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The Ethics of Effective Communication in Christian Families with A-CORE Principles

Yusuf Yacub; Sutrisno; Bobby Kurnia Putrawan

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah, Tangerang, Indonesia

Email: yusufyacub73@gmail.com, christdeon@gmail.com, bkputrawan@gmail.com

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Abstract

Good communication is necessary in an effort to build a harmonious Christian family, requiring that every family member should learn and understand how to communicate in the most proper way. This paper aims to describe the A-CORE principle (Amiable, Clarity, Obvious, Respect, Empathy) as the principle of building effective communication in Christian families. The research method used throughout writing this paper is qualitative methods with data collection through library research. From this study, it can be concluded that the A-CORE principle is in accordance with Christian ethics based on the Bible, and can be applied as a communication principle in Christian families.

Keywords: Christian Ethics; Communication; Family; A-CORE Principles

Introduction

Communication has a very important role in human life. As social beings, every human have needs to interact with other humans, and interaction cannot occur without communication. Communication is not just a science that can be understood with simple formulas, but also is an art in socializing and interacting with other people. Interaction between humans occurs both within the society and within the family.

The family as the smallest community in society certainly has a different communication pattern compared to communication in general in the community. Besides, the purpose of communication in the family is to create harmony between family members which ultimately has implications for the happiness and integrity of a family. Having a harmonious family is certainly the goal of every couple when deciding to build a family through marriage. Therefore, good and effective communication skills are an aspect that cannot be separated from other knowledge in an effort to maintain the harmony of a family. It can be concluded that communication is a very important aspect of family life (Hutabarat & Putrawan, 2021; Southern, Smith, & Oliver, 2005; Tubagus & Sarono, 2021).

Many problems and problems occur in the family become worse due to miscommunication. Financial problems, division of tasks and responsibilities among family members, educating children, domestic violence, and many other problems, which then lead to prolonged conflicts in the family, which in the end can affect the wholeness of the household (divorce). This does not only occur to non-Christian families, but also to Christian families. Failure in establishing effective communication is often the main hindrance in finding solutions to problems.

When discussing the topic of the Christian family, it is also necessary to explore Christian marriage. Because the formation of a family is the result of a marriage. The formation of a good Christian family begins with the establishment of the purpose of marriage aligned to the Bible understanding of the to-be-wed. There are people who think that marriage is something that is only natural because of human needs, namely human as social beings, status, sex, and other things. There are even those who argue that marriage is just human nature. As a result of this view, many couples when asked what the purpose of their marriage is, the answer is "to find happiness". This answer is not entirely wrong, but if from the beginning the purpose of a marriage is only to obtain happiness, then what happens is the tendency to use and demand the partner to give the desired happiness. Therefore, couples who have the view that marriage is to obtain happiness, will in the end be unhappy in their lives (Craig, 1986; Maro, 2018). This happens because in some situations this mentality has the potential to cause a conflict of personal interest which can eventually lead to divorce.

In the Bible, God has several purposes that underlie Christian marriage and family formation. In the book "Guidelines for Happy and Prosperous Christian Families" published by the Directorate General of Christian Community Guidance, Ministry of Religion of Indonesia, the main purpose of marriage according to the Bible could be listed as such:

Living together that complement each other. A man and woman who bind themselves in marriage certainly have their own advantages and disadvantages. Through marriage they realize this so that they will complement each other. The book of Genesis 2:18 explains that God has a purpose in marriage because it is not good for man to be alone, so God gives man a suitable helper. Married life aims to help, support, and complement each other in any situation (Direktorat Jendral Bimbingan Masyarakat Kristen Kementrian Agama RI, 2021).

Grow together. The purpose of marriage is to grow together in all aspects of life, such as faith, character, righteousness, and others. Experiencing growing together in a marriage is not an easy thing that can be established in a day or two. This process of growing together must even be done throughout the life of the marriage. The process also cannot occur naturally and automatically, but must be jointly pursued by both parties, namely by husband and wife. When husband and wife are both growing in marriage then the couple can serve God through their lives and even be a witness and a blessing to others (Direktorat Jendral Bimbingan Masyarakat Kristen Kementrian Agama RI, 2021).

