

"THE CYCLE OF LOVE" The Fifth Commandment

INTRODUCTION

Only after thoroughly discussing our relationship with Himself does God move on to the fifth commandment, which addresses our relationships with others. He knows we must be at peace with Him and under the influence of His Spirit before we can hope to relate to others satisfactorily.

Occasionally, non-Christians come to me for counseling because they want to "get their act together" and work on family relationships. They're frustrated because their attempts to be more loving to family members usually end in failure. They can't forgive past wrongs. They can't overlook irritating habits. They can't love someone who seems "unlovable." They don't seem to have it in them. They just can't do it on their own.

I tell such people the same thing I tell myself every day of my life: "Of course you can't do it on your own! You need a love that's not your own—and a patient, forgiving spirit that's not your own. You need a change of heart."

Not long ago a friend of mine had to fire one of his key employees. "Five years ago, before I became a Christian, this would have been easy," he said. "I would have sent the guy a pink slip and said, 'Sorry, you weren't doing the job.' Short, simple, and to the point. This time, however, I agonized over the situation. As soon as I realized this man couldn't handle his responsibilities, I started praying about it. I even tried to alter his job description. But it just didn't work. I knew he had to go. So I flew to the city where his office was located and talked with him personally. I gave him my reasons and promised to help him find another position.

It was easy to fire people when I didn't care about them. But now that I know the Lord, people and relationships are very important to me. I don't want to use or hurt people, or take their needs lightly. I want to love and encourage them."

That's exactly how every true believer should feel. As we grow in our relationship with God, we should experience a revolutionary change in our attitudes toward people. People should become more important to us. We should become more sensitive to their needs, desires, and hurts.

And guess what: parents are people too!

Children living in the parental home should honor their parents by cooperating with them joyfully, respecting them, and expressing appreciation. Children living outside the family home should make sure their parents' basic needs are met, ought to include them in family activities, and should communicate their love to them over and over again.

Our reward for obeying the fifth commandment will be the blessing of a warm and harmonious family life—and that is a rich blessing indeed. When we're enjoying a right relationship with God and a right relationship with our parents, we have the most important relationships in life in order—and the freedom to establish a right relationship with the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Take some time and discuss what the ideal biblical family should look like.
2. Read Exodus 20:12. What do you think it means to 'honor' your parents? What are some reasons that we would want to obey this commandment?
3. Why do you think this commandment is placed at the beginning of the commands concerning our relationships with others?
4. What are some practical ways that we can honor our parents the next time we visit home? What struggles or obstacles do you face in honoring your parents?
5. Share some convictions you gained today. Spend time praying for your family.