

Communication as a Normative Principle Within the Family: A Praxiological Approach

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Abstract: Family dynamics have been dramatically changed by the progress of postmodern society and its economic and socio-cultural reconfigurations. Today, the role and structure of the family have been greatly eroded, and society has become the main formative environment for the individual. Regardless of the multitude of resources the individual receives from society, the family remains the main nucleus of society, shaping the individual's identity. Therefore, individuals should not only recognize the value of the family, but also strive to improve the quality of the family environment. This paper examines how communication, one of the structural elements of the family that has been lost, is the foundation or principle that guarantees the quality of family relationships and that should be rediscovered. In this context, the biblical foundations of communication, its meaning, stages, and types, are analyzed in order to demonstrate how and why communication is important to the well-being of family relationships. This paper approaches marriage and spousal communication from a Christian theological perspective.

Keywords: communication, sender, receiver, message, language, interaction, family

Introduction

Since the end of modernity, especially in postmodernity, humanity's attention to the family has been overshadowed by concern for the progress of society. Economic and technological development have become the main objectives of scientists, and, implicitly, of humanity. Industrialization and modernization have dramatically redefined the family. From an environment in which all the daily activities of the individual took place, the family has turned into an environment where its members interact only during their free time. Thus, society has quickly taken over the main role in the formation and care of the individual. Because the family was no longer the main formative environment of the individual, its value has eroded.

If the family apparently no longer makes any major contribution to man and society, what is its importance? What is the family and why do Christians emphasize its value? We find a relevant answer in Virginia Satir, a 20th-century psychotherapist. The conclusions of her famous book *The New Peoplemaking* demonstrate that the family plays a central role in creating authentic people. The family is the framework in which we form our identity and shape our role, which we will then manifest for the good or bad of human society (Satir, 2010, pp. 38-45, 145-152). An individual's success is closely linked to the health of the family environment (Satir, 2010, pp. 255-266). Satir's conclusions are convincing enough not only to recognize the value of the family, but also to motivate Christians and non-Christians alike to fight for the health of the family. A healthy foundation is the only way to build a healthy and harmonious family. Therefore, in our study, we will address the importance of communication, one of the elements that form the foundation of the family. With the help of specialized books, we aim to demonstrate why healthy communication is one of the solutions contemporary families should resort to solve problems.

The biblical foundations of communication

Undoubtedly, the first chapters of Genesis (chapters 2-3) depict, among other things, how God fulfilled humanity's need for fellowship. The Garden of Eden was the perfect environment in which feelings of inadequacy and unfulfillment were satisfied by God. The continuous

manifestation of God's unmediated presence (2:15, 3:8) and the creation of a family environment (2:22) fulfilled man both spiritually and existentially. Both had the element of communication in common. IHVH interacted with man through verbal communication (3:8), and Adam and Eve presumably communicated with each other (3:2-3) about the divine will (Beale & Kim, 2014, pp. 17-18). In fact, the entire history of God's dwelling among humanity is defined by verbal interaction between man and divinity. IHVH revealed Himself to Abraham (12:1-3), Isaac (26:24-25) and Jacob (28:13-22, 35:7-12) through propositions – words were used, verbal communication – which is why it is called propositional revelation. They were able to receive the divine revelation because God made Himself intelligible to man, using words that were easily assimilated by human reason (Berkhof, 2022, p. 78).

Therefore, the nature of divine revelation paves the way for our discussion about the importance of communication in the family. Just as in the spiritual realm communication is the glue that fosters the relationship between man and God, so in the existential realm communication is the element that smooths and strengthens interpersonal relationships – interpersonal relationships take on the paradigm of man's relationship with God. Communication brings harmony to the family. Experts urge parents to teach their children the art of communication from an early age and spouses to practice communication. Unfortunately, the alarming pace at which the contemporary family carries out its activities results in a lack of communication between spouses and a lack of fellowship between parents and children, a fellowship that should take place through communication. Only through communication can spouses maintain, cultivate and perfect their love, and children grow up harmoniously and blessed. Communion within the family has profound effects on the lives of its members. As long as there is genuine communication, children and parents will enjoy irreplaceable spiritual and emotional benefits (Coblentz, 2002, pp. 146-147).

What is communication?

Defining the concept of communication has become a difficult and insidious task for contemporary man. The passage of time has enriched and diversified the meaning of communication to such an extent that the goal of establishing its nature and dimensions has become a quasi-impossible mission. The older a term or concept is, the more susceptible it is to erroneous and subjective interpretations. In such cases, the etymology of a word proves to be more useful than its semantics. That is why educators and linguists have used etymology to distil the original meaning of the concept of communication. Analyzing the Latin verbs *communico* and *communicare*, which form the basis of the concept of communication, they concluded that these undoubtedly refer to the meaning of sharing information with the general public or work that belongs to several people (Palicica et al., 2007, p. 151).