Representing the Image of God (Imago Dei). In his perspective, Darrell L. Hines argues that when a man and a woman decide to marry and live together as a Christian family, it is to represent the image of God. When God created male and female as two personalities they became one (Mark 10:6-8) to produce one harmony. When two persons (male and female) become one through marriage in unity, equivalence, and a strong commitment in building family harmony based on love and mutual trust in love, the representation of God's image becomes established (Hines, 2018). The Bible explains that Christian marriage is intended so that a husband and wife can jointly dedicate their family to the glory of God (Hutabarat & Putrawan, 2021; Santoso, 2013).

Furthermore, what about people who marry with the aim of having children? Is having children one of God's purposes as the initiator of marriage? The text in Genesis 1:28 reads: God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." This text is often

associated that the purpose of marriage is to have children. Actually this text shows that God wants humans to multiply to fill the earth with divine offspring (Malachi 2:15) through reproduction (procreation). Procreation itself is not the purpose of a marriage, but as a probability that God intends to be able to maintain the continuity of humanity (Direktorat Jendral Bimbingan Masyarakat Kristen Kementrian Agama RI, 2021). This principle becomes very important, because otherwise it will result in frequent divorce of couples on the grounds of not having children. They think that if they do not have children (descendants) through the marriage they are in, then their marriage is considered a failure. The real purpose of marriage is not just to have children. If there is no offspring in a marriage, it does not mean that the marriage has failed. For marriages that produce offspring (children) or those that do not, in God's view both are marriages that are equally blessed (Direktorat Jendral Bimbingan Masyarakat Kristen Kementrian Agama RI, 2021).

Based on these facts, this paper is written to elaborate how to apply the A-CORE principle which stands for: Amiable (friendly or gentle), Clarity (honesty or openness), Obvious (sound or visible), Respect, and Empathy to build effective communication in Christian families, both between husband and wife, as well as between parents and children. With a comprehensive understanding of this principle, it is expected that family harmony and integrity will be maintained, and when facing problems in the family, each family member can support each other in finding solutions through effective communication and Christian ethics.

Research Method

The method used to build this paper is qualitative method, with a library research as main approach method. The main sources of research come from the Bible, books, and research journals that are relevant to this research. Furthermore, the author collects and analyzes the data obtained, and describe it descriptively and systematically in order to get a clear construction of effective communication in Christian families using the A-CORE concept.

Discussion

God Initiated the Formation of a Christian Family

The family was formed at the initiative of God from the very beginning of the creation of the earth and everything in it. In Genesis 1:26 it says that God created "male and female". Then Genesis 2:18 written: The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Then in the New Testament, Jesus stated in Matthew 19:4-5: "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'. These verses are the basis of the correlation in affirming God's plan for human and forming a family. Daniel Tanusaputra stated that the Bible constructively gives us an understanding that humans were not actually designed by God to live in solitude, but to live life in a community (family) with their partner, and also with God (Immanuel, 2019; Tanusaputra, 2005; Widoyo, Maranatha, & Ndapamuri, 2020).

Because marriage is God's plan for human, thus there's a need of deeper understanding of the cause and goal of God for the formation of families through marriage. It is to be believed that there is intricate plan on God's Will, so He designed marriage and family. Throughout the Torah and Old Testament (OT), marriage is referred to as a "Berith" (Greek) which means "Covenant". Who has always been the initiator in a covenant between God and Man? God himself!Malachi 2:14 quotes that God Himself is the witness in a marriage. Because God Himself is the initiator and witness in a marriage, God despises divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Verkuyl as quoted by Jeane Paath et al., states that marriage is a phase of life when a man and a woman are united by God and bound in a valid covenant (berith) by the ties of love and law. There is protection in enjoying the sanctity of sexual relationship legally. The relationship of being husband and wife is a living reality of fellowship where they continue to be partners until the end of



Volume 5, Issue 4 April, 2022

their lives (Paath, Zega, & Pasaribu, 2020; Widjaja & Simanungkalit, 2020). A good marriage is a total commitment before God and others in a covenant bond between a man and a woman based on a deep understanding that marriage is a reciprocal partnership. Marriage must proactively involve God in every decision taken, because marriage is a special arrangement of God (Paath et al., 2020).

The above explanation actually confirms God as the sole initiator of the concept of marriage and family formation. Therefore, the family is actually a blessing and a gift from God to human. So that human must view the family as something important and sacred because it contains the initiative and the fruit of God's thoughts.

