



# Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

## SPECIAL REPORT

### GARY SMALLEY THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MATRIARCHY

by Albert James Dager



In teaching on family and personal relationships, perhaps the one person having the greatest impact upon the Church today apart from Dr. James Dobson, is Gary Smalley. Smalley's messages in lectures and writing have been targeted primarily for Christians, and offer much in the way of valuable lessons on personal spiritual growth as well as on developing sound personal relationships with others.

His book, *Joy That Lasts* (Zondervan, 1988), is an example of Smalley's giftedness in relating truths that encourage us to make an honest appraisal of our relationship to God and to our fellow man. His style is to apply Scripture to real-life experiences taken from counseling sessions.

*Joy That Lasts* provides some worthwhile reading. Some of his teachings are open to debate, as are the teachings of us all. But, generally, as long as Smalley relies on Scripture to guide his judgment, he has proven capable to counsel.

There are a few areas, however, notably in his books on marital relationships, in which he tends to rely more upon human wisdom and psychological technique than upon Scripture. While I could, with few reservations, recommend *Joy That Lasts*, and his parenting book, *The Key To Your Child's Heart* (Word Books, Waco, TX), there are some problems with his earlier writings that are still being published and widely read, as well as with his latest book to date, *The Language of Love*. It's as if Smalley had matured in his ability to counsel from Scripture and then had a sudden relapse back to relying heavily upon secular psychology instead.

As I said, Smalley has much to offer in the way of counsel provided he retains a biblically-based approach. Due to his increasing popularity it's important that Christians realize those areas in which he departs from that approach in order that they not be misled to think that, because Gary Smalley says it, it must be valid. The books with which we deal herein, therefore, are those that are devoid of any strong biblically-based counsel. In them Smalley has opted for psychological techniques that promise wonderful results to those who master them.

In *The Language of Love*, Smalley and co-author John Trent, Ph.D., present one such technique which utilizes what they call "word pictures." They tell us that to be effective in communicating with others—especially our spouses and children—plain language will not suffice. But if we paint them a picture in their minds, using stories that help them identify with our point, they will be more inclined to receive correction and change their behavior.

The authors tell how world leaders use word pictures to move the masses—some for "good," others for "evil." Yet they insist that word pictures are the "language of love." But are expressions of love valid without emphasis upon Jesus? Jesus, after all, is the one who expresses God's love—the only love worthy of the name.

But Jesus is not mentioned in *The Language of Love* except as an example of one who used word pictures. Yet the authors neglect to point out that Jesus used "word pictures" (parables) so that those who heard them would *not* understand the truths they conveyed lest they repent and be saved (Matthew 13:10-16; Mark 4:10-12).

Nor does the book, replete with case histories of the successful use of word pictures to effect psychological change, make reference to prayer, seeking the Holy

Spirit's intervention, or conviction of sin. Which proves that its advice may be viable for secular counselors, but for Christians it offers a vast minefield of dangers: advice that calls for reliance upon psychological technique rather than God's intervention.

For example, the authors present an entire chapter on "Pillars That Support a Fulfilling Marriage." The five pillars are: 1) Security: a Warm Blanket of Love; 2) Meaningful Communication; 3) Emotional/Romantic Times; 4) Meaningful Touch; and 5) Spiritual Intimacy.<sup>1</sup> The first four are given pages of attention. Spiritual intimacy rates no more than two paragraphs with no explanation of what it means.

The authors apply the same pillars to parent-child relationships, and offer the following as their advice on bonding:

The best way we know to bond within a family is by going camping. It's not the act of camping that provides closeness, but what happens when we camp with our kids. You guessed it: catastrophes!<sup>2</sup>

The pillars and the advice on bonding are certainly valid; but they should be placed within a biblical context. Unfortunately biblical applications are conspicuously absent. How about family devotions, church attendance, and raising children in the admonition of the Lord?

These are the best ways to bond within a Christian family. Granted, the others are important, and I wouldn't suggest that Smalley sees no value in spiritual exercises. But my concern is that in this book—unlike the others mentioned earlier—he virtually ignores their application.

#### LEFT-BRAIN — RIGHT-BRAIN

Smalley is a strong proponent of the "left-brain—right-brain" theory which postulates that men use the left side of their brains while women use the right side of their brains. Thus women are "more in touch" with their feelings.

Without dwelling on this theory too greatly, we must remember that it is just that: a theory. Yet even if true, the fact is that men are as much in touch with their feelings as are women. Yet most women do *express* their feelings easier than men.

Employing the left-brain—right-brain theory, Smalley insists that men should defer to the interests of their wives. This is true for both parties within the context of loving servants, but not at the expense of the husband's position. Lacking the biblical context, Smalley thus emasculates men in favor of their wives' desires:

