Life Emphasis Service Notes

Respect Your Elders

Leviticus 19:32

The Scripture

The Old Testament Lesson: 2 Samuel 19:31-37

Barzillai the Gileadite also came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there. Now Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. The king said to Barzillai, “Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you.” But Barzillai answered the king, “How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way? Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever pleases you.”

Barzillai was an old man. In his advanced years he began to see himself as a burden to others. In this respect he failed to see King David’s invitation to live with him as the sincere desire to help carry the burden. Barzillai also reflected the wish of many aging people to remain in familiar surroundings in the closing moments of life on this earth.

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 71, p. 92 CW

The Epistle Reading: Titus 2:1-5

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

The elderly must never cease learning the things of God. In fact, as they learn they further share the wealth of their experiences and knowledge with the younger generation. In this manner they contribute valuably to the well-being of the home and society by upholding the treasure of God’s Word and will.


Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:
“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

The excitement of greeting the Promised Savior is accentuated by the stories of Simeon and Anna. Though both of them were in their twilight years, they remained devoted to their Lord, and they faced death with the optimism of eternal life through the Savior.

The Sermon
The Text: Leviticus 19:32
Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

The Context:
The words were delivered by God some 1,450 years before Christ. This entire section in Leviticus is part of God’s directives which were handed down through Moses. In Exodus 20 we find that most familiar revelation which we now call the Ten Commandments. One can consider this portion of Leviticus as an elaboration of those commandments. In a sense, it is God’s Large Catechism in that it expands and further articulates the general principles He established in the Commandments.

Thoughts for the Introduction:
Since 1973 abortion has been legal in all the states and territories of the United States. By the end of this past century, more than 40 million babies who would have been born died from abortion.

During that same period remarkable advancements were made in health care. People are living longer. The combination of two factors accounts for what experts term “the aging of America.” From 1973 to 2000 the number of people of at least retirement age in the United States climbed from 21.5 million to 35 million. That number constitutes an increase from 9.5% of the U.S. population in 1973 to 12.4% in 2000.

More elderly people are living in the United States today than ever before. The challenge to a society that kills its offspring shifts with the end-of-life issue of caring for our aging.

Increased interest in patient autonomy and assisted suicide legislation is sweeping the country. The elderly are demanding ever-increasing control over their life and their death. They may also be feeling a sense of responsibility to “get out of the way” when they become old and infirm. A former Colorado governor once declared, “The elderly have a duty to die and to cease to be a burden on their family and others.”
As this declining valuation of life takes place, a corresponding lack of respect and appreciation for life also occurs in its elder years. Cases of elder abuse are on the rise. Elderly parents sit out their days in nursing homes often without hearing from their children for long periods of time. Busy young families communicate a subtle message to aging relatives that they do not have time for them and that their thoughts and ideas are of little value.

**Terminology:** Following are some buzzwords that pertain to the topic of respect and caring for the elderly:

**Burden:** As Barzillai noted in our Old Testament reading, it is common for the aging to feel like burdens upon others. Thoughtless family members make the added responsibility of caring for aging relatives unbearable. Well-meaning family members keep insisting they are not a burden even though caring for them makes a substantial impact on their lives. The reality lies in the middle. The infirmities that accompany aging are well-known and recorded in Scripture and in everyday life. Compensating for those infirmities is burdensome to some degree. Burdens, however, are often given by God as opportunities to show our faith (i.e. the story of the Good Samaritan). In fact, Scripture never speaks against those whose infirmities make them burdens. Scripture never speaks against carrying the burdens of others. In reality, Scripture commends our willingness to carry burdens. For that reason, if we were to become a burden in life it is not a mark of shame in the eyes of God. Rather, it is God giving others the opportunity to reflect their love for Him and others.

**Assisted Suicide:** Both the Netherlands and the state of Oregon practice legalized assisted suicide. Legalization suggests that ailing people have the right to not only terminate their own lives but to have professional assistance in doing so, without legal ramifications for the assistant. Other states are seeking such legalization.

**Focus of the Text:** Note the two focuses to the text which must be pointed out in the sermon:

1. Respect for the aging
2. Reverence for God

The sermon should weave both points into one unit. Simply put, showing respect for the aging is showing reverence for God, and those who revere God have respect for the aging.

**Text Notes**

*(Job 29:8)* *The young men saw me [Job] and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet;*

**Rising to your Feet as a Sign of Respect**

Herodotus (born in a Greek colony under Persian rule in Asia Minor, ca. 484-425 B.C.) – When writing on the faithfulness of Arabs in keeping promises, Herodotus explains how a person consummates a friendship with another with a type of blood oath. Once consummated, this new friend is presented to the other friends. Of those other friends Herodotus writes, “They [the other friends] deem themselves bound to stand to the engagement” (Ref.: *Herodotus: Book III, Sec. 8*). Standing was both a sign of welcome and a sign of mutual respect.

Biblically speaking we see “rising” or “standing” as a show of respect. The cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God, are described as standing (1 Chronicles
In Ezekiel’s vision the four figures are also standing (Ezekiel chapter 1).

In Genesis 31:35 Rachel expresses concern that she cannot stand in the presence of her father. The Children of Israel also rose out of respect for Moses as we read in Exodus 33:7-8.

In contrast several accounts illustrate people falling to the ground as an act of reverence before someone (Acts 10:25-26). This communicates a different flavor than rising in respect. It appears more as an act of worship and perhaps even a trembling fear.

**Respect the Elderly**

Scripture uses the word “respect” in the NIV translation only 32 times in 31 verses. Leviticus 19:3 is a reference to the attitude toward our parents. In the listing of curses from the Lord in Deuteronomy 28, a conquering nation is described as being “without respect for the old or pity for the young.”

Proverbs 11:16 indicates respect being given to a kind-hearted woman. Jeremiah’s lamentation over the greatly deteriorated condition of Jerusalem includes a lament for the lack of respect to the elders (Lamentations 5:12). The Malachi 1:6 passage makes an interesting parallel between masters and servants with fathers and sons. It reads: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” There is a parallel between “honor” and “respect.” See also Matthew 21:37 in which the master speaks of the tenants having “respect” for his son.

The directive from the Apostle Paul certainly places on all of us an enduring concept of respect beyond the Old Testament writings when he writes: (Romans 13:7) “Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”

The discussion in 1 Timothy 6:1-2 is interesting in its insistence on maintaining respect despite a change in circumstances. In particular, a slave must respect the master. In addition, if that master is also a believer, that level of respect must be maintained. In other words, familiarity or common convictions do not change the God-given assignment to maintain respect.

In Titus 2:2 the Apostle Paul does lay upon the elderly a responsibility with regard to respect. Here the elderly are reminded they are to be “worthy of respect.” This passage does not so much suggest that an elder’s respect is as much earned, as it can be lost through compromising actions.

To better illustrate this point, look at 3 John 6: “They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.” This passage suggests that one does not “send them on their way” in a manner that “earns” God but rather that reflects God and in no way compromises all that God stands for. In the same way, the statement, “worthy of respect,” suggests that nothing is to be done to compromise the respect that is already there.

**Revere Your God**

The word “revere” is only used in the Old Testament (17 times), and in every instance it refers to a demonstrated action of respect and adoration toward God. As I conducted a study of “revere”
and “reverence,” I was struck by a progressive trail in the words of Scripture. We “respect” the elderly, our spouses, our rulers, our masters, and all in authority. “Honor” carries an additional measure of resolve and devotion. “Revere” is the ultimate. It is the fiercely uncompromising respect deserving only by God. Some can lose respect. Others may lose their honor. The reverence due God can never be lost.

The construction of the verse suggests a parallel, of sorts. By respecting the elderly people revere God. At the outset, if you recall, I pointed out that this section of Scripture is an expansion of the commandments. We know from Scripture that we show love to God by obeying His commandments (1 John 5:3). As He instructed us to honor and respect, we therefore demonstrate a love and reverence for Him.

This parallel is easily shrouded in the English translation. If you look at the Leviticus 19:14 verse the NIV states: “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.” It sounds as though, in contrast to putting a curse on the deaf or stumbling block in front of the blind, a person is to fear God. Actually, the construction is similar to verse 32, and it literally means that by not cursing the deaf and by not putting a stumbling block in front of the blind you are fearing God.

