

**BIBLICAL PILLARS FOR A FAMILY FOUNDATION**  
**Pillar Nine – In Laws and Outlaws**

**I. Biblical Data**

**A. Principle # 1 – Review Genesis 2:18-25 - Unity in Marriage**

A family functions well to the extent that **the marriage** comes first.

1. Basic Family Unit – Marriage w/ potential for kids, with wife functioning as helper to man v. 18
2. Wife is the only person who is part of the man v. 23
3. Man is joined to only one of the family as one v. 24
4. Man exchanged his first loyalty and identity with parents for loyalty and identity with his wife v. 24
5. Sexual union reflects exclusiveness and mutual first loyalty vv. 24-25

**B. Principle # 2: Matthew 15:1-9/1 Timothy 5:4, 8 – Honoring Your Parents – A family functions well to the extent that the adults in it are committed to the welfare of their aging or needy parents.** Other in-laws also are to honor and care for one-another.

1. Pharisees transgress Gods commands by giving money to God that should have helped provide for their parents Mt. 15:3-6
2. Failing to take care of parents is a violation of a core doctrine of God, even if it's to give to God Mt. 15:6-9
3. Widows are to be taken care of by their children 1 Tim. 5:4, ff.

**C. Principle #3 – 1 Corinthians 11:3, ff and Ephesians 5:21-33 – The husband is his wife's head and protector who cherishes her and she is his helper who respects him and doesn't take over**

A family functions well (including with in-laws) to the extent that the husband cares for his wife, protects her, cherishes and values her above all others, even though it may cost him something personal (like a parent's anger). Likewise, a family functions well (including with in-laws) to the extent that the wife honors her husband's position and does not attempt to press her agenda at the expense of his leadership.

**II. Synthesis**

Biblical theology is the attempt to combine and synthesize all that the Bible may have to say about a matter. How do the various biblical statements about family – including marriage and parents of adult children – combine to tell us how we should respond in our in-law relationships? Three core principles emerge:

- A. **Marriage first:** The marriage relationship comes first.
- B. **Roles:** Part of putting the marriage relationship first is recognizing your need to submit to your husband or to lay down your life for your wife. This can definitely show up with in-laws.
- C. **Honor Your Parents and Theirs:** A married couple must remember that God still holds them accountable to honor with their mouth and their actions their parents and the parents of their spouse.
- D. **To do otherwise** – to speak ill of them, to be bitter, to not help them as needed, etc. – is to invoke God's judgment on you for holding your personal "traditions" above His clearly stated commands (Mark 7:11).

1. Recognize here that “speaking ill” could include contemptuous or disrespectful or unkind speech but does not include speaking truth in love (see Eph. 4:25-29).
2. Recognize also that “honor” is not necessarily the same as “obey.”

E. **Biggest problem** here usually lies with a spouse whose parent does not show respect to their spouse. The rupture occurs not when the parent in law misbehaves – that is just a circumstance in life God has permitted. The rupture occurs when the spouse whose parent mishandled the relationship does not address the issue with their parent. It may be your place to speak firmly yet respectfully to your parent when they treat your spouse rudely. Conversely, you may need to speak to your spouse if they are rude to your parents. (Rom. 12:18-19)

### III. Step Family Issues

- A. Parent not explaining adequately to their children the new relationship
- B. New step-parent overstepping bounds without building a relationship
- C. New union being tested by kids who will pit them against each other
- D. In short, forgetting the basic pattern of a functioning family

### IV. Other Issues

Many other issues are brought up by in-law relationships. This is a time for open discussion. I'll be glad to take a crack at any of these three if it's helpful for anyone, or you may have some of your own.

- **Money:** Sometimes we get something from them like money or a car and feel obligated to do certain things they want. It causes problems.
- **Abuse:** Someone in the extended family has treated someone in our family in a cruel, abusive or neglectful way. What are our obligations to them?
- **Religious Differences:** Perhaps you have endured criticism for your religious commitments because they are the “wrong stripe” for your extended family. That can include denominational loyalty with which you have broken, conservative views they think are judgmental (such as on abortion, homosexuality or salvation by faith for those who are in Christ) or fears due to our lack of infant baptism.
- **Other**