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Family Values

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

In this essay I will comment on a subject that gets talked about quite a bit these days, but is rarely defined. This subject is FAMILY VALUES. Although politicians and church people talk a lot about them no one has defined them. Jim Dobson may have some where in his voluminous writings, but I have not read them nor have I seen him quoted.

Many years ago I became very interested in the Christian family and its influence on mental disease. I studied the role of the Christian family in the development or inhibition of mental disease. We evaluated several diagnostic groups of patients with mental disease and normal persons. To carry out the studies, I had to define the characteristics of the Christian family. I searched the scriptures and came up with the following criteria.

(1) The family must be intact. God does not intend for people to get married, have children and then divorce. Above all He condemns illegitimacy. I cannot find a single character in the Bible who was illegitimate. Indeed the Bible often mentions the fatherless, but usually in the same context as widows. They are children whose father has died or been killed. God insisted that families remain intact. He knew what happens to children when they do not have a father or mother.

Scientific evidence has accrued to show that children of divorce are at risk for psychiatric problems and are highly likely to have unstable marriages themselves. I have seen no studies on illegitimate children, but I am sure that they are also prone to have problems. The black community where almost 70 percent of children are illegitimate is filled with children with problems.

I think you can draw your own conclusions about the relationship of broken families or illegitimacy to the problems of our society today. I was convinced long ago that most children of worth come from unbroken homes.

(2) Marriage must be based on love (Eph. 5:25). Only when parents love one another is love available for the children. Children need affirmation (unconditional love) to grow up with the capacity to love themselves and others in a healthy and mature way. If they do not get affirmation they develop what Conrad Baars called in his book, *Born Only Once*, the "deprivation syndrome." Love is a *sine qua non*.

Most people do not define love though they feel it. What I am talking about is the emotion of love that the ancient Greeks called *Eros*. It is a love between a man

and a woman that installs them in one another. They become spiritually one. When this happens, they live their lives for one another. Even if they are apart, where one goes the other goes also. This love is the same as the love that Christ had for the church (Eph. 5:25). He gave his life for it. If they truly love one another, men and women should be willing to give their lives for one another. Greater Love has no man or woman than they give their lives for one another.

True love generates trust and frees both parents to love their children unconditionally. Love is patient and kind. Patience is necessary in relating to a spouse or raising children. Kindness is an absolute must. Love does not demand its own way. We must always put the needs of other family members first. We cannot demand our own way and be a good spouse or parent.

Love never gives up. Having raised five kids, I can tell you that this has to be. I am so glad that my father never gave up on me. He prayed for me for forty-four years before I became a Christian. I find it easy to never give up on mine.

Love also expects the best of a person. This is why the children of true Christians are achievers. A onetime maidservant of ours reared seven children, six of whom surpassed their parents by two or three socioeconomic levels. She loved them, and expected the best of them. They gave their best because she loved them and they loved her. She was a woman of strong faith.

(3) Biblical roles are lived out. God described men as heads of the household, protectors of the home, and disciplinarians. By disciplinarians I do not mean only the parent who metes out punishment. The father is to also instruct his children in right living and teach them how to put his teaching into action. He does this by living rightly himself and seeing to it that they do too.

The mother is to be a homemaker and child socializer. Her presence provides the child with security. It has been observed that when children are small they will play by themselves or with other children for a while, but they "check-in" often. They want to know that their mothers are there. In the same way, it is desirable that the mother be there to provide the instruction for early socialization. Children are naturally selfish. They have to be taught cooperation.

When I was doing my research on the family, I ran across an article in Ebony Magazine by a black female child psychiatrist from Howard University Medical school entitled something like The Plot to Destroy the Black Race. It was interesting that she saw the feminist movement as a primary threat. She felt that the feminist's desire to blur roles would result in role confusion in children, and thus in their destruction. I agree with her.

