



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.¹ 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!²

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:

If a woman truly expects to have meaningful communication with her husband, she *must* activate the right side of his brain. And if a man truly wants to communicate with his wife, he *must* enter her world of emotions. In both these regards, word pictures can serve as a tremendous aid.³

What do we learn from this? That women must activate the right side of their husbands' brains. Why? To get them to think as women do. And men must enter their wives' world of emotions. Why? To get themselves to think as women do. Thus, husbands are placed in subservience to their wives, contrary to God's order.

FEMALE DOMINANCE

This is only one example of Smalley's psychological advice that reverses the male-female roles, making the woman dominant. More graphic examples of this role-reversal ploy are Smalley's two best-selling "marriage manuals," *For Better or for Best*, and *If Only He Knew*.

Each book was written for different readers—*For Better or for Best* for the wife, *If Only He Knew* for the husband. One might assume that the wife's book is designed to teach her how to esteem her husband's needs above her own, while the husband's would teach the man the same for his wife's benefit. This is partly true.

The *man's* book tells *him* where the husband goes wrong in his relationship with his wife. The *woman's* book tells *her* where the husband goes wrong in his relationship with his wife.

In other words, both books approach the marriage relationship from a selfish wife's viewpoint. They comprise a course on how to get the husband to meet the needs of his wife, with only a cursory explanation in *For Better or for Best* of how the wife can meet the needs of her husband—and this with the ulterior motive of inducing him to meet her needs.

I have little to say contrary to *If Only He Knew*, recognizing as I do the need—especially today—for men to truly love their wives. (This is not to say Smalley's book for husbands contains wise counsel. Essentially he wants them to give in to their wife's every whim, regardless of whether wisdom or God's leading direct otherwise.) But since both books are designed to be used in conjunction with each other, the wife's book should focus as much attention on her faults as the husband's book does on his. At least they shouldn't be out of balance to the degree that these two are.

MOTIVATION - MANIPULATION

An example of the lopsided approach to Smalley's marital counseling is the constant reference that the wife's book makes to the husband's book. This is to encourage the wife to get her husband to read his book so she can "motivate" him to shape up. Yet there is virtually no reference to her book in his. Thus the husband is unknowingly being "set up" for correction as a kind of conspiracy between Smalley and the wife.

Many churches are using these books in courses for married couples and for those engaged to be married. The strategy is that neither is to read the other's book; The husband is to read *If Only He Knew*, and the wife *For Better or for Best*.

I have personally seen this result in men becoming self-effacing, while their wives discuss how boorish and totally out of touch with reality their husbands are. They are educated on how to get their husbands' minds off normal masculine interests and totally on the wives' interests.

One particularly distasteful portion in *For Better or for Best* (the wife's book) is an illustration of a sexual bondage technique through which Smalley encourages wives to get their way by using trickery to play upon their husbands' sexual appetites.

In Smalley's example, a wife named Lois wants her husband Mark "to learn more about what a woman needs from a man, and, more precisely she wanted him to read the two books she had just purchased for him on the subject."

Smalley points out how Lois failed, and then offers advice on what she could have done by using what he calls the "salt principle" on "How to catch your husband's interest and keep it." According to Smalley, Lois should have concentrated on Mark's "area of high interest"—in this case his sexual appetite:

Using his area of high interest, share just enough information to stimulate his curiosity to hear more.

Since Lois knew of Mark's never-ending desire for sex, she could have started with the statement, "I can't believe these two books! I began reading them while you were at work, and I started to get so turned-on I had to put them down. I was really wishing you were home so we could make love."

Knowing Mark, I guarantee that she would have his undivided attention. Even the Super Bowl would have been turned off at this point.

Add a little more salt. Don't answer his response to your first dose of salt; rather, pause and build his curiosity even more.

Mark probably would have responded to the first dose with one of the following:

—You're kidding. What did it say?

—Really? Let me see it.

—It's not too late. I'm home now.

