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## **Family**

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* – October 2007 E-Newsletter

### **COMMENTARY**

**N. B.** This is the second of our e-newsletters coming late. We will try to keep them coming regularly. The July letter was late because I was out of town and had to write it on the road. Recently one of my colleagues suggested I write a commentary on the family. As I write this I am waiting for a phone call to testify as an expert witness in a child custody case. I do not like these cases because I know what trauma this inflicts on the child, but justice has to be done and if I can contribute to its occurrence, I am willing to do so.

The American family is in deep trouble. The marriage divorce rate is 50% and in 43% of the divorces children are involved. Of these, approximately 50% will end up with psychiatric problems that will require treatment. They are at risk for all kinds of problems. Rebellion, drug use, teen age sexual activity, depression, anxiety disorders, difficulty in relating intimately, unstable marriages when they mature, etc. are problems that occur in children of divorce.

Some of this is because there is an attack by humanists who want to destroy the family. They think that if they can accomplish this they can take the children and indoctrinate them with their philosophy and create more humanists. This is why they have promoted alternative lifestyles and selfishness so vigorously. They basically are hedonistic and amoral so they want to create a society that is hedonistic and amoral. That kind of society has always fallen. Recently I read an article on the hedonism of the Roman emperors and how this spread into the entire empire. Then Rome fell and the "dark ages developed. Hedonism creates an undisciplined society full of undisciplined

people. They deteriorate in their selfishness and are too weak to defend themselves from highly disciplined opponents. The belief of Islam today is that our hedonism has so weakened us that they can terrorize us and force their beliefs on us since we are too weak to resist. It appears that a large segment of the population does lack the strength. We can go the way Rome did unless we can strengthen our families.

Years ago I was a contributor to a book discussing the characteristics of strong families. My subject matter had to do with managing stress and crisis. It was clear that Christian families handled them both with greater success than pagan families. I had previously conducted a major research project on the family life of persons who were without psychiatric problems, heroin addicts, alcoholics, persons with manic-depressive disease and with schizophrenia. We had more than 100 patients in each group. Except for the normal persons, almost all in each diagnostic group came from families that were dysfunctional.

A normal person is one who has few conflicts, few symptoms, can love someone other than themselves and who has a satisfactory work capacity. We took our criteria for functional families from the Bible. These were that the marriage that established the family was based on love and order; there was good communication; there were biblically determined roles; they held biblically determined values, children were appropriately disciplined and they had a philosophy to live by, i.e. they were Christians. The data we collected always confirmed what we expected. Families that were dysfunctional were disparate in more than two of the criteria for normal. Most often the disparities were either in a marriage based on love and order or role reversal or both. If these two problems were present it is apparent that there was poor communication. Values were often taught legalistically if they were taught at all, and many times if the families were at least nominal Christians they had a distorted faith. None of them were what Ryle called authentic Christians.

As I researched the literature on the subject of marriage and family and while writing up the research I had collected, I was impressed that love was the most important aspect of marriage and family life. First Corinthians 13:13 says that love is the greatest attribute of our faith, and Jesus' commandments were all about love. Certainly it is the foundation on which a functional marriage is built. But most people do not know what love really is.

Years ago I read a book by Julian Marias, a Spanish philosopher, entitled *Metaphysical Anthropology*. Although I had extensively studied emotion I had never run across a description of the development of the emotion of love like his. I adopted it immediately to use in my work with patients. He used the term installation to describe the love relationship of a husband and wife. He said love begins with attraction. Many things attract us to others and I will not list them as they are too numerous, but that is where love begins. With attraction the persons come along side one another and through communication they get to know one another. As they do so they psychospiritually install one another. They become one. This concept means that they do what God commanded them to do in Genesis 2:24. All relationships can be explained using this concept. Our installation in our spouse, though, determines the functionality of our marriage. For if we install that person, we live our life for them and where we go they go and where they go we go. How can this be?

