

Introduction

Love, unity and continuity are a few of God's benevolent intentions for and of a family. Why then do we not find this to be always the case in all families? The answer resides in the negligence of preserving these traits by allowing problems to go rampant without analysis nor solutions to them.

Patterns of Marital Problems

What is a happy family? A happy family is not one with zero problems but a unit whose members know how to work out their conflicts with the help of God. Disagreements are bound to take place among people because of many variables and differences including gender, education, upbringing, level of maturity, understanding, biological and psychological factors. Allowing these disagreements to develop into unhealthy problems will lead to dissensions and eventually inevitable some most abominable solutions. Problems in marriage seem to take one of four patterns.

1. Escalation

Escalating is responding to a negative attitude with another similar or more intensely negative one. Negativism is very powerfully destructive and unfortunately very common. There is usually no creativity in negativity. It is fast and detrimental.

One negative response annuls one thousand positive ones that came prior to it. An explicit example of the awful effect of the negative is given in Ecclesiastes chapter 10:1 *"Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, And cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor."* Proverbs 20:3 *"It is honorable for a man to stop striving, Since any fool can start a quarrel"* and Proverbs 29:11 *"A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back"* provide the advice and remedy. Usually it is easier to depict others' faults while minimizing or totally ignoring our own mistakes. All the law is summarized in "love your neighbor as yourself". If we devour one another, we will destroy each other. Do not allow to others what you would not allow to yourself. Emotional abuse is worse than physical abuse. Lack of self-control in such situations lead to a lot of hurt that may not be easily erased or forgotten. *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise"* (Proverb 12:15). Lack of self-control is manifest in the choice of the most hurting words. Augmenting problems to the extent of threatening with divorce or separation robs the family, especially children, of the feeling of security. In his epistle St. James lays the important foundation: *"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless"*

(James 1:26). We may say things that we do not mean just to hurt others. Learn how to stop escalating or augmenting problems from the Holy Bible: *"not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing"* (1 Peter 3:9) and *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"* (Proverbs 15:1). Examples from the Holy Bible whereby escalating a problem was cut short and a hot situation was turned into a balmy one is Abigail's solution of the problem that escalated between her husband and King David (1 Samuel 25).

2. Invalidation

Invalidation is the attitude of invalidating, putting down or belittling the other intentionally or unintentionally or just for the sake of what we may consider as fun or funny. Invalidation can extend to include the belittling of another person's opinion, personality, feelings, work, or thoughts. This process is well described in Proverbs 25:20 *"Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather, and like vinegar on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart."* St. Paul describes the antidote to invalidation in Ephesians 4:29 *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the*

hearers." Christ's verdict on invalidation is clear in Matthew 5:22 "*And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.*" Christ was always positive with people and teaching them to be so. This is clear in his response to the woman with the alabaster at Simon's house labeling her a woman with great love, praising her for doing what the others considered as waste and also rewarding her with the long term reward of being remembered for her deed throughout the ages (Matthew 26:6-13), with the sinful woman (John 8:2-12), he told her straight out that he was not about to condemn her. With the Samaritan woman (John 4:17-18), He saw her as a candid truthful woman. On the cross He saw His crucifiers as ignorant and not guilty of what they were doing. So, He asked forgiveness and judgment for them. Christ is described as "*A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory*" (Matthew 12:20).

3. Negative Interpretation

Negative interpretation takes place when what the speaker's intention is twisted from what it originally meant to what we intend for it to mean. An example is a wife's interpretation of her husband's gift to her as a bribe to have her do something for him or as a

cover up for something he has done. People's claim that that they can read and interpret people's thoughts and intentions is totally unbiblical for it is written "*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?*" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Wrong or negative interpretations lead to despair and giving up on each other. This process of interpreting things according to our beliefs and desires is a dangerous tool to use in educating youngsters. St. Paul admonishes against it saying "*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God*" (1 Corinthians 4:5). Positive and realistic thinking are both very important tools in interacting with people. Love "*rejoices in the truth;*" (1 Corinthians 13:6). Love "*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Doubting the intentions of the others hurts badly. Also, trying to fish for mistakes, feeling satisfied by catching others at their faults or doubting or negatively interpreting other people's intentions damage relationships. There is a big difference between objective facts and subjective opinions. For example, it is a fact if a husband is late coming home but it is her opinion if the wife interprets this tardiness as negligence of her.

Negative subjective interpretations may lead to destruction of the family oneness.

4. The "Hide & Seek" Pattern

This pattern is exhibited more by husbands who in their effort to avoid confrontation and any attempt to bring their issues to the light. This avoidance could either be overt or covert. Men avoid confrontation for three reasons:

- No intention to change: In trying to avoid commitment to change, some men avoid discussion
- Feeling of insecurity: Unable to bear the consequences of humiliation and hurt as a result of losing in a discussion, some men avoid discussion and communication.
- Delusion: False intention of avoiding escalating a problem which in reality is just mere avoidance of discussing it.

The Holy Bible teaches us to avoid avoidance. St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians chapter 4:25 says, *"Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another."* St. Paul urges openness, expression of emotions without hurting each other. *"Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil"*

(Ephesians 4:26-27). Prolonging the time of separation opens the door wide to Satan to increase the breach that started in the oneness of the family.

Conclusion

Four patterns, within which family problems seem to fall, exist and of which spouses should be aware in their attempt to analyze their conflicts and to find a solution and an end to them. A one thousand mile journey starts with a step. No change comes around without a start. Our Lord is a Lord of reconciliation. Therefore, put your confidence in the Lord who has given the commandments along with the assistance to fulfill them. Starting with the self is the best place to start without waiting for the other to initiate change or reconciliation. Breaking negative patterns is the most practical method of change. Humility and love are the two surest roads to tolerance, reconciliation, and accommodation of one another bearing in mind that change will not happen with the blink of an eye or overnight. David the psalmist used these strategies with Saul the King who wanted to kill him until he had him pronounce that David was better than him (1 Samuel 24).

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