

GOD'S RENEWAL FOR HOUSEHOLDS

"Part XXVI: Renewing Household Families: Addressing Roadblocks - Overcoming Stepparenting Rigors"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) The family structure in America is changing due to the presence of divorce and remarriage. Consider the following statistics:

(a) In 1960, the percentage of children living with a father and stepmother was .8% where in 1990, it had risen 11% to .9%.

(b) When it comes to children living with a mother and stepfather, 5.9% of American children in 1960 lived in this arrangement where the number had risen to 10.4%, an increase of 56.7%.

(2) With this change in structure come very special stresses and needs. Here is a list of some of them I have run across in pastoring:

(a) A stepparent may feel guilty by feeling "in the way" of the original mother or father to a child.

(b) The child may feel bitterness toward the stepparent not because of anything innately wrong with that adult, but simply because he or she is "in the way" of the original family parent.

(c) With a broken relationship existing between a stepparent and a child who is not his offspring, awkwardness in situations of child discipline, in knowing what to do in family gatherings with the divorced, real parent present, etc. arise, creating stresses.

(d) The "real" parent may feel anger that the stepparent is constantly in the "role" of parenting where he feels he should be, so stress comes in from the "real" parent toward the innocent stepparent.

(e) The child, caught in the vice, may sense the opportunity to take advantage of the awkwardness felt by the stepparent to "use" it to run around the stepparent's rights and leadership, creating great stresses in the household.

(f) The parent who is the true parent, feeling caught in the middle between the stepparent marital partner and his or her own, troubled child, may feel alternately angry at the child or the spouse, or get caught in tiffs with the divorced partner over the child!

(g) Stresses can arise in a dwelling between a sibling who is fully related to both parents and one who is related only to one through a former marriage, creating inflammatory jealousies!

In view of the added dynamics of being in a home where there is at least one stepparent, what would God want, and why for improving the situation and leading to edification?!

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . .)

Need: "We don't live in the single parent status, but our family still faces unusual challenges with a stepparenting set-up. Is there any guidance from God as to how to face OUR special family needs?!"

- I. **The stepparent family, being short of God's initial design, makes use of REGULAR parent-child roles NATURALLY ineffective!**
 - A. God designed a family to be a man and a woman coming together to create a unit where children arise from their mutual procreation, Genesis 2:25. In this way, there is a natural and thus very easy bond between both parents and the children from their earliest memories.
 - B. Thus, in the event of a death or divorce of a parent followed by remarriage, if the stepparent mistakenly *assumes* a regular parental role in relation to the **stepchild**, since that child *cannot* **NATURALLY** adjust to it, trouble is bound to rise!
- II. **However, in Christ, SPIRITUAL relationships exist that can go FAR towards meeting individual needs REGARDLESS if the NATURAL parent-child roles are ineffective (as follows):**
 - A. Positionally, a perfect spiritual "family" relationship occurs between every believer and God in Christ:
 1. The Triune Godhead is a "threesome parent" to every believer, the Holy Spirit ministering as a "parent" to the believer (John 14:16-18 NIV) under the parental jurisdiction of Christ (Jn. 16:13-14) whose authority is granted by the Father (1 Cor. 15:20, 22-24).
 2. All believers collectively are united as the Bride of Christ in relation to the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church, Eph. 5:25-32.
 - B. Experientially, each believer's relationship to God can be "lived out" in his relating to other believers in an edifying "family format":
 1. Believers are to treat older men as they would fathers, 1 Tim. 5:1a.
 2. They are to treat younger men as they would brothers, 1 Tim. 5:1b.
 3. They are to treat older women as they would mothers, 1 Tim. 5:2a.
 4. They must treat younger women as they would sisters, 1 Tim. 5:2b.