A colloquialism might go something like this, “Why don’t you clean up your room and be a good boy?” In other words, by cleaning up your room you are being a good boy. They are not two distinct and different thoughts, but the latter is reflected by performance of the former.

The point here is the close tie between doing God’s commands and revering God. When you do what God requests, it is your act of honor, reverence and worship. It is the true religion (James 1:27).

I am the Lord
Perhaps the best way to understand this phrase is to say it is God’s autograph. It is His distinguishing mark used 158 times in the Old Testament. It leaves no doubt who is talking and the authority of which He speaks.

Law Application
Respect is something that is an entitlement for the elderly. It does not have to be earned. It is a demand of God. Failure to respect the elderly means one’s failing to revere God.

Because the elderly, like all of us, are sinful, they do things that are contrary to their entitlement of respect. That doesn’t mean they are no longer entitled to respect. I find no evidence in Scripture that the elderly ever forfeits his entitlement to respect. Rather, God places the challenge before the elder to act in a manner worthy of that entitlement for respect.

Two possibilities for law application exist here. First of all, a word to the elderly. What have they said, or done, or are doing or are saying that compromises their entitlement to respect? The answer is simply anything they do contrary to the will and Word of God. Whether they use God’s name in vain, tell off-color jokes or seek to commit self-murder (suicide) because they no longer like their life, they compromise their entitlement to respect.

Contemporary examples are not as readily obvious. Many kind and perhaps even well-meaning elderly grandparents have decided to seek assisted-suicide or have refused certain care with the
expressed intent to shorten their lives. However noble the reasons may sound for this kind of action, it is contrary to the will of God and puts personal desires before God’s Word. A God-fearing and Bible-believing child, grandchild or on-looker should recognize that because this action is contrary to God’s Word, it tarnishes that entitlement to respect.

At the same time, a responsibility is placed before us to respect others. Interestingly enough, this respect is not automatically forfeited when the elderly do things that tarnish their entitlement to it. Biblical examples of this would be David’s continued respect for King Saul despite Saul’s sinfulness. In that regard, Saul was entitled to respect and honor as the ruler despite the fact that he certainly did not seem worthy of that respect in and of himself.

Respect for the elderly should be understood as considerate and compassionate actions and emotions toward the elderly. While dementia may rob some of their cognitive skills or their more pleasant disposition, we never have cause to be disrespectful. Disrespect for the elderly is displayed when we fail to be compassionate and kind toward them. If we communicate to them directly or subtly that they are in the way, am undesired burden or a nuisance, then we sin against God.

**Gospel Application**

There is no more sobering thought than God’s patient and considerate love for us in Christ. Because of our sins we were spiritual nuisances to God. Yet, with steadfast and unwavering devotion He loved us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). As if that miracle of love is not enough, we continue to do the evil we would not do (Romans 7:19). Nevertheless, every week we can come before the altar, confess those sins and know that in Christ those sins are blotted out. It is for this reason, that we can love the elderly, even when they may seem difficult to love.

**Practical Applications in Sanctification**

- Encourage support of legislative, political, and community efforts that demonstrate respect and concern for the health and well-being of the elderly.
- Encourage the elderly to be pro-active members in community causes in which their wisdom and Christ-oriented lives can be beacons of hope to a sin-infested world.
- Lead listeners to evaluate their own attitudes and actions toward the elderly.
- Encourage the elderly to consider their responsibility to live in a manner consistent with the respect God has prescribed for them.
- Suggest visits with the elderly to not only help them out but to listen and learn from them.
- Encourage the elderly to be mentors in their congregation, helping youngsters learn memory work, class assignments, etc.
- Raise the issue of how inclusive the congregation’s physical design includes the elderly as well as the manner in which it conducts its operations (i.e. disabled access, reasonable times for the elderly, adequate sound systems, large print material, etc.)
- Challenge the elderly to use their retirement years as an opportunity to testify by example the blessings of the godly lifestyle through their regular worship and Bible study practices as well as intense interest in the Christian mission of the congregation.

**Sample Theme and Parts**

**Respect your Elders**
1. It is their entitlement
2. It is God’s request
3. It is your reverent service

**Reflecting God’s Love to the Elderly**
1. Respect them
2. Care for them

**Elderly Respect**
1. It is demanded from all
2. It is a prized right for the ages
3. It is an act of worship