

A Good Kind of Preferential Treatment

Leviticus 19:32

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-5-19

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Text: Leviticus 19:2,32

Lev. 19:2 “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. . .

Lev. 19:32 “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.

Introduction

While I was commuting back and forth to work two weeks ago I was listening to a marvelous sermon by Dr. Joe Morecraft on the Biblical philosophy of work. During a really small section that dealt with how communism destroyed the Biblical work ethic, he mentioned that one of the things that Americans and communists have in common is a hatred for the fifth commandment - honor your father and your mother - especially as that commandment is expanded in the rest of the Scripture to refer to honoring anyone who is in authority over you. He pointed out that there is a breakdown of God’s normal authority structures and substituting radical submission to the state.

But what was shocking to my ears (it should not have been, but what was shocking to my ears) was how boldly he used the terms from the Larger Catechism of inferiors, superiors, and equals. He said, “All of us are superiors to somebody, and all of us are inferiors to somebody, and all of us are equals to somebody. And when you try to blot out that hierarchy in culture and in work it falls apart like in the Soviet Union.”

Just hearing him use those terms in our egalitarian-saturated society sounded strange to my ears. And I thought that if it sounded strange in my ears, it probably sounds even stranger to the average Christian. This is a topic that needs to be taught, and thought about, and carefully and prayerfully implemented. We don’t tend to think of inferiors and superiors in our culture. But the Bible does. You will notice that the Dykstras, and Simmons, and others using language of honor for pastors or elders and even of those who are older than they are. And that is good.

And our culture’s rejection of the honor due to the elderly can be seen in so many different ways. Sometimes it is subtle. A young man was asked by a widow to guess her age. He paused for quite a while, obviously uncomfortable, until she said, “Come on, you must have some idea.” He

answered, "I have several ideas. The only trouble is that I hesitate whether to make you ten years younger on account of your looks, or ten years older on account of your intelligence." It was a somewhat safe answer. But it illustrates the irony that many want the honor that used to go with age, but they don't want to be thought of as old. They want to have their cake and eat it too.

And this confusion over what is truly honorable is not just to be found between the young and the old, but also between males and females, citizens and civic officers, or even the honor that should be paid to a guest who arrives in your home. Have you thought about that? Scripture talks about a special honor that we should give to guests. Why? Just because God wants us to honor guests in a special way - He has a heart for that ministry. In Biblical times people took it as a great honor to host guests. When the three guests (who later turned out to be angels) visited Abraham, Abraham was a civic officer in his own right commanding a small army. So it was not as if he was a common man. He was a highly respected leader. Yet Genesis 18:2-5 says that as soon as Abraham saw these three visitors before his tent, ...he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. And after that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant."

And when they agreed, it says, "So Abraham hurried [notice that word, "hurried" - Abraham hurried] into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." And then they enthusiastically extended hospitality. Now, it may be that Abraham prophetically realized that he was entertaining angels. But this kind of hospitality, washing of feet, and respect for guests was common in the Bible. They considered it an incredible privilege to extend hospitality. And they gave great honor to their guests.

We need to disciple our children into a biblical view of honor where honor is due. And the Bible would say that honor is not due everywhere. In that first picture in your outline, the meme says, "The hoary head [that is the gray head] is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." At least that's what it says in the KJV and the NKJV. Not all are to be honored, but "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." And by the way, having your children read a chapter of Proverbs every day and report back what verse God has quickened to their hearts is a good habit to get into. If you read and apply the Proverbs every day, you will automatically begin to develop a Christian counter-culture in

your homes.

But what does it mean to honor a person? How should it be expressed? One of the few places where our culture still retains some semblance of honor is in the courtroom. People still have to rise when a judge enters the court room, don't they? And they can be in real trouble if they show disrespect to the judge.

Scott Polski (he is a lawyer friend of many in this church, for those who are visitors - Scott Polski) once told me that he has to watch his p's and q's when he is in the courtroom, and it can make him a little nervous when he is called upon to approach the bench. Why? Because our society still expects us to show great honor for a judge. I want you to keep that picture in mind when you look at other forms of honor that are mentioned in the Scripture. It might help to give you a feel for the kind of honor that the Bible is calling for. Honor does not mean that you have to agree with the judge. There are judges that ought to be disagreed with, but how do you disagree with a judge respectfully? The modern church really doesn't have good guidelines to teach on this subject; but it should.