According to this, we understand why educators have firmly postulated that communication is the basis of all human interactions. In reality, through communication, teachers can convey information to students, spouses can share their emotions, and human beings in general can verbalize their thoughts. Communication is the channel that allows information to be transmitted from the sender to the receiver in a language common to the two subjects engaged in the act of communication, thus making it possible for interpersonal relationships to develop. The multifaceted aspect of communication can be understood and addressed by focusing on the key element of communication: the transfer of the meaning of information. As a result, we refer to communication exclusively as the action by which the sender transmits intelligible information to the receiver (Pănișoara, 2019, pp. 144–145).

Failure to understand this detail has had and continues to have dramatic repercussions on the family. The husband's superficial and poor choice of words, together with the wife's silence and revenge, betray the couple's inability to explicitly convey their feelings and desires. Most of the time, discord in the family is a direct consequence of a lack of communication skills. In countless situations, spouses have never learned what

communication is and how to convey a message effectively (Pelt, 2011, pp. 21-22). In this regard, it is pertinent to examine the act of communication and break it down into several stages in order to capture its scope and implications.

Stages of communication

The first stage of the communication process is defined by the appearance of two or more human subjects, who assume the roles of sender and receiver. The initial stage of communication is initiated only if there is a flow of information transmitted alternately between the sender and the receiver. The flow of information can be transmitted alternately or simultaneously. In other words, to put it figuratively, the act of communication is the continuous juxtaposition of information that human subjects emit, as a result of the alternating or simultaneous interpretation of the roles of sender and receiver. Identifying the sender, the zero point of communication, can often be complicated, especially if we take into account the influences that past dialogues have on the present. However, the problem is easily solved by delimiting a conversation in time and space. Thus, there is no longer any possibility of confusing the sender with the receiver, who in fact responded to a past conversation (Fârte, 2004, pp. 39-40).

The sender of the message is not just a passive agent who reproduces previously learned ideas or sentences, but actively contributes to producing information and transmitting paralinguistic elements to the receiver. Voice intonation, conversational rhythm, pauses, and emotions have the potential to create a framework of deep intimacy between the two subjects. For example, when a wife initiates a discussion with her husband, she conveys not only information but also emotions. An entire psycho-emotional reality is imprinted in her words (Lesenciuc, 2017, p. 19). The nature and dynamics of the message transmitted mark the beginning of the second stage of the communication process, where the object of our study is no longer the sender or receiver, but the message. Once the foundations of communication have been laid by the sender and receiver, what animates their dialogue is the flow of information. The message is the element that gives value and purpose to the dialogue between the interlocutors. Its absence makes it impossible to create a connection between the interlocutors. Its importance is underlined by the complexity and multitude of information condensed in it. Based on the message, the subjects engaged in the act of communication manage to identify the personal characteristics of the other (Lesenciuc, 2017, pp. 19-20). In fact, the content of the message can be classified as subjective and objective. In the vast majority of cases, the subjective aspect prevails over the objective one. For example, a teacher engaged in teaching will have to exemplify, embellish and present information through their own subjective filter, even if they are handling objective informational content. Discussions between friends, spouses or parents and children are marked by the subjectivity of the participants. The sender appeals to subjectivity to ensure that the message is correctly understood by the receiver. Misunderstanding the message could suggest that the sender did not convey it correctly, that it was disrupted by other external factors, or that the sender did not provide enough elements to decode the message, an action that defines the third stage (Pănișoară, 2019, p. 150).

Decoding the message is a difficult and sensitive activity. Real life shows us that there are more cases in which the wife and husband do not correctly receive the message from their life partner than those in which they manage to receive it, a situation that applies to all human interactions. In general, the sender of the message is overly focused on the message or their own needs and neglects to convey the clues necessary to decode the message. The code of the message, slipped in by the speaker in the form of verbal or non-verbal clues, is the bridge that the listener can use to decrypt and understand the message. In the act of communication, the code is a *sine qua non* condition, as it allows cultural, social, intellectual, emotional and sexual barriers to be overcome (Fârte, 2017, pp. 44-46). Finally, the speaker will be assured of

the correct transmission and understanding of the message only when the addressee initiates the last stage of communication through feedback.

Feedback includes various verbal and nonverbal expressions. Suggestions, remarks, and questions are proof for the sender that the receiver has understood, assimilated, and accepted the message conveyed. Equally important is the moment when the receiver provides feedback. It should be provided in the presence of the sender and within the context of the conversation, with the exception of dialogues involving several subjects. Failure to provide feedback or providing it at a time other than during the conversation can generate tension and conflict (Pănișoară, 2019, pp. 151–152). There are other elements that are taken into account in the act of communication, such as the channel, the means of communication, the situation, etc. (Stănciugelu et al., 2014, pp. 47-38). However, the limited scope of our research and the topic addressed, communication within the family, requires us to consider only the forms of communication that are useful for achieving the objective of this study.

