

GOD'S RENEWAL FOR HOUSEHOLDS

"Part XII: Renewing Household Marriages - Adjusting To In-Law Relationships"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Getting along with the in-laws as a newly married couple can be quite a challenge. Consider the following:

(1) About eight years ago, on a warm summer night when we had left our bedroom window open to enjoy the cooling outside breezes, I was startled from dozing by some shouting that was coming out of the woods up the street. I didn't know if there was a serious enough excuse for me to call the police, so I listened intently at the window to see if I could tell what to do about it.

Apparently, an argument was raging involving several relatives, and one of them was drunk and very angry. They were having a discussion over the property there on County Road -- as to which child had been given that property by the parents.

Since then, the property has been developed with a house built on in, and I hope the problem has been settled. I keep an eye on matters there now, but that night, it was really touch-and-go!

(2) More than once, in a wedding rehearsal, as I have tried to get the various parties on the groom's side and the bride's side to agree to follow the wishes of the wedding couple to what they want at their wedding, I have had to address the group, telling the parties that the wish of the bride takes precedence over that of the mother of the bride or the groom, their personal interests involved notwithstanding!

(3) One of my high school sports teammates had a mother who insisted in tucking him in every night until he actually left home at 18 years of age! She had inherited all of the property from her parents, so that when her husband married her, she basically ran the lives of Ron and his dad. I remember once Ron solemnly telling me, "My dad is not the one who leads our home." When Ron got married, his wife very soon became distraught at the mother-in-law's encroaching in her home so that Ron had to establish a rule: mother could visit and deal with the grandchildren only when she was invited to do so by Ron's wife!

Getting along with the relatives! How does a married couple learn to adjust and relate well with the relatives that follow on the coat tails of his new spouse?!

(We turn to the sermon "need" section . . .)

Need: "It's one thing to find and marry the right SPOUSE, but adjusting well to some of the in-laws who have influence over my spouse seems impossible! The relationship complexities are hard to understand let alone address! Whether it's over-domination, overdependency or isolation, etc., how do I DEAL with this?!"

I. When God instituted human marriage, He arranged for there to be a healthy DISTANCE with its balancing LOVE between in-laws:

A. God arranged for married couples to be **separate** from other relatives:

1. Genesis 2:24 reveals that God intends that a young man *leave* his father and his mother and *cleave* to his wife to become **ONE flesh**.

2. Thus, **NONE** of the *couple's* **PARENTS** belong in their union, so a married couple should be **separate** as a couple from their in-laws.

B. However, by this **distance**, God *never* meant the couple was to be **isolated** from the in-laws, for God's Word reveals one is to **honor** his parents by seeing that his aging parent's needs are met, Matt. 15:3-6.

II. However, SIN led to problems in relating to their in-laws so that often couples became helpless to make helpful relationship changes:

A. When Jacob sought to marry Rachel, and agreed to work 7 years for her dowry, instead of honoring the couple, Rachel's father, Laban tricked Jacob by giving him Rachel's sister, Leah in order to get another 7 years of service out of Jacob, Gn. 29:15-30. Then Laban lowered Jacob's wages 10 times, abusing Jacob's service, Gn. 31:41c.

B. Jacob was **unable** to **check** Laban directly since he was boxed in by Laban's influence over Leah and Rachel. Both wives then competed to have the most sons to win the troubled Jacob's favor, 29:31-30:24.

C. In the end, this struggle erupted in the next generation to Jacob's grief: ten of Jacob's jealous sons sold into slavery his favored son, Joseph, who came through the favored wife, Rachel, Gen. 37:1-36.

III. Accordingly, we view Scripture on how to overcome such humanly impassable problems married couples can face with their in-laws:

A. As **SIN** starts the problems with in-laws, we **first** address **our own**:

1. We must believe on Christ for salvation from sin to be forgiven **our own** sin and be equipped to live righteously, Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17. **As an important by-product of this action, we are placed into God's ETERNAL PLAN regarding our destiny**, Rom. 8:28-29.
 2. As believers, we (a) confess sins we do that block rapport with God (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) depend on the Spirit for behavior control to live uprightly (Ga. 5:16-23) & (c) obey Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:3-6.
- B. Then, we let **GOD'S plans FOR us** address the difficult in-laws:
1. We should first seek to be a witness with the in-laws so that they can come to Christ and so heed the **love-balanced-with-distancing** format God originally designed for in-law relationships.
 2. However, that may not quickly occur, if ever. Since individuals may be helpless to change in-law complications due to spousal ties involved, the next step is resting in **God's** plans for results:
 - a. Letting God tackle **interdependent** in-laws: (1) When Laban ensnared son-in-law Jacob by forcing him to work another seven years for Rachel, Jacob upheld his part of the bargain by working another seven extra years, Gen. 29:15-28. (2) Yet, **God's plan** meant Jacob should be blessed as the heir of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 28:13-15), so **God** gave Jacob **insight** in acquiring the possessions he needed from **Laban's** goods to go **independent FROM** Laban regardless of Laban's deceit, Gn. 31:36-42. (3) When Laban saw Jacob had gained **his** goods, **God** warned Laban to leave Jacob alone, Gen. 31:20-24.
 - b. Letting God tackle **dominating** in-laws: (1) When Jacob returned to his home, past problems with his brother, Esau erupted as Esau came with 400 horsemen apparently intent on robbing Jacob's possessions. (2) Jacob was met by the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus who taught him through a wrestling match to **trust** God's plan for his life for **defense** against Esau, Gen. 32:24-30 with 32:9-12. (3) God softened the attitude of Esau so that he met Jacob with peaceful intentions, Gn. 33:1-20.
 - c. Letting God tackle **isolating** in-laws: When Jacob's son, Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery, **God's plan** to save the family worked to reunite Jacob & Joseph, 37:1-30; 45:4-7.

Application: *To handle difficult in-law relationships, handle SIN in OURSELVES and become part of God's eternal plan by (1) trusting in Christ as Savior from sin, Jn. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:28-30. (2) Then, we must fellowship with God ("I I, A" above) and (3) seek to witness to in-laws for their change of heart. (4) For in-laws who remain ungodly, rely on God's sovereign plan for our lives to give a "clearing" for us to be able to function well in relating to them.*

Lesson: *Since the complexities of in-law problems take divine effort to solve, one must side with God's plan for his life to get GOD involved in giving a "clearing" for him so he can do GOD'S will amidst the relatives.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon . . .)

Eleven!

I was pretty upset with my relative, but he held onto the job despite my concerns! I was able to handle the bitterness I confess I felt at first, but felt I couldn't really trust him much anymore!

And was able to make enough money the rest of the summer to return to college!

Years later, between pastorates and before coming up here to Nepaug, Nadine and I reached financial rock bottom. We had nothing but a single dollar bill in my wallet to our names, and no source of income! I didn't want to get a job because of the limited time we had in Dallas before coming to Nepaug. We didn't know what to do.

Two YEARS suddenly sold the van, and sent us \$2,000 of the proceeds for us to live on! God knew we needed the money for survival if we were to stay in the ministry, and He wanted us to arrive to minister at Nepaug. Thus, the rift between us was healed, and I was able later to pay him back all of that money once we had drawn salary at Nepaug!

God's plans for our lives is what we need to solve deep problems with the in-laws and other relatives, for we are too vulnerable to complex tangles in relationships to address them impartially! We must get right with the Lord and let HIS purposes for our lives make "room" for us to live well with in-laws.