with anger or disgust, everything is undone, everything has its opposite effect, even if no physical discipline is administered at all.

In fact, physical or corporal discipline can have a saving effect on a child, dare we say, a sacramental effect on the salvation of child, if administered out of love...God’s love. Such methods of psychological and verbal warfare can destroy the spirit in a child, while we meanwhile point the finger with accusation toward parents who administer corporal discipline out of love as destroying the spirit in their children.

St. Theophan the Recluse – Raising them Right Forming attitudes – Chapter 4

Mind p.38

- In children the power of thinking is quickly manifested. It comes at the same time as speech and grows together with the development of speech. Therefore, the formation of the mind must be begun together with speech.
- In other words, we don’t simply teach children to speak; we teach them how to think at the same time.
- They learn by listening to us talk.
- They learn by us telling them stories.

¹ That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

- They learn by us asking them questions, listening to their answers, and reinforcing their good answers and correcting their mistakes.
- In doing so, we instill sound principles of judgement in the child.
- We should remember that truth is accessible to all, and that we should not wait to begin teaching the Truth to our children.

Will p.39

- Being unable to distinguish good from evil a child desires everything, and is ready to do everything he desires. A child left to himself becomes untamable.
- The simplest means for confining the will within its proper bounds lies in teaching children to do nothing without permission.
- This should produce an attitude of
 - obedience toward parents,
 - a disposition to deny oneself, and
 - the conviction that one should not obey oneself in everything.
- At the same time parents should inspire their children to good deeds.
- At first children must be ordered to do good deeds, but later simply guided into doing it themselves:
 - Almsgiving
 - Compassion
 - Mercifulness
 - Yielding to others
 - Patience
 - e.g. sharing toys, taking turns, waiting in line, etc.

Heart p.41

- The heart is the capability of tasting and feeling satisfaction. But what kind of satisfaction? True satisfaction which comes from immersion in
 - A church-centered life
 - Reverence for the Church building
 - Participation in singing, veneration of icons
 - To the spirit belong
 - The fear of God (mind)
 - Conscience (will)
 - Prayers (feeling)
 - Children are already predisposed to to invisible world, and assimilate these things willingly and happily and without fatigue.
- Let parents, in accordance with their best understanding, give their commands in such a way that children are not forced to be transgressors of their will; and if they have already become such, they should be disposed as much as possible to repentance.
- This is the rule:
 - begin with the child's very first breath;
 - begin everything at once, and not just one thing;
 - do this all
 - unceasingly,

- evenly,
- by degrees,
- without jumps,
- with patience and expectation,
 - observing a wise gradualness,
 - taking note of the sprouts and making use of them,
 - considering nothing unimportant in such an important matter. p.43

Review of My Thoughts shared in the February 2020 presentation:

One of my spiritual fathers taught me three degrees of seriousness in disciplining children:

1. General naughtiness - bad
2. Disobedience - worse
3. Talking back to mother – the most serious.
 - a. Think about it – if we grow up freely talking back disrespectfully to our mother, as adults we may talk back disrespectfully to our mother - the Church, and her teaching and guidance in our lives. This spirit of disrespect in our souls must be addressed at an early age.

Cautions:

1. If we are angry at our children, we should wait until the anger inside of us subsides before administering the corrective discipline.
2. We should place limits upon ourselves (beforehand) in terms of how much discipline is administered, in order to keep ourselves in check, and not sin against our children.
3. Finally, children discern the difference when we discipline them out of anger, and when we discipline them out of love.

Regardless how we choose to correct our children,

- we should (in my opinion) never administer corrective discipline with the hand, and
- we should always embrace our children with a big hug and a kiss and tell them we love them after the discipline is administered,
 - because we know that God loves us when He corrects us.

V. Rev. John Finley has been a staff member of the Department of Missions and Evangelism for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America since 1996. He is also serving as the Interim Dean of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology.

Fr. John is a graduate of St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology with an STM (Sacred Theology Master's) Degree in 1981. He taught Theology and Liturgical Studies in the Academy from 1979 to 1992 in the residence programs of study. During that time he developed two correspondence courses in Liturgical Studies and has shared much of the content of those courses in his Singing the Triumphal Hymn podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio:

<https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/triumphalhymn>

More recently, Fr. John has worked with Dn. Adam Roberts in spearheading a project to move the correspondence courses online, and additionally offering tutoring for homeschool parents through St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology: www.saaot.edu This project has grown into a full-blown K-12 online school called St. Athanasius Academy. The correspondence courses have formed a core curriculum for an undergraduate Associate of Arts (AA) degree, and we are expanding to develop and offer a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) degree online – hopefully, next summer.