Types of communication

According to well-established criteria, there are countless forms of communication, for example, according to the criterion of partners, according to the status of interlocutors, according to the code used, according to the purpose of the communicative act, etc. Each pattern of communication, in turn, opens up the possibility of nuancing the typology of communication into subcategories. The complexity of the information presented is reduced by limiting our spectrum of analysis to the basic distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication, a distinction sufficient to analyze communication within the family (Pănișoară, 2019, p. 154).

Verbal communication is the main means by which people around the world manage to interact. Language and speech, which vary from one person to another, are the vehicles through which verbal communication is made possible. Language is the tool human beings use to translate their thoughts and emotions from inner realities into outer realities, cognizable to those around them. Speech is a window or mirror into the inner self. People use the language of the people they belong to in order to convey information about themselves or their environment to others, through writing or signs. Ultimately, verbalizing language is the activity that allows for the rapid transmission of information. Through verbal language, families, friendships and human society have been able to form and develop (Stănciugelu et al., 2014, p. 156).

Nonverbal communication is both the most neglected and the most important form of communication in countless situations. Nonverbal language plays a role of utmost importance in the transmission of information, as it complements and supports verbal language, as a result of a continuous interdependence between the two. The tone of voice, rhythm and volume of speech, which are components of nonverbal communication, play a decisive role in emphasizing or invalidating information conveyed through verbal language. Smiles, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, and clothing are all nonverbal channels that convey useful information to those involved in communication (Pănișoară, 2019, p. 155). A change in tone of voice or a fake smile is enough to drastically alter the information that the speaker intends to convey. The meaning of words and sentences can be completely changed with the help of non-verbal language. Researchers have observed that in the act of communication, non-verbal language has the greatest influence (55%), followed by the content of the message (7%) and the tone of voice (38%). Surprisingly, speakers generally pay more attention to what they see than to what they hear from the speaker (Wright & Roberts, 2015, pp. 56-58). If, as our study shows, communication is one of the most important aspects of family life, what should it look like in the relationship between children and parents and between spouses?

Communication between children and parents

Every family has a truth or an element around which it revolves and guides its existence. Whether we are referring to a Christian family, where God is present, or a secular family, where worldly philosophies are manifested. That central element becomes a catalyst in the development of the family and its members according to a certain ideal. Therefore, in the Christian family, the main responsibility of parents is to raise their children in accordance with God's will (Wenger, 1997, pp. 145-146). The recognition of God's will and presence in the family is reflected in the parents' concern to set spiritual goals for their children. Parents should be interested in creating a routine of collective prayer, fostering an atmosphere in which God is praised, and transforming the family into a school of truth, where children are accustomed to serving and protected from the harmful influences of the world (Coblentz, 2002, pp. 160-162). The objectives listed above are important and vital, but they are not complete if they become the only form of interaction between children and parents. Communication should not be limited to activities predetermined by parents, which are a formative framework (Wenger, 1997, p. 152), and to episodes in which parents reprimand their children, which are a corrective framework (Coblentz, 2002, pp. 166–171).

Parents are encouraged to build a partnership with their children. Therefore, the time spent together should go beyond formative or corrective interaction and become a friendly interaction, in which both parents and children spend a relaxed time together. A relaxed setting will encourage discussions of common interest, which will captivate even the quietest child. Parents who pay special attention to their children will discover that they are willing to engage in serious dialogue when given exclusive attention and trust. Eye contact and openness on the part of the parent in expressing personal feelings and events are key aspects in gaining the child's attention and trust. Without hesitation, the child will feel free to discuss their thoughts and feelings with their parent, who is now considered a trustworthy person. This will lead to important conversations, which parents can use to convey fundamental truths about God, life, and society. Of course, depending on the age of the children, parents will choose the time and manner in which to converse with them. In early childhood, the ideal time is in the evening, before bedtime, and the ideal way is through storytelling (Chapman & Campbell, 2001, pp. 58-63).

Effective communication between parents and children is fostered under certain conditions. Shared activities, discipline and training can never replace the genuine interaction that every child desperately needs. In this sense, parents are called upon to re-evaluate their relationship with their children, so that the time spent with them is more qualitative than quantitative (Wenger, 1997, pp. 157-158).

Communication between spouses

From a biblical-theological standpoint, discussion on spousal communication gain greater coherence and depth within a scripturally informed understanding of marriage. Within this framework, texts such as Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," are viewed as central. The expression "one flesh" has profound implications. It conveys the concept of emotional, sexual, spiritual and existential union. Thus, Christian theology interprets God as instituting the family to address human needs for companionship, fulfillment, and communication—needs met through emotional, sexual, and spiritual union. In this view, communion between husband and wife is possible through sincere communication. Just as communication is the ingredient that makes interaction between man and God possible, so too in marriage communication, animated by continuous dialogue, initiates, develops and maintains communion between husband and wife (Wright, 2011, pp. 18-23).

