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Can We Avoid In-Law Problems

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Ask the Prof

How Can We Avoid In-law Problems?

by James A. Borland

The relationship between parents and their married children is an important one and needs to be given careful and prayerful consideration. Are children commanded to "leave" home at marriage (Gen. 2:24) and yet expected to "obey" their parents (Eph. 6:1)? Does the obligation to obey parents ever cease? When children marry, are parents thereafter absolved of all responsibility toward them? Is there a balance?

When a young couple gets married they may be thinking more of the cleaving together contemplated in Genesis 2:24 than of the equally binding command for the gentleman to leave father and mother. Marriage should signal the completion of the parental task of training children to be responsible adults who have gained the ability to function independently in our complex society. Wise parents will teach children to see things from God's perspective and guide them into maturity. Paul said he once spoke, understood, and thought as a child until he "became a man" (1 Cor. 13:11).

God says that instruction should be built "precept upon precept; line upon line . . . here a little and there a little" (Isa. 28:10). Careful attention must be given to a balance between discipline (Prov. 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; Heb. 12:5-11), and instruction (Prov. 22:6, Eph. 6:4). Both are necessary.

After a child marries, wise parents observe a hands-off policy. Be friendly, but not nosy. Do not offer unsolicited

advice. Encourage without bothering. Continue in prayer for the new couple.

The other part of this relationship concerns whether married children are still under obligation to obey their parents. The obedience required in Ephesians 6:1 applies only to children within the family unit during the process of rearing as indicated in verse 4. However, the Fifth Commandment (Ex. 20:12), which is repeated in Ephesians 6:3, applies to all children. Age, marital status, and degree of independence are not considerations

here. Children are to pay the same honor and respect to their parents as they would to a king. (1 Peter 2:17 uses the identical Greek word for honoring.) Honoring disallows ignoring, abandoning, spurning, or despising. In fact, children even have an obligation to financially support parents who may be in need (1 Tim. 5:8). To avoid dishonoring parents, children need to communicate with them, live harmoniously and in friendship with them, and live lives that will bring no reproach or disgrace upon their parents. □

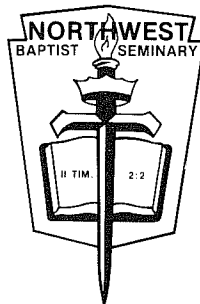
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