Effective Communication as Connectors of Meaning

International communication expert and motivator, Aqua Dwipayana in his book titled "The Power of Silahturahim" says that the most important thing in achieving success is communication (Dwipayana, 2016). Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn stated "Communication....is the very essence of a social system organization" (Mahmudah, 2015). Agreeing with this statement, Silmi Nurul Utami stated that communication is one of the competencies that are needed in society. A good social life is formed by good personal and community communication competence (Utami, 2021).

In the context of family life, Wanda Humble and Victor S. Liu also stated the same thing as quoted by Mieke Yan Manu et al., "In married life, there is no more substantial ability to continue to be developed than the ability and art of effective communication. Without communication, love cannot be fully conveyed. Without communication, a deep understanding of a partner cannot develop. Without communication, various problems in the family are not resolved (Manu, Giri, & Kawangung, 2020). Julianto Simanjuntak, author of the book "Educating Whole Children, Reaping a Strong Family" stated, "Communication is the essence of family life" (Simanjuntak, 2017).

Etymologically the term communication comes from the Latin "communicatus" derived from the root word "communis" which means: establishing or building togetherness between two or more individuals. Communication also comes from the root word "communico" which means to share. According to Miller, communication is the delivery of information from one position to another (Kurniati, 2016). According to Clevenger, communication is a term related to the dynamic information transfer process (Kurniati, 2016). According to Felix Kasim, communication is a process of transferring information in the form of feelings, explanations, ideas, or questions, from one individual to another (one or more people), which aims to influence the attitude or behavior of the recipient of the message (Kasim, 2011). From some of the opinions above, it can be concluded that communication is a process of conveying and receiving information (messages) between individuals which is carried out dynamically, with the aim of changing the attitude or view of the recipient of the message.

According to Harold Lasswell in the book "Introduction to Communication" as quoted in Marista Elisabeth Bala, et al, there are five elements in the communication process (Bala, Senduk, & Boham, 2015), namely:

1. Source (messenger/communicator)

Sources (communicators) are individuals who have the need to convey information through communication. The source/communicator can be an individual, a group of individuals, an organization, or a country.

2. Message (information to be delivered)

Message (information) is a news that the communicator wants to convey to the recipient of the message (communicant). The message conveyed can be in the form of verbal and non-verbal symbols, which can be a feeling, a value, and an idea that represents the communicator's intent. There

Volume 5, Issue 4 April, 2022

are three parts of the message, namely: the meaning of the message, the symbol that states the meaning of the message, and the form of the message.

3. Channel (media)

Channels or media in conveying a message from the source (communicator) to the recipient of the message (communicant) can be done face-to-face (directly) and can also be done indirectly through print media, electronic media, or online media.

4. Message Receiver (communicant)

The recipient of the message (communicant) is an individual, group of individuals, an organization, or a country who receives a message (information) from a source (communicator).

5. Impact or Effect

Impact or effect is intended as the response of the recipient of the message (communicant) when a message has been received from the source (communicator). The response of the recipient of the message can be a change in attitude, additional information as knowledge, or other responses.

The success of a communication between the communicator and the communicant depends on many things. Therefore, a skill in communication is needed. The right communication strategy is often referred to as effective communication. Mulyana in Rahmawati and Muragmi said that communication is said to be effective if the meaning of the message conveyed by the communicator can be accepted and understood in the same sense by the communicant (Rahmawati & Gazali, 2018). If the meaning intended by the sender is different from the meaning understood by the recipient of the message, then the communication is said to be failed or ineffective. Effective communication is not only a knowledge that is mastered by a communicator but is influenced by how that knowledge is used and developed creatively. An effective communication is a skill and sensitivity that can only be done after someone can understand the process and awareness of what communicators and communicants do when communicating (Rahmawati & Gazali, 2018). According to Efendi in Yossita Wisman, communication can be said to be ineffective if there are several indicators, such as: differences in perception, the emergence of emotional reactions, inconsistencies in verbal and non-verbal communication, suspicion, and unavailability of reciprocal reactions as expected by the communicator (Wisman, 2017). So it can be concluded that a good and effective communication strategy does not only depend on our skills when speaking and conveying information but also on a comprehensive understanding of the concept of communicating.