Now Lois applies her second dose of salt, *without* giving relief to Mark's budding curiosity, with a statement like this: "They really are unbelievable. They tell a man just what he needs to do to prepare his wife mentally and emotionally for sex. Those authors really understand what it takes to turn me on."

Use a short question to gain a commitment to his pursuit of your interest or to teach him what you're trying to communicate.

Lois, at this point, can gain a commitment from Mark to read the first book by asking him one of several short questions: "Have you ever read a book like this that tells you the five things that women can't resist?" or "Have you ever read about the five things you can do to turn me on?"

Lois's goal was not to turn her husband into a manipulator of her sexual desires [no, it was to turn *herself* into a manipulator of *his* sexual desires!], but to get him to read two books that would encourage him to do the things that would built up their emotional relationship. She knew the "five things" would motivate her husband to treat her with greater tenderness and respect which, in turn, would help her to be more sexually responsive.

After you have taken these five steps, if he still doesn't show sufficient interest or commitment, keep adding salt.

Lois could further salt with a statement like, "I'm glad you haven't learned any of these yet; my sexual drive would probably get so strong we'd never get any work done around here."⁴

Smalley calls this perverse psychological ploy "motivation." In reality it is manipulation; and not only manipulation, but manipulation based on a lie. The books didn't "turn on" Lois, nor did she necessarily even have to read them.

What's the difference between motivation and manipulation? *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "motivate" thusly: "to provide with a motive." Under the term, "motive" are several examples such as "incentive," "inducement," etc.

In the broad sense, I suppose we could say that Smalley is teaching wives how to “motivate” their husbands. But the word “manipulate” carries a more precise definition of Smalley’s “motivation”: “to control or play upon by artful, unfair, or insidious means esp. to one’s own advantage...to change by artful or unfair means so as to serve one’s purpose.”

Which word applies really depends on the wife’s motives. If her genuine concern is for her husband’s welfare, and it is her desire to fulfill her role as his helpmate, and if she is honest and above board with him, her actions might be properly classified as motivational.

If her concern is for herself—how she can get what she wants—and especially if she uses subterfuge, lying, even the slightest amount of deception—she is being manipulative. It is this latter method that colors Smalley’s advice to women.

In effect, this book teaches women to prostitute themselves within their own marriages by trading sexual favors for approved behavior.

THE WIFE AS TEACHER

In his advice to the wife, Smalley puts her in the role of teacher to her husband:

Remember, you are *in the process of* teaching him, and he is *in the process of* learning.”⁵

She is told how to get her husband to receive her correction, how to get him to stop watching “the most important football game of the year” and focus his attention on any trivial matter she wants to discuss. But if she loves him why can’t she let trivial matters wait and allow him to watch the game in peace—perhaps even try to develop an interest in it herself?

Were I to expound on the unscriptural nature of Smalley’s advice to wives it would take volumes. Suffice it to say that of the 170 pages in *For Better or for Best* (the wife’s book) there are *at the most* some eight or ten pages worth of copy, split up among various sentences and paragraphs, that acknowledge the wife’s responsibility to get her act together. Add the remaining 160 pages to the 167 pages that dump on the husband in *If Only He Knew*, and those few nuggets aren’t worth digging for.

SECULARISM VS. THE BIBLE

What makes Smalley’s advice in these books particularly dangerous is the scant use of Scripture to justify what amounts to a secularist philosophy. How much better it would have been for Smalley to present

the Scriptures as inviolable, recognizing that “Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (I Corinthians 11:9).

Now, whenever someone asserts the man’s headship over the woman these days, a great cry of protest rises from those even in evangelical ranks whose thinking has been muddled by modern secularism.

Why is the modern Church so afraid of what the Scriptures plainly teach in this regard? They do not teach that men should brutalize their wives. They must *love* their wives. And love cannot be manipulated through psychological ploys; only the Holy Spirit can develop it within us.

But the Scriptures also instruct wives to revere their husbands and to submit to them “in every thing” (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18). No man can love his wife and abuse her; neither can a woman reverence her husband and manipulate him.

