

"Wisdom for All Ages"

Proverbs 16:25-33 (The Message)

"There's a way that looks harmless enough;
look again—it leads straight to hell.
26 Appetite is an incentive to work;
hunger makes you work all the harder.
27 Mean people spread mean gossip;
their words smart and burn.
28 Troublemakers start fights;
gossips break up friendships.
29 Calloused climbers betray their very own friends;
they'd stab their own grandmothers in the back.
30 A shifty eye betrays an evil intention;
a clenched jaw signals trouble ahead.
31 **Gray hair is a mark of distinction,
the award for a God-loyal life.**
32 Moderation is better than muscle,
self-control better than political power.
33 Make your motions and cast your votes,
but GOD has the final say."

In 1968, I preached on this text¹ at the Church of Christ in Hollywood, California.

You might be interested in some facts about that church group in 1968.

Before I relate them, I'd like to remind you of some 1968 headlines provided by the current Smithsonian website.

- The week of March 1, 1968, 15,000 Latino students walked out of their classrooms in LA City schools demanding a better education.
- On a motel balcony, April 4, in Memphis, James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King. King went to Memphis to help lead a sanitation workers' strike. Over the next week, riots in 100 U.S. cities left 39 dead, 2,600 injured and led to 21,000 arrests.
- On May 10, U.S. and North Viet Nam began peace talks in Paris, which itself was violently rocked by student protests and riots.
- On June 4, Sirhan Sirhan shot Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel, barely a mile from the Blairs' residence in 1968.
- Boeing Aircraft in Seattle unveiled 747s.
- After 267 years, Yale University decided to admit female undergraduate students in 1969.
- In a 90 minute December 9, presentation, Douglas C. Engelbart displayed and used the first mouse and word processor.

¹ I regularly used the American Standard Version then. "The Message" version (above) was not published until 2003.

On May 19, 1968, I had served as a minister of the Hollywood Church of Christ for five years, the pulpit minister for two.

For decades, the Hollywood church held an annual Homecoming Sunday.

On that day, former members returned to worship together, share fellowship & meals, and to enjoy a little entertainment; after all it was Hollywood.

Encouraged by my predecessors Wade Ruby (he died in 1966) and Harris Goodwin, whom in 1963 the church sponsored in Mexico City, as well as later in Honduras, the Hollywood elders pledged that they would welcome all who came through the church building doors.

The church accepted members on the basis of their faith and loving commitment to Jesus and his teaching, not based on race or ethnicity.

The 1968 church family included African-Americans, Asians, Jewish and Arab Christians, Latinos, Native Americans, and Texans.

As in all families, occasional disagreements arose, but for the most part, this very diverse group harmoniously worshipped God.

To affirm their oneness in Christ, church members often held international dinners.

The church never charged for any type of meals; members shared with one another and all guests.

The Hollywood church actively supported an orthopedic clinic established in Calexico, California, by church member and orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Robert Nichols. The clinic provided free services to crippled Mexican children. Church members contributed generously for the purchase of braces, casts, and other clinic needs. Church teens held annual Christmas parties for clinic children. At the time, a polio epidemic ravaged Mexico. Local Mexican authorities refused to admit the problem, and would not allow vaccines to be given.



Some Hollywood church children with patients of the orthopedic clinic. The girls on the left in matching dresses are Stephanie and Janice Blair. The girl on the far right now owns and operates one of the food stands at the Los Angeles Farmer's Market.

On May 19, 1968, I preached the following sermon to the Homecoming crowd in Hollywood.

Most revisions relate to phrasing the sentences, and word selection.

When the wise man Solomon ruled (about 970-930 BC), the nation Israel prospered.

Solomon succeeded in many ways.

- He formed peace alliances with stronger militant nations.
- He retained the efficient, elaborate civil service corps his father David established.
- Solomon erected The Temple, magnificent palaces, and other splendid civic structures.
- Solomon's large merchant naval fleet sailed to places such as Spain, and perhaps India, to obtain gold, ivory, and rare animals.
- His world-renowned wisdom and massive construction projects attracted tourist trade.
- People such as the Queen of Sheba arrived bearing tribute, not in salutes, but in hard cash, yet they also returned handsomely rewarded.



- Solomon maintained the well-trained, equipped, and structured army his father David organized.

Solomon reinforced military forts, e.g. Megiddo and built new cities in strategic locations.

As you know, improvements can be costly.

Ages ago, governments devised and implemented property, income, inheritance, corporate, luxury, personal and use taxes; also tariffs and levies.

Solomon became a master taxer.

In his latter days, his levies, dues, and tolls became burdensome to hardworking people.

About 930 BC, when King Solomon died, his son Rehoboam prepared to succeed him as ruler over the confederation of 12 tribes known as Israel.

Concerned about the extremely high taxes, Israel's leaders told Rehoboam: "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."

Rehoboam requested three days to consider the tax matter.

First, he asked the elders, who served his father:

"How would you advise me to answer these people?"

