

What does the Bible say about older people?

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to our subject for this evening. We've been looking at different things about family. We looked at families in general, and we looked at parents and children briefly, and husbands and wives briefly.

And I thought this evening we would look at God and older people. We've got one more Sunday evening before we get into Christmassy things, so I would like to reserve the possibility next Sunday evening of revisiting either some of this or some of the things that we've looked at previously, rather than start on a whole new set of subjects.

So let's pray. Lord, we thank you together for the blessings of being put in this world, made in the image of God, and the wonders and tremendous blessings that you have given to humankind, and particularly that we have understanding of and insight into as Christians.

So help us to hear your word in a way that does us good, in a way that enables us to hear the voice of the living God, as we're gathered together.

O Lord, hear our prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, let's look a little bit at this subject.

[1 : 48] God and older people. So my first comment is that here, if anywhere, is a call for Christian people to be countercultural.

not something that I must say I thought about a lot before, but having thought about it a bit, I think of all the subjects, all the subjects that we've looked at in this series, in each case we're called to go really against the way that people are drifting into thinking these days, in terms of parenting, in terms of marriage, and here in terms of older age.

Because in our culture, seems to me, that youth and being young is good.

It's the same thing as being good. With the converse, the other way around, that if, that our culture would tend to push us in the direction of thinking that old, older, is the opposite of good.

It's to do with being useless, and unwanted, and unloved. The times I've been to Sri Lanka, they ask us about the way in the West we look after the older members of our family.

[3 : 27] And I have to sort of hang my head in shame and say, in the West we're terrible at the way we relate to, and look after, and think of older people.

And I thought of the examples of advertising, and I thought of the example of the care of older people. So I'll stop for a moment and say, do you agree with me on that?

Or could you think of any examples of that? Am I right in saying that our present day culture is not good in the way it relates to older people, and it's all the emphasis is on youth?

Would that be correct? Slightly correct? Have something... Yes.

Particularly if they've got disposable income. Yeah. The grey pound. Yeah. Yes, it certainly wouldn't be the case that in all aspects of society, there's nobody ever who looks out for older people.

[4 : 38] I mean, that certainly isn't the case. And in Brighton there are people, resources put into looking after older people, and those who care for older people, and so on.

So it's certainly not across the board, but I think it is one of the threads of contemporary culture. So in advertising, everything is done to try and make you look younger, isn't it?

How many hair products have you seen that make your hair grey? Yes. Yeah, the sort of logical push is that if I'm older and I'm a burden, then I am really unwanted.

So I think that's profoundly contrary to the ideas of the Bible. And the foundation of that, seems to me, is that we're made in the image of God.

So we are... Every human being is valuable being made in the image of God. That means whether you are financially productive or not, whether you are in full health or not, whether you are very young, even in the womb, or whether you are very old.

[5 : 59] Made in the image of God, and therefore infinitely valuable. So let's look at a few verses that say something about this.

And I'm saying that in the Bible, there is a respect for old age. Now Steve, were you going to give us a microphone? Okay, right.

Let's... So the idea is that if we're reading out verses, that you could read them out holding the microphone in one hand so that it goes down on the recording and everybody can hear.

Let's look at Proverbs 16, 31. Proverbs 16, 31. And Steve, could you turn down the channel on the mic so that when it comes on, it doesn't come on terribly loud and squeaky?

Just turn down a little fraction. So Chris has got the mic. Please could you read us Proverbs 16, verse 31. Grey hair is a crown of splendour.

[7 : 01] It is attained by a righteous life. Thank you. Simple sentence. Talking about grey hair. I sort of look around out the corner of my eye when I say that.

And it says, Grey hair is a crown of splendour. It says it is attained by a righteous life. I think with Proverbs, it often puts things in an ideal or I don't think it's guaranteeing that everybody who has grey hair has had a righteous life.

But I think it is saying something positive about being older and showing that you're older. It's not a sign of disgrace, but it says here, grey hair is a crown of splendour and associated with, let's put it like that, can be associated with a righteous life.

Let's look at Leviticus 19. Carry on. Thank you, Roger. Verse 30. Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary.

I am the Lord. Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God. Rise in the presence of the aged.

[8 : 24] Show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord. When an alien lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born.

Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity.

Use honest scales and honest weights. an honest ephah and an honest hymn. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them.

I am the Lord. Thank you very much. So I ask for the larger context because as you'll see, there are some things in there that when we read them as Christians, we say, that's changed.

We're no longer in the... Well, we're not people who've been brought out of Egypt. We're in the New Testament.

[9 : 35] So for example, verse 26, I don't think we would want to pin that on to Christians. Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it. Because our Lord Jesus at a certain point said it isn't what goes into you that makes you unclean.

It is what comes out of you. By saying this, he made all foods clean. So that's changed. And we read it Christianly. And likewise, the hairstyle thing, I think that was a particular issue of paganism in those days.

I don't think Christians are obliged to have any particular hairstyle and so on. But when we come to verse 32, I don't think belonging to Christ makes any substantial difference to this apart from that we're to do it too.

Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly, and revere your God, I am the Lord. I don't think we're going to find any way of saying well that doesn't apply anymore.

I think we take that on and it's saying we should respect the aged. Rise in the presence of the aged is a sign of respect.

[10 : 56] Not sure we should do that literally, could do, but the respect is the important thing. And it's linked with reverence for God, isn't it? Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly, and revere your God, I am the Lord.

Let's look at Daniel chapter 7, verse 9. Daniel chapter 7, verse 9.

Roger, could you pass the mic to Ray? So when we've all found this, Daniel 7, verse 9, part of the famous vision that Daniel had, only going to look at one verse of it.

Daniel 7, verse 9. Thank you, Ray. As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow, the hair of his head was white like wool, his throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.

Thank you. Switch the little switch off. I've always wondered about that text.

[12:23] It's a strange one, isn't it? It's it. Thrones were set in place, and the Lord God is referred to as the Ancient of Days.

So he says he's old, and his hair is not grey, but it's white. And I've often thought, why does God portray himself in this way?

And Roger Hitchings wrote, or I think I heard him give a talk, and he said, God portrays himself as old because old is to be respected.

So when God says, I want you to think of me in a respectful way, he says, well, here's a way I can portray that. I'll portray myself as old, and that will mean that you will respect me.

It's interesting, isn't it, that God says, think of me as old, think of me in a way that you will respect, and then work it backwards, that we're supposed to respect older people.

[13:33] Let's look at Deuteronomy 28, verse 50. Deuteronomy 28, verse 50.

So here are people doing what they're not supposed to do. Here are people who are behaving in an unhuman way. So this is Deuteronomy 28, we take 49 and 50, and please could Catherine read that for us.

A fierce looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. Give us the first verse before that if you wouldn't mind, 49. The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.

Thank you very much. So that's putting it the other way around. Here's a nation that are appalling. Here's a nation that you really wouldn't like to meet on a dark night.

Can I just ask, is that making a funny noise? Yes. Is it speech breaking through or is it just a funny noise? So, in Deuteronomy there, disrespect for old age is a mark of savagery, isn't it?

[15:14] And by contrast, proper human behaviour is to have pity for the young and respect for the old.

And let's look at 1 Timothy 5 verse 1. 1 Timothy 5 verse 1.

And perhaps Brenda could kindly read this. Perhaps you could give us 1 and 2 to give us a tiny bit of context. Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father.

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with absolute purity. Thank you very much indeed. So, here's New Testament, the way to deal with older men in the congregation, in a particular way suited to their seniority.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. And then there's suitable ways of treating the younger men and the older women and the younger women and so on.

[16:36] But the older men and indeed the older women there to be treated with a certain respectfulness. Full stop.

So, respect for old age. Old age. Are you feeding back the recording into the...

No? Okay. All right. I shall just carry on. Right. Let's... Third... Third section.

The Bible is also realistic about the problems of old age. So, the Bible doesn't minimise that there are issues to do with getting older.

So, I've got a few verses here. Psalm 90 verse 10. Psalm 90 verse 10.

[17:40] And where's the microphone? Oh, right. Thank you, Enid. Psalm 90 verse 10. Psalm 90 The length of our days is 70 years or 80. If we have the strength, yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and we fly away.

Thank you very much. So, a little bit of sober realism there about the... about being older. The length of our days is 70 years or 80.

If we have the strength, yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and we fly away. I don't think it's giving a fully rounded picture of life.

I think it's giving from a certain angle, but he's saying that it all goes very quickly, which from one point of view is true. And their span is trouble and sorrow.

Well, that's what we do experience in this life. And our days are limited. Let's look at Ecclesiastes 4.13.

[18:54] If we can find Ecclesiastes. sort of wry comment on what might happen to you when you get older.

Ecclesiastes 4.13. Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. I suppose he's saying that there can be a sort of stubbornness about getting older, that you don't take notice of anybody, and it's not a good situation to get into.

I think that's what it's saying. And let's look at Genesis 27, 1 and 2. I think this is a realistic description of somebody who is older.

Genesis 27, 1 and 2. The microphone is right at the very bottom there. Right. Could you read us Genesis 27, 1 and 2?

[20 : 19] And it came to pass that when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau, his eldest son, and said unto him, my son.

And he said unto him, behold, here am I. and he said, behold, now I am old, I know not the day from my death. That's it.

Good. Thank you very much. It's just in passing that the writer is very realistic about Isaac in his older years. He was old, his eyes were dim so that he couldn't see.

so as various faculties come under strain, so hearing perhaps, and mobility, and in this case the visual faculty under strain.

The Bible's realistic. There are problems associated with old age, which we sort of knew anyway, didn't we? So fourthly for this evening, and finally, the blessings and opportunities presented in old age.

[21 : 32] So I think as Christians we need to be positive about old age. 46, this is Isaiah 46, verse 4.

Isaiah 46, verse 4. And while Tim's just finding that, I think it's about Israel in her national lifespan, but I think it's applicable in terms of individual lifespan, so this is Isaiah 46, verse 4.

And even your old age and grey hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you, and I have made you, and will carry you, and I will rescue you.