This applies no less to believing wives with unbelieving husbands. The Scriptures make no distinction in this regard.

Nor is a wife to usurp her husband’s authority on the basis of greater “spirituality.” Because she may understand the Scriptures better than her husband does not alter her standing in the marriage relationship. A woman who seeks to place herself above or even on the same level of authority as her husband proves herself unspiritual.

In the context of a biblical marriage, the wife certainly enjoys the position of helpmate, which includes the right and the duty to give her full, honest and candid opinion. If the husband is wise, he will weigh his wife’s input carefully, and will respect her insight as a woman, recognizing that she will often see things in a way he will not.

This is true simply because God has established a certain order that is not open to question on our part: Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman (Ephesians 5:22-33). Even if the man is not in submission to Christ, that does not excuse the woman from obeying her husband, as we see that God wants her to be in submission even to the unbelieving husband (I Peter 3:1-2).

A SUBTLE WITCHCRAFT

If a man allows his wife to lead him, or a wife seeks to lead her husband, they have disobeyed the Father’s command; they have rebelled against His order of creation. They cannot expect His protection upon

their union. They are, in effect, guilty of a sin as serious as witchcraft:

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (I Samuel 15:23)

An important aspect of witchcraft is the propagation of female supremacy. This comes from witchcraft’s worship of nature spirits, the earth goddess being supreme.

Another tenet of witchcraft, over which I have had confrontation with promoters of these two books, is that God is androgynous; he is both male and female. This has been accepted in the Church because of an erroneous interpretation of Genesis 1:27:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

This interpretation that makes God androgynous is satanic. In the first place, this verse states that God created “him” in His image. He created “them” male and female. And we know from Genesis 2:9-23 that Adam was created in the image of God. And woman—Eve—was taken out of him. More clearly, I Corinthians 11:7-9 states, “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”

The concept of a male-female deity upon which rests this proposition of equal authority is not biblical. It’s eastern mystical in origin.

For example, in Tantrism, a mystery religion expressed in both Hinduism and Buddhism, the female principle is supreme. John Ferguson’s *Encyclopedia of Mysticism and Mystery Religions* states:

In Hindu Tantra everything is the active play of a female principle: “Whatever power anything possesses, that is the Goddess.” Though there is a strong emphasis on the female, visually and imaginatively, the ultimate creative power [God] is bisexual, and often portrayed as a single bisexual being, or as a divine couple, or symbolized by the two sex organs, the *lingam* (male) set in the *yoni* (female).⁶

Mankind, under Satan’s direction, has perverted the understanding of Jehovah God’s nature in referring to Him as “Goddess” or, at best, androgynous. In the same way man perverts the nature of angels, often depicting them as feminine, whereas Scripture reveals them as masculine.

This is a subject that cannot be dealt with sufficiently in the space of this writing. But if the Scriptures refer to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in masculine terms, it is obvious that masculinity is more than an anthropological term. It applies *first* to the nature of God, and *then* to man who is created in the image of God. It does not necessarily have to do with the ability or the inclination to procreate offspring.

It is from pagan religious philosophy that the feminine aspects of nature are stressed. It is obvious then, that, the Scriptures being true when they say that the man is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the Church (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23), those who advocate equality of authority in marriage are in rebellion against God.

UNREALISTIC VIEWS

Will marriages be helped by Smalley's advice? Some might be—those that are gross examples of a husband's total insensitivity to his wife's needs. But it won't be the Holy Spirit doing the work. It will be a manipulative wife employing psychological subterfuge. And she must maintain the ruse throughout the life of the marriage. Any lapse could prove disastrous.

And therein lies an essential problem with Smalley's philosophy. It is predicated upon the blanket proposition that all men are by nature lowbrow creeps whose only redeeming value lies in their brute strength which, if "harnessed" by women, as Smalley implies, might be put to some good use—like helping with the housework.

