

Spare that Rod!

*by Marilyn Reeves*

NFL star Adrian Peterson recently turned himself in to authorities in east Texas, after news broke that he had hurt his child under the guise of discipline. According to his lawyer, Peterson used a switch to spank his son in doling out discipline much like he experienced as a child growing up in East Texas.

“Doling out discipline like he experienced as a child” are the key words here. Dr. Spock notwithstanding, most people treat their children the way they were treated by their own parents, and their parents before them. Although, in cases of inherited abuse, some finally decide that enough is enough, vow to break the cycle and to raise their own children in a different manner.

Children are not punching bags. They are miniature human beings, helpless and defenseless, and dependent upon adults to teach them what they need to know about the world and how to survive in it. Under the best circumstances, those lessons are taught with love, kindness, and understanding.

Culture and religion often play a role in shaping attitudes of child rearing. Children raised in overly strict homes – be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim – are occasionally subjected to religious abuse. If their parents grew up believing that women are inherently evil, that children are the product of sin, and with religious doctrines which emphasize the concept of hell and damnation as their basis for motivation, pass on to their children the idea that they are bad, that they must be punished for even the slightest infraction, and often expect even the youngest of their offspring to automatically know when something they’re doing is wrong. This over-zealous approach to child rearing often results in rebellious teenagers, adults with no self-esteem and even psychopathic killers. Tell a child often enough that he is bad, and he will carry out that prophecy.

Children need to be allowed the privilege of learning through trial and error. If they do something wrong, they need to understand why it was wrong and how they can do better next time. They learn nothing from the words “Because I said so!” The only lesson a child who has been beaten learns is to fear the parent who administered that beating.

Things are beginning to change for the better, however – at least in Western society. With our growing understanding of psychology and sociology, we are becoming more aware of the effects that extremely harsh home environments can wreak upon our children. People are learning to raise their children with love, not abuse, paving the way for a better, more civilized world.