- C. However, this arrangement works well only as all involved are spiritually, positionally related to God as true Christians (He. 12:6-8), and are walking in fellowship with God and are maturing in Christ to relate well to one another, 1 Cor. 3:3.
- D. Thus, we need the following practical advice on using the resources available to us in Christ to offset imperfect stepparent arrangements:
1. Focus One - As a Stepparent or a stepchild, **do NOT** try to "fill the void" of the absence of the "real" parent with our **own** efforts -- we are **not naturally** equipped to do what God never designed people to do outside of His original, natural family arrangement!
 2. Focus Two - Rather, *orient* and draw from the **spiritual** resources we have available to us in Christ for step-relationships in a family:
 - a. Become positionally related to God, the spiritually overseeing "parent" through faith in Christ for salvation, Jn. 1:11-13.
 - b. Fellowship with God through (1) confession of sin (1 Jn. 1:9), (2) dependence on the indwelling, "parenting" Holy Spirit, and thereby, on the Triune Godhead for behavior control (Gal. 5:16-23) to (3) heed Scripture for God's blessing, 1 Jn. 2:3-6.
 - c. In this position, (1) attend gatherings of the body, the local church for fellowship with the godly for going a long way for filling up the "void" in the imperfect "home" situation, He. 10:25 with Eph. 4:7-16. (2) Seek to apply the **spiritual** pattern of home parent-child relationships implied in II,B above in the home to fill in the chasms of hurt and frustration!
 3. Focus Three - Often, not all in *Church* or at *home* are godly so that all works well. If so, use the "missionary approach" as follows:
 - a. Believers are to disciple **all nations**, Mtt. 28:19-20, a huge effort in bringing very alienated people into II,B-type relations above!
 - b. Yet, Paul examples how to do so in his epistles as follows: (1) take on unconditional love for the "estranged" party, Rom. 9:1-3; (2) assume a posture of unconditional self-sacrifice of all personal rights considered "offensive" by the estranged party to gain a hearing with him, 1 Cor. 10:31-33; (3) **God** may *push* us into conflicts with the party as part of the discipling process, so, if that occurs, don't shy away from it, Acts 18:5-6; (4) if put into such a conflict, hold our ground with what is right, Acts 18:5-6, 19; (5) always nourish even the smallest progress even if it is inexcusably long overdue, Acts 19:1-7 with Mtt. 3:11-12; (6) with our role or authority finally accepted by the difficult party, isolate the party from unproductive peer pressure, Acts 19:9-10; (7) let our credibility be God's business to establish, not ours, Acts 19:11-20. (8) Share victories with other needy family units so that they can learn from our experiences to gain God's victory, Titus 2:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:2 and 2 Cor. 1:3-4.

Lesson Application: *What sin destroys of the original, NATURAL family unit, God in Christ can successfully circumnavigate by grace if we but get right with and stay right with Him. Our part is to avail ourselves of the spiritual resources we have in Christ to get results.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson . . .)

The Hartford Courant staff writer, Valerie Finholm reported in the November 15th, 1996 issue on a troubling survey on the state's teens. Connecticut's teens have serious personal, emotional or mental health problems according to the study. She quoted Dr. Michael Resnik, director of the National Adolescent Health Resource Center as saying, "The health and well-being of America's youth is in a state of decline."

We can only imagine how these problems are augmented by stresses added with the presence of a stepmother or stepfather.

However, this study revealed a fascinating deterrent, a real balm for troubled teens. Finholm reported Dr. Resnik as concluding that the most important "protective factor" that draws "young people back from the abyss" is the "presence of at least one caring adult . . . If not a mom and dad it can be a teacher, coach, older sibling, responsible adult in the neighborhood . . . and frequently the parent of their best friend."

If a teen in trouble needs a caring adult for help, and even if it is not a mom or dad, but even a responsible adult in the neighborhood like a friend's parent, certainly GOD can equip a godly STEPPARENT to help him. The key of course cannot be that adult's seeking to REPLACE a mother or father that is impossible, but showing real CARE as the "parenting" Triune Godhead lives and works through the stepparent to make a big, positive difference!