A CALL FOR BALANCE

Few today would question the need for greater understanding between husbands and wives. Marriages are falling apart or are held together by fragile threads of resigned misery. Husbands aren't loving wives; wives aren't submitting to husbands; both are destroying not only their own lives, but those of their children.

We can expect these conditions to prevail in the world. Without the light of Scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, "self" will surely rule in these relationships. Yet even in the Church wives complain that their husbands don't show them love, and husbands complain that their wives don't show them respect. Within these two areas lie most every other problem in marriages.

The only way to address the problem is a balanced, scriptural approach, recognizing the inherent selfishness of both men and women. An approach that favors one

over the other not only fails to recognize that inherent selfishness, but panders to the sin nature of the one in whose favor it leans, whether husband or wife.

Smalley isn't entirely wrong in his advice to men, but I would instead recommend Dr. Ed Wheat's *Love Life For Every Married Couple* (Zondervan, 1980). Dr. Wheat takes a far more balanced and scriptural approach.

Smalley's emasculation of the male is contrasted by Wheat's confirmation of the males' biblical position of headship while not ignoring the areas where women have an edge. And whereas Smalley encourages the wife to "teach" and "correct" her husband that establishes her in a maternal role over him, Wheat encourages both to allow the Holy Spirit to teach the other while not ignoring the need for meaningful dialogue.

The important difference is that, while Smalley encourages psychological manipulation as a means for the wife to get her way, Dr. Wheat encourages prayer and dependence upon the Holy Spirit to change lives—both lives—where needed.

One of the banes of the modern Church is the encroachment of secular psychology, based on a humanistic worldview, which places man's wisdom on an equal footing with God's Word. In practice, psychology often takes precedence over Scripture.

Well-meaning Christians, schooled in secular psychology, are applying the tools of their trade in counseling. They desire to help others become happy, productive human beings. But they ignore the Holy Spirit's refining work, which is most effective through the application of Scripture. Rather, they center on self-help techniques designed to overcome what human reasoning perceives as "unacceptable traits."

What is ignored in the employment of psychology is the basic problem of man's sin nature. Thus it may have some outward value to the unbeliever who has no recourse to God, but it is not only worthless to the Christian, it is counterproductive to his spiritual growth.

This is because the change of outward behavior alone, without repentance, does not address the root of the problem. Therefore, one must always be on guard against his natural inclination to slip from conformity to the psychological remedy. An added danger is the tendency to think of oneself as having achieved spiritual growth when all that was really achieved was a degree of psychological change.

While sometimes effecting outward changes and even inward motivations, the thin veneer of Christianity overlaying the advice of many professional counselors gives their clients a false hope. If Scripture is not applied with the understanding of repentance as the source of true spiritual change, the barriers to one's relationship to God will remain intact.

If one can get his relationship to God in order, he will automatically establish proper relationships to others. Lacking the first, the second are always self-serving.

Psychological counseling, though sometimes effecting outward change in behavior, can go only as deep as the mind. It doesn't affect the spirit. So it is equally valid on the unsaved whose spirits are dead. It masks the disease of sin and treats the symptoms; it may alter one's thinking and establish more acceptable behavior, but its basis for defining what is acceptable behavior is seldom scriptural.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, works from the inside out—upon the sin nature. In so doing, He affects the emotions and behavior of the individual, bringing him or her into conformity to God's will.

This may take longer and be more painful to both parties in the marriage relationship; the Holy Spirit recognizes the inherent sinfulness of both husband and wife, and effects spiritual growth in both.

Smalley fails to stress the Holy Spirit's approach in working on *both* parties at the same time. He would do well to rewrite his books, incorporating a biblical premise and scraping the current editions. A warning to the Body of Christ not to use them in their present form would be most welcome. ■

NOTES

1. Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Language of Love* (Pomona, CA: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1988), pp. 108-125.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
4. Gary Smalley, *For Better or for Best* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pp. 48-49.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
6. John Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Mysticism and Mystery Religions* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1982), p.185.

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