(4) Loving discipline is necessary. This has to be administered by both parents. As they do so, they have to be consistent and in agreement. Discipline includes instruction and punishment for transgression of rules for right living. Discipline

should always be authoritative not authoritarian. Only two forms of discipline are acceptable. Power assertion includes switching and any other noninjurious method is the first that is acceptable. Use only when necessary, and never in anger. The other more desirable form of discipline is what is called induction. With this form we explain to the child what is wrong with his behavior and inform him of the consequences of his wrong behavior for himself and others. Combine induction with power assertion before or after the painful punishment is administered.

One should never use a third method called love withdrawal. The technique most often used with this form, is to scream, yell, harshly criticize them, refuse to talk to them or ignore them. Love withdrawal destroys the foundations of self esteem.

When the child has lost emotional control, isolation is the best method of dealing with this problem. It is not love withdrawal. Removing the child from the stimuli that cause his emotional outbursts is essential. Their dyscontrol quickly dies down when they are by themselves for a few minutes.

(5) A family must possess a philosophy of life and teach it to their children. Our philosophy of life is Christianity! It is explicated in the Bible. It is sufficient for salvation, and a guide to right living (2 Tim. 3:17). It really is all we need to spell out the basics.

Included in this philosophy of life is a set of values that apply to the details of our lives. Values are beliefs or commandments and ordinances that make a favorable difference in our lives. If they do not, they have no value. The Bible speaks about relationships, money, sex, law and order, respect for other's possessions, education, marriage and family, discipline, diet, cleanliness, health practices, work, alcohol and drugs and almost every other important aspect of living. It describes how we are to manage all these, and the consequences of not living by them. Space does not allow me to discuss them in detail, but I can assure you the Bible speaks to every one.

In every family it is important that the faith that energizes this philosophy of life be witnessed to in word and deed. Often it is the case that parents never share their beliefs with their spouses and children. We should always be willing to share our faith in our family. Family devotions are not as effective as our witness. Sadly, I am going to have to wait until I get to Heaven to hear my father's witness. He never told me how he came to know the Lord.

In writing this I went back over my notes relating to values. In the folder I found all the scripture references that related to the subject of family values and values in general. I was amazed by the great amount of Bible study that I had done without a computerized Bible study program. I cannot recall the number of hours I spent accumulating those notes. The fifteen pages of notes are all written in longhand with a pencil. I cannot believe I was so diligent.

As I noted in my opening statements, the important criterion for any set of values is that they make a favorable difference in the lives of those who hold them. Obviously we can observe those around us and come to some tentative conclusion as to their veracity. Nevertheless, in this day of scientific research most people want better evidence than their crude observations. Most of us are not able to decide whether people who seem to be living normal productive lives are really OK. Scientific studies have been done that do prove the value of biblical principles for family structure.

The most powerful data set is that collected by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. They were Harvard sociologists who studied juvenile delinquency in the 1950's. They matched delinquents and non delinquents in a Boston ghetto, and followed them for twenty years. At the end of the time the delinquents were still in the ghetto, but the non delinquents had moved up socioeconomically and were no longer in the ghetto. The difference in outcome was that the non delinquents had intact families, roles that were appropriate, and a philosophy of life to live by.

Subsequently, Roy Grinker a psychoanalyst in Chicago evaluated the origins of 200 normal young males. He found that they all came from intact homes based on traditional (Christian) family structure. Their value system was clearly traditional, and they had encountered few problems in growing up and leaving home to establish independent lives. Our own studies of two hundred normal persons of all ages revealed the same thing. Even more important was the observation that almost all of our normal persons had been punished corporally.

Finally, Judson and Mary Landis have observed that a Philosophy of life (Christianity) makes for successful marriages. Even in these days of epidemic divorce we find that two Christians still contract and maintain successful marriages almost 95% of the time.

What can we say them about family values? One thing is for sure, and that is that being a Christian makes a greater difference, but just holding Christian values without true belief is also beneficial. This has to become part of our apologetic to the world.