Christian Communication Ethics

Wahyuningsih in Falimu said that ethics is the application of one's moral understanding process to real life conditions. Ethics is oriented to the basic principles and concepts of human thinking and actions, which are based on the values they accept (Falimu Imu, 2019). Jan Boersema said that ethics are considerations regarding moral actions which can be described as actions that are humane, have norms, have good and bad aspects, are related to motivation, have emotions, are based on virtue, lead to the best values (Boersema, 2014). Etymologically, ethics comes from the Greek words "ethos" and "ethikos". Ethos means a place to live, customs, habits, character attitudes, feelings, concepts of thinking, while ethikos means good behavior, morals, or deeds. In simple terms, ethics is an assessment of a person's behavior and habits based on the moral norms of life that are understood and accepted.

Christian ethics are behaviors or actions in the life of a Christian that are based on biblical values. Eka Darmaputera in his book "Simple Ethics for All: First Introductions" as quoted by Jamin Tanhidy et al., states that Christian ethics should be based on the understanding of "humans as the image of God (Imago Dei)", which in all considerations and judgments ethically Christians should in the context of appreciating and respecting the special human rights that God has given (Tanhidy, Daliman, Suparti, & Siswanto, 2021). Then Sproul in his book entitled "Ethics and Attitudes of Christians" in Jamin Tanhidy

Volume 5, Issue 4 April, 2022

et al., said that a Christian should affirm his declaration of faith, that the figure of God and His attributes is the center of everything and the absolute standard that guides right or wrong (Tanhidy et al., 2021). This statement illustrates that our every behavior as Christians must reflect the image and nature of God, because God wants us to be representatives of God on earth (Genesis 1:26-27). If so, Christian communication ethics should be based on the Bible.

From several theories and views regarding effective communication and Christian ethics, the author formulate effective communication ethics in a Christian view is the behavior of a person who reflects Christian moral values when conveying or receiving the intent of a message (information) both verbally and non-verbally aimed at paradigm or behavior change.

A-CORE as a Principle of Communication Ethics in Christian Families

In the early part of this paper, it has been concluded that human life cannot be separated from communication. The more often individuals are together, it means that they communicate more often. The closer our relationship with other people, it also means the more often we communicate with that person. This statement can be proven against people who work together in their daily lives, or against people who almost every day are in the same space or place for a long time.

The same conclusion should also be implemented in family life, especially Christian families. When a person decides to enter into marriage with their partner in a Christian marriage, there should be awareness that their partner will be the closest person to them. Moreover, the Bible bases Christian marriage on the concepts of "two becoming one" and "inseparability" (Mark 10:8-9). Therefore, Christian families should understand how to communicate effectively in their lives, so that their marriages are increasingly protected from conflicts that threaten their families. In addition to understanding how to communicate, one must also understand the ethics of communication in accordance with Christian values. Communication ethics is important in establishing harmony in the family. The relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, will be maintained if all parties agree to understand and apply good communication ethics, because the main factor in communicating is ethics.

In building effective communication and Christian ethics in Christian family life, the author proposes five principles to do, namely: (1). Amiable-friendly; (2). Clarity-openness/honesty; (3). Obvious-audible/clear; (4). Respect; (5). Empathy. To make it easier to remember, these five principles are abbreviated as "A-CORE". How do these things apply in communication within the family?

1. Amiable (friendly/gentle)

According to Collins English Dictionary, "Amiable" means "having or displaying a pleasant or agreeable nature; friendly" (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). Friendly (gentle) is an attitude that is in accordance with Christian ethics (Ephesians 4:32; Titus 3:3). Good communication etiquette is how to speak politely, speak with soft intonation, and show friendly facial gestures to the other person (Falimu Imu, 2019; Tamawiwy, 2021). Communication carried out in a pleasant mood will make the message conveyed easily. Budyatna suggests that many interpersonal relationships are initiated and maintained through the exchange of acts of affection, such as hugging, kissing, holding hands, or saying the phrase "I love you". Such actions become an effective medium in determining and accelerating the improvement of relationships in the family (Budyatna, 2015). Communication in the family by showing a friendly attitude and gentleness will make the communication atmosphere conducive, so that in the end the family communication process becomes effective (Proverbs 15:1).