And while today's sermon won't give everything that could be given, I hope it will spur your thinking on a good kind of preferential treatment that we can give to women (especially older women), to officers in the church, officers in the state and to others in authority. Don't assume that your children will learn these things automatically. In fact, in our culture it is almost guaranteed that they will not learn these things automatically. Almost guaranteed. I think we need to teach them from the Scripture very consistently.

For example do your children know the proper way to address the envelope of a letter to a President, a Senator or a Congressman? Each one has a slightly different protocol.¹ And very few people know the difference. It's a shame. For the most part, Americans have lost touch with these terms of respect, though you can read about them on the web.

I have copied Larger Catechism 126-128 to give some further guidance

¹ For example, if writing to Senator Orrin Hatch, you would address the letter to "The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch" and directly under that his title, and under that, "United States Senate." In the letter you would simply write, "Dear Senator Hatch." This is the same protocol for former senators. Meeting such a senator face to face, you might say "Senator Hatch" when greeting him, and after that either say simply Senator or Sir, or Ma'am. However, if testifying before a committee, you would address the committee chair as "Chairman." If introducing him it is etiquette to say "The Honorable Senator Hatch, Senator from Utah." When speaking about a president, you speak of "President Trump," or in the case of a former president, "former President lastName." A current governor is Governor Tom Smith, and a former Governor is "former Governor Jim Bell." Etc.

beyond what I will teach on this morning. It's on the top right hand part of your outline. And if you have a really good edition of the Larger Catechism, you will be able to read all of the verses in the footnotes. Prayerfully reading the Larger Catechism's exposition of the ten commandments and the verses listed at the bottom is one of the most humbling exercise I have ever done. They make me realize that I fall far short of God's standard. But they also make me long for more of God's grace. That's another exercise that I would highly recommend that you do.

And this morning I won't stick to the honor that we show to an elderly man or woman. I will broaden the scope of the sermon with other Scriptures. And I will start by reading some sample passages. The first one shows God's judgment of dishonor.

It is 2 Kings 2. It's a powerful passage, and if you have ever been tempted to laugh at or to mock an officer who represents God, keep this passage in mind. 2 Kings 2:23-25. Speaking of Elisha, it says,

2Kings 2:23 Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" 24 So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. 25 Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

This was a large gang of juvenile delinquents, not just a group of thoughtless young people out on a Sabbath day's stroll. Nor was this personal vengeance on the part of Elisha. This was an inspired curse from God Himself that shows God's attitude toward a lack of reverence.

A second thing we can see from this passage is that honor is not simply a cultural issue. Every culture has struggled with it. You might be tempted to think, "It was natural for them." No. Every culture has struggled with this issue of honor. Don't just write these things off as cultural issues. Israel at that time was not living out this verse. It's culture had gone bad just like ours has gone bad.

For our second reading, please turn to Job 32:4-12. This was the beginning of the speech by Elihu. He is the only one of Job's friends who was not rebuked by God, and his words were very similar to God's words at the end of the book. So don't write off what I am going to read by saying, "Oh, yeah - it was one of Job's bad counselors." No, this was a good counselor.

But here was the problem (and it's a problem not even considered by modern young people): Elihu was considerably younger than Job. Obviously he was

an adult. In fact, I believe that he, like the other counselors were civic officers, just as Job was. But Elihu was considerably younger than Job, and perhaps had an inferior office. I believe that he did have an inferior office. And this passage shows that honoring the elderly and honoring civil magistrates does not always mean that you agree with them. He disagrees with Job, and was quite bold in explaining his disagreement. But he does so in a very respectful way. He first of all waited until the others had opportunity to talk. He was not the first one to spout off. Younger ones should not be the first ones to spout off at a table, or hijack a conversation. Knowing your station in life is an important part of good conversational etiquette. Anyway, let's read verses 4-12.

Job 32:4 Now because they were years older than he, Elihu had waited to speak to Job. 5 When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was aroused. 6 So Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said: "I am young in years, and you are very old; therefore I was afraid, and dared not declare my opinion to you. 7 I said, 'Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' 8 But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. 9 Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged always understand justice. 10 "Therefore I say, 'Listen to me, I also will declare my opinion.' 11 Indeed I waited for your words, I listened to your reasonings, while you searched out what to say. 12 I paid close attention to you; and surely not one of you convinced Job, or answered his words—

It showed a respectful way of disagreeing - even when he had righteous anger at the way the counselors had mishandled the word and at the way that Job had started to speak against God. It showed an honoring of people who were older than him.