They counselled him:



“If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

Then the new king consulted his friends with whom he’d grown up:

His contemporaries replied,

“These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter’ . . .

tell them, ‘**My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.**’”

Three days later, “The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men and said, ‘My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. **My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.**’”²

All but two of the twelve tribes rebelled against Rehoboam and formed a separate country.

Israel never reunited all twelve tribes.

I call attention to this passage, not because of the taxes, but because of the age-old generation gap.

Does it amaze you that this incident occurred nearly 3000 years ago?

Sometimes youth seem disrespectful of wisdom gained from age and experience.³

Even then, older people asked for moderation; young people wanted radical change now.

In 970 BC, many youth felt that their seniors had their chance and made a big mess.

The younger generation concluded:

- “We know exactly how to fix the problems.”
- “Old folks are behind the times and worn out; we must take immediate action.”
- “There’s no time for talk and long deliberations. This dire situation requires quick thinking and speedy results.”



Yet Rehoboam’s own father wrote these maxims:

- “The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old” (20:29).

² see 1 Kings 12:4-14 NIV

³ I was barely over 30 when I preached this sermon.

- "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (23:22).
- Buy the truth and do not sell it— wisdom, instruction and insight as well.
The father of a righteous child has great joy; a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him. May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful! 23: 22-25.
(This and above from *Proverbs* NIV)

Thus "Gray hair is a mark of distinction, the award for a God-loyal life."

The Law of Moses required honor for older folks:

"Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD" Leviticus 19:32.

I regret to say that even at twenty I showed little respect for elders. An example: At the Bartlesville, Oklahoma S.H. Kress store where I worked part time as a "stock boy," a grandmother employee lighted her cigarette in the lunch room.

Telling her, **"Grannies shouldn't smoke,"**

I grabbed the "smoke" from the startled woman's mouth and threw it away.⁴

In his middle age, George Bernard Shaw wrote:

"It's all that the young can do for the old, to shock them and keep them up to date."

Do you wonder if Shaw felt that way in his later years?

Let me quickly add that there's good reason for the saying: "There's no fool like an old fool." It breaks our hearts to watch old people stubbornly, gullibly, make naive mistakes.

Dr. Edward L. Bortz was past president of the American Medical Association.

Dr. Bortz studied and lectured on geriatrics lamenting society's youth-oriented outlook.

Dr. Bortz didn't get to bewail long.

He died in 1970 at the age of 74.

In 1968, young people considered old folks "a drag on the community."

Get them out of the way so "they can talk about the good old days of Teddy Roosevelt and Cal Coolidge."

"The world doesn't have time for them.

"They have hang-ups about morality."

Yet a nation or an individual that disrespects any category of "people is sick and immature."⁵



⁴ I apparently forgot about this brash 1956 action in 1968.

⁵ The lines in quotation marks appear precisely as I preached them in 1968.

Do you find it contradictory that many churches which decry racial segregation hold separate services for younger members and seniors?

The geriatric expert Dr. Edward J. Stieglitz wrote about the idea that all intellectual ability goes downhill with age.

- "Endurance of a certain type, for the long slow grind, the continuous labor type of situation increases as speed declines . . . as strength declines, judgment increases."
- At 80 the individual's ability to learn is approximately the same as it was at 12.

A few decades ago an Iowa State psychology professor by the name of William Owens discovered in the archives the scoring records of 179 Iowa State 1919 freshmen on the Army's Alpha Mental Ability Test. He located 127 of the original 179 and retested them. Although several decades had passed, Dr. Owens found these results:

- 1. No evidence of rusty brains;**
- 2. Several scored higher on general info questions;**
- 3. Most scored higher on practical judgment questions;**

4. Most impressive was the increase in certain categories that required logic and clear thinking.

Some elderly people do become cantankerous and senile, but what if someone told you that you had lost your usefulness?

Jesus considered all lives precious.

Most of us recall the Sunday school picture of Jesus loving and holding little children.

For balance, we should also include the Matthew 15 picture of Jesus' displeasure as he excoriated his contented contemporaries who neglected to honor their elders.

My main purpose is not to empower elderly people or any group.

Many churches leaders assume that the church's chief task is empowering women or minorities.

Many organizations dedicate themselves to such causes.

God did not assign us the task of changing society or empowering any person or group.

The Lord wants us to go to the entire world and tell his good news.

By means of several signs, the Lord convinced the strict Jewish Christian, the Apostle Peter that he wanted him to tell this great news to a representative of a people that Peter hated:

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."⁶

As the Apostle Paul told a bunch of elite Greek philosophers:

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."

Only the Lord can make us truly one.

Unless we listen to God's command, quit our pride, hate and lust, and do right according to God's word in Christ, it won't matter whom we empower or befriend now.

Accomplishing these ends creates nothing more than building a dream house on sand.

Jesus tied up the devil and he overpowered death.

When we love God, obey him, and model Jesus' love and righteousness to the end of our days, God empowers us on Judgment Day to defeat death.

Can there be any better than that?



**Some of the Hollywood kids and their teachers circa 1969.
Norma is in the back row, 4th from the left.**

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⁶ Acts 10:34, 35 NIV