Achieving the ideal of effective communication in the family is often made difficult and almost impossible by the realities of life on earth, defined by immorality and alienation from God. The "compartmentalized" personality of the man, which influences him to have a

propensity for inhibition in communication, and the expressive-receptive personality of the woman, which predisposes her to seek communication, are among the reasons that prevent spouses from building a harmonious relationship in marriage. The differences between life partners must be accepted and not criticized. Therefore, the husband should strive to meet his wife's need for communication by sincerely expressing his own feelings and concerns, while the wife should support her husband in communicating and show understanding when he struggles to do so (Eggerichs, 2007, p. 133). A husband's lack of communication does not necessarily indicate indifference toward his wife, just as a wife's insistence on communication does not necessarily signal rejection of her husband. Often, a spouse's negative attitude is a desperate cry for communion, which unfortunately is not sought through communication and acceptance.

Success in communication can be achieved by implementing basic skills in the art of communication, such as transparency, clarity, and unconditional commitment. The decision to change one's own flawed behaviour is essential. With determination and perseverance, spouses can overcome the boredom, disinterest and fatigue that arise in the act of communication. Preventing problems through proactive communication is the best approach. However, if problems have arisen and been neglected, and spouses ardently desire to improve their marital relationship, the art of listening is indispensable. Communication cannot take place in the absence of a receiver who silently listens to the sender's message. The eyes, mouth, head, mind, hands, and body must all be engaged in the act of listening. The sender must be assured of the receiver's seriousness, so that the flow of the message, which defines communication, will gain momentum (Pelt, 2011, pp. 31, 33, 78-84). The flow of information is a sign that the two spouses have begun to communicate, sharing their feelings and concerns. Interactions based on communication, acceptance, interest, and listening will help spouses resolve their problems.

Communication tailored to the individual

Phenotypic differences among people raise serious challenges to applying the aforementioned principles. General notions of psychology, sociology, and pedagogy are useful, but they remain theoretical concepts, unsuited to the specifics of each individual. Not everyone communicates, loves, or behaves the same way. As a result, psychotherapists and psychologists have developed a language of communication based on empirical observation of how people communicate and express their emotions, while remaining within the spirit of theoretical concepts. These studies have shown that husbands and wives, depending on their personality, can express and communicate their love for their partner in different ways. Words of encouragement, gifts, time spent together, services and caresses are different ways in which the message of love can be conveyed. Good communication within the family will always be preceded by discovering the specific language of one's life partner, a discovery that the husband or wife should only venture into after knowing their own love language (Chapman, 2008, pp. 117-118).

Communication tailored to the individual is valid for any area of the couple's life. Therefore, another area where we can apply the principle of specific language is that of conflict. Studies have shown that people approach and resolve conflict differently. The languages noted are: expressing regret, accepting responsibility, righting the wrong, sincere commitment, and asking for forgiveness. If husbands and wives want to resolve their disagreements, they will need to understand and recognize their partner's specific language, through which they will accept the request for forgiveness. Communicating the request for forgiveness in a language other than the one that the partner prefers will necessarily lead to misunderstanding or disregard of the message that the husband or wife has conveyed (Chapman & Thomas, 2006, pp. 105-106).

Adults are not the only ones who need a special approach to communication. Children communicate according to the same pattern as adults. Each child can receive love through a

different language, such as physical affection, words of encouragement, time spent together, gifts and services. It is certainly the parents' duty to pay attention to the child and assess which language best conveys love and words to them. Although such a search on the part of the parent is a long and demanding activity, with results over time, it is essential for the child's psycho-emotional development. A child who does not know how to communicate and love will be an adult incapable of living (Chapman & Campbell, 2001, pp. 96-97).

Conclusions

Family life is changing and differs significantly from that of previous generations. The rapidity with which these changes are taking place has often prevented recognition of their negative effects on contemporary families. Today, it is increasingly difficult to define what the family is and how it works. In this sense, this research has proposed a constructive reading of family life through the lens and the meaning of biblical and classical theological tradition. From this perspective, communication emerges as a foundational element of communion between husband and wife. Communion is achieved and maintained to the extent that the two spouses deepen their understanding and application of communication. Interaction through communication is important for the entire family, both in the relationship between parents and children and in the relationship between husband and wife. Additionally, another aspect that should not be overlooked is time. Only in a relaxed and balanced atmosphere can healthy relationships based on effective communication be formed. In light of the present study, contemporary families may benefit from slowing down their often frantic pace and from directing their attention to a Christian perspective on communication and family life.

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