The last passage, and this is the one that I want to preach from, is Leviticus 19:32. So let's turn back there and read it one more time. "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am Yehowah."

I am going to apply this passage more broadly than to the elderly, but I think we can see that it at least teaches that God wants you to serve Him by honoring and revering the elderly. That's obvious. But even on that level, this verse is a radical statement in today's society. Today youth is idealized and people fear getting old. And while there are health issues with aging, this passage gives us the standard, the motive, and the goal of respect that we should show to those who are above us.

So this is one of my ultra-rare Tom Penning sermons; it is a three point sermon. I just had to show that I can preach a three point sermon without having 24 subpoints. I can do it once in a while. It is painful, but I can do it.

I. The Standard

First, the standard. And the standard is simply the command. It says, “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man.” I want to try to unravel the implications of this command (or this standard) under three sub-headings: the meaning of the word honor, the posture of honor and the presence of honor. And all of that is just point number I, the standard. It will be the longest of the three points.

A. *The meaning of honor*

Let’s look at the meaning of the word “honor” first. The Hebrew (hadar) is the same word that is used in verse 15. And I want you to look at verse 15, because hadar is forbidden in that verse. And I think by examining the context in which hadar is forbidden, it will help us to know what the commanded hadar (or honor) means. Look at verse 15. It says, “You shall not do injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor...” that’s the word “hadar” - “nor honor the person of the mighty.” The parallelism shows that honor and partiality are being used as synonyms. But more importantly, contrasting verse 15 with verse 32 shows that what is forbidden in the courtroom is commanded outside the courtroom. That is important to understand. What is forbidden in the courtroom is commanded outside the courtroom.

And to further define what is forbidden in the courtroom, it is helpful to know that the same term hadar is translated as “partiality” in Exodus 23:3 which says, “You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.” When it comes to judgment in a court of law a judge is not to show hadar to any person. He is not to treat anyone differently whether that person is old or young, rich or poor, great or small; they are all equal before the law and there can be no deference or partiality shown to one over the other. And in the ancient world, this would have been a radical and counter-cultural prohibition. You mean the judge is not to bow down and honor this magistrate who is being tried in his court? Yes, that is exactly what it is saying. So both sides of this equation of hadar or honor are counter-cultural to at least some cultures.

So verse 15 indicates that all who are being judged are equal inside the courtroom. But (according to verse 32) they are not all equal outside of court. What is forbidden in court in verse 15 is commanded outside of court in verse 32. Do you see that? Verse 32 is commanding us not to treat all people equally. We are supposed to show partiality (if you will) to certain people. Outside the court there are superiors and inferiors. Though we all

have equal rights before the law and before the throne of God, we are not to treat others equally in our social relationships. That is exactly what God is commanding.

This is a direct rebuke to modern egalitarianism that tries to level all distinctions. You've probably run across it in various ways. In the last few years, many religious homosexuals have been saying that since in Christ there is neither male nor female, it would be wrong to treat homosexual marriages differently than heterosexual marriages because that would be making distinctions between males and females. They claim that we are to obliterate all male/female distinctions. And we would say, "In the courtroom, yes. Before God's throne, yes. But not in our social relationships."

But there are many other ways in which you have seen egalitarianism at work. You've seen it in the child centered education of the schools and even in child rearing in the home. Children are treated the same as adults and are taught to treat adults the same as their peers. That's ungodly. According to the Bible, students are inferiors to teachers socially; not intrinsically, but socially.

You've seen it in the feminism of our culture that tries to level all distinctions between husband and wife, or between men and women in their roles in the church. But I think intuitively most people recognize that there have to be distinctions.

For example, Proverbs 31 says that we are to treat our wives with hadar (with honor). We are to treat our own wife differently than any other woman. We are to honor our wives more than any other woman. And I think we recognize that. In fact, it is unavoidable. There were American cults in the 1800s that tried to be 100% consistent with their unbiblical idea of egalitarianism, and like some of the radical Anabaptists of the Reformation period, they came to the conclusion that the only way to be 100% consistent, you could not own a wife and a wife cannot own a husband - everybody was married to everybody. Modern so-called evangelical homosexuals and transgenders are currently pushing that kind of egalitarianism even further. I'm giving these examples to show that this is not a tangential issue. This is an issue that is at the heart of our faith and that must be restored if we are to have a Christian civilization.