Thank you very much. That's a rather lovely promise, isn't it? Even to your old age and grey hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you, I have made you, and I will carry you, I will sustain you, and I will rescue you.

that in old age itself, the Lord doesn't suddenly say, well I can't be bothered with older people, and as he's known us, and looked after us through all the years of our lives, and he's particularly known the times when we're vulnerable, and in particular need, and that extends into old age, when it might well be that there are particular areas of vulnerability and need, I will carry you, I will sustain you, I've made you, I will rescue you, so I think a lovely promise there that's applicable in that sense, let's look at Psalm 1, which we read at the beginning, Psalm 1, verses 2 and 3, let's go back to Chris, shall we?

[23 : 41] verse 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night, he's like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither, whatever he does, prospers.

thank you, so that's what we read at the beginning, and I would like to present that as being a very positive view of the spiritual possibilities of getting older, fruit in season, leaf not withering, and a certain prospering, I don't mean to say that there are no problems in older age, and I don't mean to say there are no particular spiritual challenges in older age that might be particular to being older, but I think this promise will still work, won't it, that there is the possibility of being spiritually fruitful, and spiritually beautiful, I remember Doris, Doris Pocock, who, how old would she have been, was she in her 90s?

Yeah, she was, she used to be in the church here, very diminutive lady, her teeth were all sort of twisted out of shape because when she was little she had TB, the doctors all messed it about, and they thought she was such a frail and sickly child she wouldn't last into her 20s, they were wrong, weren't they?

and, but she was a constant challenge, so here she is, she can't, she couldn't, a lot of things she couldn't eat because they were too chewy, she wanted something nice and soft to eat, and she couldn't see very well, and so on and so on, but she would pray, Lord, thank you for all, thank thee for all the blessings thou hast showered upon me, and the fact that she could pray with such a sense of the goodness of God, I mean, she wasn't a theologian, but she knew the Lord, and there was a beauty to that, and a, what shall I say, a sort of a spiritual encouragement to know somebody like that, and have them in the congregation, and let's take one more text, which is 2 Corinthians 1,

3 to 5, 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, so, this isn't specifically about old age, but what it is about is, when people have experienced things, they are in a position to encourage and understand, and get alongside, in a way that you can't really do, if you don't have that richness of experience, and in older Christians, hopefully, and I think generally speaking, we have that maturity of experience, by which somebody can look, speak to us, and understand where we're coming from, and say a word in season, which is of immense value, so here's 2 Corinthians 1, verses 3 to 5, thank you Roger. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble, with the comfort we ourselves have received from God, for just as the sufferings of Christ grow, flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

[27 : 48] Thank you very much. So there's Paul saying, we've been through stuff, it really affected us, but we experience God's comfort, and we in turn can pass that on, and I think that's just one example of a whole range of things by which older people can be of an immense spiritual input into the church, I mean, not in terms of perhaps hours and energies and efforts, but in terms of wisdom, in terms of a word in season, in terms of prayerfulness, in terms of really spiritual qualities, I think.

So Pastor Les used to say when I was a younger man, he said, we've got some real gems here in the church, and he was referring to Doris Pocock and Aunty Maud, names that escape me now. Sorry? Mrs. Henderson. Yes, Mrs. Henderson. Elsie. Yes, Elsie. Oh yes, I have some great times with Elsie. So, okay, I've run out of things to say there.

Anybody like to make any comments or offer any observations? I would like to say that when I look at children, other elderly people's home, the contrast was just incredible.

Poor darlings, all they could do was complain because they don't have nothing to afford to. And our people at the problem home, they're outward looking because they're paying commission rates, and there is a thronging and complaining that very sadly, people that have no help, hope, help.

[29 : 42] And it's just a privilege to be good, lovely, Christian people. Yeah, wonderful. Joy and appreciation. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was speaking to a nurse that worked there yesterday.

I love, I love my work, I love being on people, and I love being wonderful. Yeah, thank you very much, that's right.

And I suppose it also points out that we can, as we get older, we go in a certain direction, don't we? One of these things, it says you become more the person that you are inside because all the things that sort of support you outwardly diminish, so you become more the person you are on the inside. Of course, it is possible to become grumbling and complaining and embittered, but for the Christian, one would hope, as you just said, that there is a progressing in beauty and in trust and in positiveness.

Yeah, thank you. Any other observations? Yeah. Yeah.

[31 : 02] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Thank you very much.

Thank you. I think in when we were young, we weren't allowed to sit in the company of old people. And we were really young. My uncle, my grandfather, and we'd never be able to call an old person with their first name until we're on to the matter of their way.

I'm not going to call it on to the north. And I think generally, the big lack of that was just young people respecting old people. We saw those basic things of saying and saying thank you.

[33 : 01] I was in my mom and I was thinking about what you say now. Thank you. What do you say now? And later in life, you find that you have that interesting perspective.

You've had this essence of respecting old people who were really young. How intentional that is when you grow older. I think there's a big lack of that today, especially with younger people who are 18.

Yeah. Yeah. Just a conversation. No, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.