The answer is that our minds are supernatural, so it is possible for us to become one with others. Our mates are completely installed in us. With salvation God is completely installed in us. Our children are completely installed as soon as we know they have been conceived, but as they grow older they separate and individuate and we release them to establish their own installation with a mate. With friends there is only a partial installation. The concept of installation has caused me to reject the statement I hear people make about their spouses when they say they are their "best friend." A spouse should be more than a friend! They should be one.

Marias' concept of installation helped me to develop a relational psychology that made it possible for me to better understand the marital and family problems that I had to deal with in my practice. It has also helped me to understand the pathology of a particular relationship called bondage. I also saw that the resolution of a relationship called grief means that we have to release the lost loved one whether it is a mate, a child, a fetus or a friend.

All of us are born with a radical need for love! It must be available before birth and throughout our life. It profoundly affects the lives of children. The need is manifest in the last trimester of pregnancy when children can sense the emotional state of their parents. If the atmosphere of the home is loving, they will bond much quicker to their parents after they are born. (They also like lively music when they are in the womb.) Prayer makes a difference. Francis and Judith McNutt have written a book called *How to Pray for Your Unborn Child* that describes the importance of this prenatal loving. It is love, though, that makes a difference for the rest of their lives. After birth children have to be held, cuddled and spoken to with pleasant words or sounds to help them grow. If they are only fed and kept clean and warm they will die. As children grow they still want to have physical contact and to be told and shown that they are loved unconditionally. Not surprisingly when they mature they still want the same expressions of love. I do not know if I have seen this expressed as a lifelong need during my career. Paul must have known when he wrote his paean to love in 1 Corinthians 13.

Out of love comes happiness. In some research on another subject recently I was amazed at how often happiness was mentioned. Sadly, they frequently related it to vocation with no mention of love. I am sure that the world that is materialistic would relate it to earning money. Earning money, sadly, does not bring happiness nor does anything else in the world. Education does not, alcohol and drugs do not, sex without love does not, and other religions and cults do not. Love brings happiness. Years ago I asked the Lord what really brings happiness. He did not answer directly, but I realized in my practice that almost all of my patients complained of dysfunctional relationships.

They had bad relationships with their parents, with their mates, with their children, with their friends, with God, with their church, with fellow workers, or they were not creative in their vocation. Therefore I came to the conclusion that happiness comes when we have a right relationship with our parents, with our mates, with our children, with our friends, with God, and when we are vocationally creative.

How do we have a right relationship with our parents? The answer lies in having parents who love one another unconditionally. When they love one another unconditionally they can love us in the same way. God created in us a radical need for children and a desire to love them. When we love them we put their best interests and welfare above our own. This is why Jesus said if we want to be his followers we have to forget (deny) ourselves (Luke 9:23). If we accomplish this we will do what he tells us to do because his best interests are above our own. This is what someone does when they love another.

If we have denied ourselves we will find it easy to love our children. It is natural for them to cry a lot, to get sick and fretful, to be willful, to have temper tantrums, but we love them just the same. It is a fact that one of the fringe benefits of having children is to watch them while they are asleep. I will never forget going into my children's rooms and just stand watching them. Love would well up in me and I wondered how in the world they could have been so rambunctious and difficult, yet here I was loving them. It seems that love makes it possible to think that those negative behaviors make no difference. I am sure that God, who is our father, feels the same way about us when he watches us sleep. Our love for our children should be unconditional when they are awake. Unconditional love when expressed is affirmation and affirmation is what we all need as children and then throughout the rest of our lives.

In marriage we need to receive and give unconditional love. There is a song, “My Cup Runneth Over” with lyrics by Ed Ames, that expresses its presence so well. It goes like this:

*Sometimes in the mornin' when shadows are deep  
I lie here beside you just watching you sleep  
And sometimes I whisper what I'm thinking of  
My cup runneth over with love*

Loving a mate is an absolute. I cannot count the number of people I have seen who have contracted a marriage for the wrong reasons. Some have married because all their friends were getting married. Others got married because everyone thought they “were made for each other.” Others married because they had been “sweethearts” since they were in elementary school. They never dated anyone else so they had not had a choice. Others did not really get to know the person they were going to marry. Their courtship was too short. After they got married they found to their consternation that the person is an alcoholic, or an abuser, or a misogynist.