There will always be distinctions in our social relationships somewhere. And God is not pleased when all social distinctions are removed. Isaiah 3:5 speaks of the horrible state of a nation when the child will be insolent toward the elder (God hates that), and when the base are insolent toward the

honorable. Proverbs 30 indicates that there are four things which make the earth perturbed. If you have the whole earth perturbed and shaking and out of order, you better pay attention to what God is saying. So Proverbs 30 says that there are four things which make the earth perturbed and unable to bear up under the weight, and all four deal with this failure to recognize the social distinctions of superiors and inferiors in society. It's a huge deal for God in the book of Proverbs.

So in verse 15, distinctions are obliterated before the throne of God and before a court of law, but nowhere else. A judge may never show hadar to a king or other great man in a court of law where there is a dispute, but in our other social relationships, we must show hadar. And by the way, this is one of the reasons why a woman can be charged, and tried, and convicted, and excommunicated without her husband's permission. In a court of law, the social hierarchy of superiors and inferiors does not apply. We are commanded to not let it apply.

Psalm 45 translates this honor that we give to the king as "majesty." There is a respect that we give to the king that we don't give to others. I dare say that we as a congregation have failed to give this majesty, or respect, or hadar to ruling officials. But we need to learn to do that. It's OK to disagree with them and even to have a righteous anger against them, but let's do so like Elihu did.

B. The posture of honor.

So point A is the meaning of honor. Let's look second at the posture of honor. The verse says, "You shall rise before the gray headed..." This means getting up off our chairs when a gray haired man approaches our chair to talk to us. It doesn't mean every time a gray haired person walks through those back doors you have to get up. No. The literal Hebrew deals with being before his face. He is approaching your chair. That's the idea.

I think it is worth asking the question: "If the command to honor the elderly is not a culturally relative command, what about the posture? Could the posture be relative?" Some Christians liken this to foot-washing. They say that it could be one example of honor, but that it is not the only possible expression and certainly not a mandated expression. They will say, "I've got different ways of showing honor to the elderly. I don't stand when they approach me, but I honor them in other ways that they appreciate more. Besides, the elderly people I know don't want me to stand up and treat them differently."

But I want you to notice three things about this passage: first, this is a command, not a suggestion. Secondly, we've already seen that the word "honor" (hadar) means that we are indeed to treat them differently, whether they want to be treated differently or not. Third, God wouldn't have to give the command if it was already a cultural norm. This is what the cultural argument completely misses. It was not a cultural thing until God made it cultural. Moses had to buck the culture when that command was being written. The reason He commanded them to do it is because people were failing to rise for the elderly. Their culture was rotten. So the cultural argument is not as strong as it might appear.

But this issue of rising to express honor was not just used in the Bible for inferiors to superiors. It was used for all forms of honor. Please turn to Proverbs 31. The exact same Hebrew words are used in Proverbs 31, and surprisingly, they are used to speak of rising before an inferior in certain circumstances as well as before a superior. That is very interesting. That passage indicates in verse 25 that the woman should be clothed in honor (hadar). In other words, she should be honorable. We are not talking about honoring a wench who is in constant rebellion. No. It would be wrong to honor such a person. But look at verse 28. When you have an honorable woman like the Proverbs 31 woman, every one in the family should rise to honor her. So it is not just an issue related to authority or office. Verse 28 says, "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her." The word "rise up" is the same Hebrew word for "stand up."

Now that is such an interesting switch. The husband is the one who is in authority over the wife, yet the passage says that the husband rises up before her. This is one of many passages that transformed Western Civilization and turned it into Christian Civilization and informed the Western ideas on chivalry. It's not just a weird custom to rise when a woman approaches your chair. The West got its idea from the Bible. And by the way, it looks pretty weird when a woman approaches you at a table and you are talking to that person for an extended period of time with your head at the level of their belly buttons. I'm just sayin'. Ask them to sit down and join you, or stand up briefly. But in this passage the husband was rising before his wife, not because she is an authority over him, but simply because he wants to honor her.