In building parent-child communication, the friendly and gentle principles are to balance the firmness or discipline principle. Because sheer firmness in the end can give birth to an attitude of rebellion. Firmness accompanied by a friendly attitude and gentleness gives the impression that the rules applied in a child's life are based on parental love (Hebrews 12:6)

2. Clarity (honesty/openness)

Honesty and openness must be possessed by Christian couples in terms of communication, because this will give birth to an attitude of mutual trust. Communication accompanied by distrust or suspicion will result in ineffective communication. Matthew 5:37 says "All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. David P. Gushee & Glen H. Stassen say that reading Matthew 5:33–37 requires us to devote our attention to the moral issues associated with telling the truth and denying the truth, such as lying, breaking promises, and deceit (Gushee & Stassen, 2016). Honest behavior is one of the important foundations of Bible-based Christian ethics. Telling the truth is a human obligation under God's sovereignty (Gushee & Stassen, 2016; Pangumbahas & Winanto, 2021).

Healthy family relationships will be established if all members are honest and open with each other. To create openness and honesty, the principle of "be willing to apologize and be willing to forgive" must be applied (Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:32). With this principle, members will always learn to immediately admit their mistakes rather than hiding mistakes with lies.

In addition, to teach children about openness and honesty, it must begin with an example from parents. Parents will not be able to effectively teach their children to be honest, while in everyday life the child sees their parents who often lie. What parents need to do before teaching honesty to their children is to get used to being honest, not only when in front of their children, but in daily life. And the best way to train children's honesty is with honesty starting from the parents themselves (Chairilsyah, 2016).

3. Obvious (audible/clear)

The message conveyed by the communicator must be understood by the communicant. Therefore, communicators must use the principle of clarity when conveying messages, both in terms of language, meaning, expectations, and even mood. Obscurity will lead to: confusion, confusion, misunderstanding, destruction (Genesis 11:6-8). Misunderstanding is a barrier to communication. One of the causes is the lack of audibility of the communicator when translating the message to be conveyed. This can be caused by factors such as: the way of speaking is not good and constant, communication with emotions, communication time is not right, and other things.

4. Respect

Mutual respect is needed in building good communication. With mutual respect, a sense of mutual need will be formed. What is meant by respect here is to appreciate out of love, not out of fear. Christian marriage ethics teaches that husbands and wives should respect and love one another (Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:7), as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). In this principle of respect too, although there is a strong desire to change their partner, this is done in a polite manner, so that their life partner does not feel pressured (Santoso, 2013). Mutual respect between husband and wife will produce strong feelings of mutual trust (Santoso, 2013).

In parent-child communication, the principle of respect must also be applied in a balanced manner. Children must honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), and parents must not anger their children (Ephesians 6:4). In many cases, when this is ignored, what happens is that healthy communication is hampered. Children become reluctant or afraid if they have to interact with their parents, because they feel that their parents have no respect for them as a person. Every human being needs to be respected for their existence, in other words they will feel uncomfortable if they are with people who do not respect themselves. A child whose opinions or arguments are heard will feel valued. On the other hand, if they are always rejected because they are considered inferior by their parents, it will result in the child not wanting to communicate properly with their parents.

5. Empathy

According to Collins English Dictionary, Empathy is the ability to share another person's feelings and emotions as if they were your own (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.). Empathy means a person's ability to understand and place oneself in what other people think and feel in certain situations (Zoll, Bamberg, Enz, & Bamberg, 2010). Strauss (1988) said when communicating with a life partner, you must use your heart and not emotions, because when you hear the voice of the deepest heart, a person can better understand, care and appreciate what their partner feels, thinks and needs (Santoso, 2013).

A simple example of how to show empathy to the family: do not demand our spouse or children more than their abilities and capacities. When someone wants their partner or child to grow into something better, then accompany them as a friend who helps, and not demands. Another thing that can be shown as empathy is to appreciate your partner or child by giving praise, encouragement for the things they do. Not comparing our spouse and children to others is also an expression of empathy.

By applying these five principles, each family member will feel comfortable in communication. With these conditions, communication and relationships between family members will continue to grow. By applying the A-CORE principle, it is hoped that the harmony of Christian families will be maintained.

Conclusion

Communication is an important need in the life of every human being, in order to interact with others. Therefore, every human being should understand how to communicate effectively. This does not only apply when communicating with the general public, but in family life, effective communication is also required.

Christian marriage and family are God's own initiative. Through harmonious marriage and family, humans represent the image of God and His nature (*Imago Dei*). Christian ethics according to the Bible is an absolute standard for the behavior of Christians in carrying out their life activities, including family life. Communication based on Christian ethics will help family life to remain harmonious.

The A-CORE principle is a principle that can be applied in Christian family life, because it is in accordance with the Bible. The values in this principle are also a solution on how to build effective communication in Christian families, in order to build and maintain family harmony.

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