It is no wonder that marriages contracted after only three months of courtship usually end up in divorce. Many marriages are contracted before the persons are mature enough for marriage. Others marry even though they have communicated little in their courtship. It is a fact that good marriages have good communication and bad ones have poor communication. A problem occurs when one member of the dyad does not separate and individuate from their parents. When this happens they do not leave their mother or father as God ordered them to do, and are then unable to become one with their husband or wife. A common problem is that the woman is pregnant and neither of them wants an abortion. So they marry as the honorable thing to do. Pregnancy casts a pall over the marriage even when they may have planned to get married or were engaged.

Loving friends is easier to do than loving a mate. It is a fact that we are attracted to a friend usually because we have common interests. As a physician I found that most of my friends were physicians. After I became a Christian my friendships shifted and I had more friends who were Christians. I did not cast away my physician friends, I just expanded my friendship base. I have to admit that I did not restrict myself to physicians only before I became a Christian since I had hunting and fishing buddies who were not physicians. One of the things that we usually do not do with friends is to live our lives for them. They are only installed partially in us and therefore it is not necessary for us to depend on them for support when we need it. To be sure they may give us support, but we usually depend on our family and church to provide it.

Loving Christians is like loving our brothers and sisters. It is no wonder that the relationship causes us to refer to them as brothers and sisters (in the Lord). The old song that says that old time religion makes you love everybody is true. The supernatural love that is in us draws us to others who have been adopted into God's family and makes us one. Even though Jesus commanded it, we do it automatically. Love draws us together and this is why we seek a church when we are saved. We know our brothers and sisters are there and they will love us. When I encountered God and became a Christian it only took a few days before I told my wife I wanted to go to church. She could not believe it. We had been married for 16 years and I had gone to church only to get married. As soon as we returned, I established new friendships with people who were authentic Christians. The love of God drew me to them.

Our love for God is the result of his love for us. The apostle John said that we love because God first loved us. When God installs himself in our lives at our invitation he immediately amplifies our love for all persons we relate to. One of my students who has a theological degree as well as a PhD was stiff and formal in all his relationships. He was not a person you were attracted to. He had a

radical encounter with the Lord and lost all his stiffness and formality. When I saw him for the first time after his encounter, he spontaneously hugged me. I could not believe that this was the same person who I had talked to two weeks ago. There was love and joy in his voice and his facial expressions displayed his feelings. This happened to me too. I loved my wife and children a hundred times more after my encounter and it made an enormous difference in my relationships with my patients. I really could love them as Christ had loved me. It made an enormous difference in the results of my therapy. I could now successfully treat borderline disorders that most psychiatrists do not treat successfully. I also had greater success with patients who had bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

Vocational creativity is something that makes for happiness. It occurs when we are doing a job that we can make a difference in other lives. Whether that difference is derived from a product that changes their life, or whether we render a service that they need and we do it in love, it will bring us both happiness. I have found that telling a clerk or waitress how much I appreciate their service does something for them. I eat in a barbecue restaurant in the town where I work. There is a little waitress who renders good service. She is prompt in waiting on us and sees to it that we get our food quickly. She also is cheerful and it is a joy to have her serve us. I always go out of my way to tell her how much I appreciate her as a waitress and as a person. She is not embarrassed when I do this, but always seems to feel loved and appreciated. I know it makes a difference in her life. It has nothing to do with the standard tip I give her.

What has all this to do with marriage and family life? It has everything! We are all humans and we all need love. There is unequivocal evidence scientifically and historically to support the idea that love is a basic ingredient of a successful marriage and a functional family. All of us flourish on love and are stunted by anger, abuse, jealousy, denigration, criticism, rejection, and neglect. In this day and age when so many people are messed up, the only thing that will heal them is love. The love of God is the greatest medicine of all but our love can go a long



way to helping them be healed too.