So we have seen that we are commanded to rise for the elderly. Husbands are shown how to honor their wives, and children how to honor their mothers. It includes praise, but it also includes rising for her just like Leviticus 19 calls us to rise for the elderly.

Scripture also calls children to honor their fathers. Interestingly, in Genesis 31:25 we find a grown lady who is already married expected to rise before her father when her father approaches her chair. I don't think she had to rise simply because he came into the tent. But she sensed the need to rise when he approached where she was sitting. In Genesis 31, Rachel apologizes to her dad that she can't stand up as she normally would because she is going through her monthly period. And he says in effect, "I understand."

Genesis 37:7 speaks of both standing and bowing as ways of honoring a civil magistrate. Job 29:8 is similar. That is a passage which shows even aged men standing to honor Job, who was the highest civil magistrate in Edom (at least that's my view and the view of many commentaries). It says, "The young men saw me and hid, and the aged arose and stood." There is that standing again.

Nehemiah 8:5 says, Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, ... and when he opened it, all the people stood up. There are several Scriptures which call for us to stand when the Scriptures are read as a form of honoring God's Word.

I'm giving these different Scriptures to show that this form of honor by standing is a pretty pervasive concept. Leviticus 19:32 is not just a one-off passage.

How do we honor Scripture? By standing. How do we honor God? Scripture says, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!" (Neh. 9:5).

I hasten to say that Scripture does speak of other postures for worship, especially during the sermon. And the same is true of our relationships with older men, or women. You don't have to stand the whole time you are around them. It's just a short, quick way of greeting them and acknowledging them, and then you can all sit down. That's why we begin our service by standing for the call to worship. It's similar to that initial standing when approached by a man or woman who should be honored. And then you go ahead and sit down in their presence just as we also sit in God's presence, as part of His family. We can be comfortable with those that we honor. So when a person approaches your chair to talk to you, the polite thing is to (after standing and shaking their hand) to welcome that person to sit down and join you. And if you don't want them to join you, the polite thing to do is to stand and greet the person and tell them that you would love to be able to talk with them at some point, but to please excuse you because

you are discussing an important or private issue right now. There are ways of handling awkward approaches to your chair.

Let's drill a little bit deeper: We might ask why does the Scripture call for us to stand for the elderly. And I am not sure I can give every possible reason, but let me suggest one that I think has a bearing for every culture. I think one reason that there should a physical act of honor is that there is such a close connection between our bodies and our spirits that our body's posture will influence our spirit's attitude. And God wants our bodies to be consistent with our spirit's desires.

And there are plenty of examples of how our bodies can say the exact opposite of what our spirit is saying. When your mouth says that you are patiently waiting, but your fingers are drumming impatiently on the table, it could miscommunicate. When you gaze fondly into your wife's eyes and say "I love you" you are communicating a slightly different message than when you flop down into a chair, turn on the TV and say, "I love you dear." Now, the latter can be appropriate, but it does communicate something differently. Our body language needs to be consistent with whatever it is that we are trying to communicate.

And often our bodily posture will even affect our attitudes. My attitude in prayer is transformed by kneeling. I instantly have a different attitude. I feel much more humble and I feel God's majesty much more when I kneel. I feel different in prayer when I stand and raise my hands. God intended our bodies to convey what our spirits are doing. But we Americans try to divide between the body and spirit. God says that's not healthy. It don't actually think it is possible. When you slouch in your chair drinking coffee while confessing your sins, are you really humbly confessing your sins? I think not. Your bodily posture says otherwise. So God is telling us to put this honor into action. "I want your body to show honor, not just your mouth."

Here is the problem: people will respond – "But our culture, especially in the last 50 years, does not see this bodily posture as being in any way meaningful. Why engage in an action that is not meaningful to others?" And I can appreciate where people are coming from on that objection. But I don't think that the secular culture should dictate what our Christian culture should be like. And I don't think that this objection is thinking through why it has no longer seemed meaningful in the last 50 years. Democracy and egalitarianism has infected the minds of people to such an extent that the distinctions that the Bible sets are meaningless as well. Of course rising will be meaningless because hadar is meaningless in our ultra-egalitarian culture.

On many areas of life we must develop a Christian counter-culture. We must do so in our speech, in our dress, in our priorities, and in many areas of life.

I think it would be worth your while to dwell some on how the elderly were treated in the Bible. There are many O.T. examples I could give but I will just give you one from the New Testament. 1 Timothy 5:1 indicates that we cannot speak to an older person in the same way we might speak to someone our own age. And that seems strange to our egalitarian culture. It says, “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father.” Of course, that assumes that you treat your fathers with respect. Do you? It says, “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger as sisters.” And by the way parents, that verse also assumes that you need to allow your children to respectfully disagree with you. You must provide the mechanisms by which disagreement can be expressed, but in an honorable way. That is a clear implication of that passage. So even the way we speak to people should reflect differences in age and office. And it is going to be hard to implement these commands when you are constantly bucking culture in doing so. So the more that our church can develop a counter-culture, the better.

Several years ago our church watched a video that had RJ Rushdoony talking on it a bit, and I was surprised to hear some people making fun of how slowly he spoke. They were actually mocking his speech. That is the antithesis of honoring the elderly. They were speaking disrespectfully of him - not because they disagreed with him (they agreed with what he was saying) but because of the slowness of his elderly speech. It was shocking. And of course, I addressed it.

Let me give a positive example of how some people have tried to develop a counterculture. I think that the titles of Sir and Ma'am used in the south are a very healthy way for younger folks to address those who are older than them. You may not have chosen to have your children show honor that way. That's your prerogative, so long as there is honor shown. But don't try to undermine those attempts at developing a Christian counterculture in their children.

Our text says that there is a posture of honor that God commands. Don't just say that nobody else is doing it. That's immaterial. They don't honor the elderly in any other fashion either. I think we are too quick to explain away Scriptures that might make us have to make an uncomfortable change.

So I would encourage you to start practicing these little courtesies with your children. Not all old Western customs are worth resurrecting, but this is one

that probably is.

So we have seen the meaning of honor and the posture of honor - that it should affect the things we do.

C. The presence of honor

The next phrase indicates a third way in which honor is shown. Honor carries with it the need for presence. Our passage says, “honor the presence of an old man” or as the NASB gives the literal rendering in the margin, “honor the face of the aged.” There needs to be face to face communication of honor. So many times when parents are shunted off into nursing homes it is a case of out of sight and out of mind. I’m not criticizing the nursing homes or having relatives in the nursing homes. Sometimes that is the only thing that can be done because of health reasons. I am criticizing those of us who don’t visit the elderly.

It’s the absence of the elderly that Americans like. They shunt them off to a place where they won’t be as visible. But this verse says, “honor the presence of an old man.” In the mercy ministries classes for deacons we looked at several concrete, specific ways in which we can be in the presence of the elderly. And it is not just our parents that we are to honor. It is the aged in general. This is where nursing home ministry can be a valuable part of our church outreach. Some of you saw Bill Heyne’s presentation of his ministry to nursing homes in California at Presbytery. I think his ministry is an outstanding example of how to implement this phrase. Nursing homes are often thrilled to have church members who are willing to read to the elderly, talk to them, pray for them, sing with them, and do things with them. That is simply honoring the aged with our presence. The weightiness of the honor that God has conferred upon the aged should compel us to work at it, not just letting it happen by accident. It takes planning; it takes effort.

Let me make another suggestion that may not otherwise be obvious. Those of you who are in your twenties and thirties may not think of yourselves as old, and that is true. But you are a lot older than some children are. The Larger Catechism would insist that Biblically a thirty year old adult is a superior to a 15 year boy. That doesn’t mean you act pridefully or insist upon being respected. I don’t think you probably should insist upon being respected, because that will come across as prideful. But please do not rebuff the efforts of children to honor you and pour cold water on their newly developing habits.

I have heard people refuse the titles of sir or ma’am. Don’t do that. You are

undermining the attempts of parents to instill honor. You may have taught your children different ways to respect their elders and that is your prerogative so long as there was respect communicated. But if some child has been taught that it is disrespectful for them to address you by your first name, please don't make them do so. Some have tried to flex by calling a closer adult Uncle Fred, or something like that. But to insist that these attempts at respect be stopped is to side with our egalitarian society and is overruling a parental attempt to instill respect. And I am just as guilty as anyone. I have used my first name even with younger people in my emails. They are calling me pastor Kayser, and I am responding with Phil. And I have realized that my response is not helpful. I should respect their attempts to show respect. I've been a little bit convicted by that as I have developed this sermon. It's so easy to fit into our cultural norms and make ourselves equals. Certainly superiors should show humility and approachability and not be stiff or haughty or insist on being respected. But we shouldn't reject attempts at honoring us.

Another example, if you are offered a seat on a bus or if someone rises at your presence, or holds the door open for you, don't be offended as if your dignity has been taken away. Just graciously thank them and invited them to be seated. Don't make a big deal about it. Don't get in a huff as if people are taking away your independence. Be appreciative of the attempt to fulfill this mandate rather than trying to erase distinctions that God intends to be highlighted. God wants there to be a distinction between those who are young and immature and those who are aged and mature.

II. The motive

So we have looked at the standard, or the command. Let's look next at the motive for obeying this command. Verse 32 continues, "and fear your God." The motive for honoring the elderly is not so that we can be liked by them, or so that relationships can be better. Rather, it is a God-centered reason. It is because we fear God. In fact, when you analyze the parallel structure of the first two phrases you will see that honoring the elderly is a sign of our reverence for God. To the degree that you fear God, there will be reverence that you show to pastors, deacons, and the elderly. And when you don't have that respect, you are probably missing that fear of God.

I think Christ makes that very clear in Mark 7 where He discusses honor for parents. He said, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' And then He lists one of those commandments that

have been violated.

MAR 7:9 He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. 10” For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ 11 “But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban”—’ (that is, a gift to God), 12” then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, 13 “making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

The culture of Israel had thrown off the honor that God wanted for parents within their culture. And Jesus goes back to the law of God. He says in effect, “You dishonor Me when you fail to honor parents and the elderly.”

I suspect that you have been so infected by egalitarianism that Christ’s words were shocking to you when he said that those who curse their parents deserve to die. This is Jesus speaking. It probably seems extreme to you. Why would Jesus say that? But it shows me that God sees this issue as being far more serious than we tend to. Have you ever wondered why so many evangelicals are flippant in the way they approach God? or why they lack depth in their relationships with God? It may very well be that they have neglected God’s social laws respecting honor of those who are older than them. A shallow reverence for parents will produce a shallow reverence for God. That is one of the things Jesus was saying. There is a relationship between the two. Any society that fails to honor God will eventually fail to honor the elderly and vice versa. It is guaranteed.

I grew up in Ethiopia and saw the very visible living out of this verse that happened in the church. It really blew me away. It was a beautiful thing to watch inferiors show very practical and honoring respect to superiors or even guests who were inferiors. And it is not surprising to me that the moment Ethiopia was overrun by the communists in 1975, one of the first things that the communists did all over Ethiopia was to outlaw all signs of respect for age, such as rising or bowing before an older person. In fact, they deliberately humiliated older people by making them obey the arbitrary commands of children in front of others. They were trying to break down the implementation of honor. It fits their atheistic outlook. It is not surprising that the Eskimos used to practice euthanasia of the elderly. It’s not surprising that America is heading that direction very, very fast. It is a by-product of egalitarianism (of which feminism, homosexuality, and transgenderism are three examples).

Ephesians 6:1 gives both the positive and the negative side to this honoring of parents. It says,

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

It says there is blessing and there is cursing when we fail to honor our parents. Why? God stands behind this law, and if we fear Him we will avoid the cursings and value the blessings.

Scripture says that societal disintegration happens when honor for each other is lost. And this honor doesn't just have to be between generations or between the sexes. There needs to be honor for office and between offices.

John Randolph and Henry Clay were examples of violating this precept in the 1700's. They had a quarrel in the Senate in Washington, and Randolph refused to talk to Clay for several weeks. One day they saw each other coming down a narrow sidewalk, and when Randolph got close he stood his ground and said, "I never turn out for scoundrels." Mr. Clay politely stepped in the mud and said, "I always do." And their quarrel continued. But that was an age in which personal honor many times outweighed honor for others. I'm not exaggerating. This is what led to so many duels back in those days. They took personal honor more seriously than life itself. They felt that they had to defend their own honor above defending their own life. That's why Hamilton died in a duel with Burr – both founding fathers. He didn't feel like he could kill Burr, but he felt like his own honor was more important than living. But Scripture says that self-honor needs to be put away. While we should teach our children this honor, we cannot pridefully be defending our own honor. It's hard to maintain this balance, isn't it? And it is why we need to cry out for God's miraculous grace to restore these things.

Malachi 4:6 predicted that this is exactly what would happen in Christ's kingdom. It says that when there is a rift between the generations, God will strike the earth with a curse. But He sent His messenger to solve that. Again, it shows how important this issue is. It is not a tangential issue that you can say, "Oh, that's only pastor Kayser's quaint, old-fashioned opinion." No, that last paragraph of the Old Testament is prophesying what John the Baptist will do to prepare for Christ's kingdom. It is talking about New Covenant ideals. And God's goal in Malachi 4:6 was to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and of the children to the fathers. 2 Chronicles 36:17 (which is the end of the Hebrew canon) does the same thing. It describes the ungodliness of a nation that had no compassion on the aged and weak. What does that say about our nation which not only aborts babies but kills people in the nursing homes when their insurance runs out. And if you want examples of exactly that happening here in Omaha, I've got some very

troubling examples of euthanasia that we have tried unsuccessfully to intervene in. This is a pervasive problem in our society and we need to prayerfully be asking how we can make a difference on this issue. I think Bill Heyne's nursing home ministry may be a potential key to accomplishing this. He has said that he is willing to train us in it.

Isaiah 3:4-5 portrays the breakdown that had occurred between the elderly and the young as a result of God's judgment. It says,

I will give children to be their princes and babes shall rule over them. The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor; the child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable.

And then Isaiah in that chapter shows how every other area of social structure was breaking down. When you break any one of the links of a chain it is going to affect what is attached to it. And this is a vital link in the social chain that God has given to us. If we fear the Lord, we will honor the elderly, ladies, officers and magistrates. Our motive - the thing that should drive us is not that we think it is sweet. Our motive is the fear of God; reverence and respect for God and His authority and wanting to avoid anything that displeases Him.

III. The Goal (to glorify God by His grace)

The last thing that I want to look at very, very briefly is the goal. The verse ends by pointing to the goal - to glorify God by His grace. It says simply, "I am the LORD" or literally I am Yehowah. That phrase occurs 14 times in this chapter and is a continual reminder that God is the goal and pattern for our holiness, but he is also the supplier of that holiness. And I get the idea of His supplying grace from the covenant name, Yehowah. The chapter begins by saying, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" The word "LORD" is all capital letters. It is Yehowah, and Yehowah was the covenant name associated with redemption. In other words, it is only by grace that this command can properly be fulfilled.

Christ is the one who can restore all our broken relationships. Sin has ruined the relation between the young and the elderly and Christ's sacrifice on the cross was intended to take away that sin. That is why you can pray with faith that you are asking God's will to be done on earth when you pray and strive to re-instill the values of this verse in our society. God not only gives the command but He as Yehowah God gives us the strength, the desire and the perseverance to live in terms of this command. Our goal in life should be full conformity to the image of Yehowah. We are to be holy because He is holy, and we are to be holy just as He is holy.

And you might think – “How is this verse imitating God? God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equal.” Yes, that is true - intrinsically they are equal, just as elders and members, males and females, are all equal before the throne of grace. But in terms of their economic relations with each other, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have voluntarily entered into roles that are not equal. Their Persons are equal, but their roles are not. The Son submits to the Father, and the Spirit submits to Father and Son. Likewise, the Spirit honors the Son, and the Son honors and glorifies the Father. Interestingly (just as the husband is called to honor his wife who is under his authority) the Father honors the Son. So I would say, yes, this verse is definitely imitating God.

And so this morning if you have realized that you come short, I want you to ask God to cleanse you from your sin by the blood of Christ and to give you grace this morning to honor each other as the Trinity honors the distinctions within the role relationships of the Godhead. I want you to believe that He truly is glorified in your doing it, even if everyone thinks that you are weird.

And let's remind each other about it. I have been so affected by my culture that it doesn't come naturally to me. I give you permission to remind me when I fail to honor the elderly by rising to greet them, or fail to open the car door for my wife. I want to grow in this as well. Let's pray.

I charge you to honor the elderly by rising before their face, by treating them with favoritism, by visiting them and ministering to them. And I charge you to do it in the fear of God, by His grace, and to His glory. Amen.