

Rise Before the Gray-Haired Man
(Leviticus 19:20-37)
Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. **Leviticus 18-20** address a number of *moral and ethical laws*.
- b. **Leviticus 18** addressed some rather disturbing subjects:
 - i. Incest (prohibitions on marriage and intimate sexual relations with close relatives).
 - ii. Bestiality (people having sexual relations with animals).
 - iii. Homosexuality (an explosive issue today, including in more and more 'Christian' communities).
- c. In the first half of **Leviticus 19**, which we covered in the immediate prior lesson, we were introduced to what Jesus called the *Second Greatest Commandment* of the Law: "love your neighbor as yourself" (**Leviticus 19:18**).
 - i. Jesus said that all the Law hung on the two greatest commandments.
- d. Context for these instructions given in **Leviticus**:
 - i. These instructions were given while the Israelites were encamped at Mount Sinai, near the beginning of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
 - 1. Some of these instructions will be repeated in **Deuteronomy**, an address given by Moses near the end of the 40 years (and right before Moses died).
 - ii. In the future, when the Israelites entered Canaan, the people they find there will be involved in all kinds of depravity. The Lord did not want His people to become like the people of that land. He did not want them to pick up their wicked practices.
 - 1. Abraham was told in **Genesis 15:13-16** that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, but only after serving in another land for 400 years.
 - 2. They would return to Canaan only after the sin of the Amorites was "filled up".

- e. In looking at the moral and ethical laws, there are two things we should keep in mind:
 - i. What do these commands tell us about *the nature and concerns of God*?
 - 1. Many spiritual problems are rooted in our misunderstanding of who God is (for example: believing that He is The Great Killjoy, or the Great Enabler).
 - ii. What do we learn about the way of life of the Canaanites, the people who were then occupying the Promised Land?

II. Even the Land was Defiled

- a. Read **Leviticus 19:23-25**.
 - i. The land was so defiled that even the trees planted had to be purified.
 - ii. God's people could not eat from the fruit of those trees *until the fifth year*.
- b. Read **Leviticus 19:26-31**.
 - i. On cutting a man's facial hair.
 - 1. "Don't disfigure the edge of your beard". (**Leviticus 19:27**)
 - 2. I was surprised at the number of early Christian writers who discouraged men from shaving their beards too much, citing this passage as well as **Leviticus 21:5**.
 - a. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian and Lactantius all addressed this teaching in their writings.
 - b. For more on this, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on 'Beards'.
 - c. Their reasoning included:
 - i. God designed men with this distinctive marking of facial hair, distinguishing them from women.
 - ii. The beard shows one's age (and maturity) more readily, since the hair on one's beard tends to turn white before the hair on the top of one's head.
 - iii. A colorful quote from Clement of Alexandria:

1. "For God wished women to be smooth, and rejoice in their locks alone growing spontaneously, as a horse in his mane; but has adorned man, *like the lions, with a beard*, and endowed him, as an attribute of manhood, with shaggy breasts,—a sign this of strength and rule.
2. "So also cocks [= *roosters*], which fight in defence of the hens, he has decked with combs, as it were helmets; and so high a value does God set on these locks, that He orders them to make their appearance on men simultaneously with discretion, and delighted with a venerable look, has honored gravity of countenance with grey hairs.
3. "But wisdom, and discriminating judgments that are hoary with wisdom, attain maturity with time, and by the vigor of long experience give strength to old age, producing grey hairs, the admirable flower of venerable wisdom, conciliating confidence.
4. "This, then, the mark of the man, the beard, by which he is seen to be a man, is older than Eve, and is the token of the superior nature. In this God deemed it right that he should excel, and dispersed hair over man's whole body."
 - a. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 275–276)

ii. **Question:** What is the problem with a *ventriloquist*?

1. I think of a man or woman with a puppet who talks without moving their own mouth, making it appear that the puppet is actually talking.
2. However, the word comes from Latin root words and means, essentially, "speaking from the belly" (in other words, talking without moving one's lips).

3. This term was associated with those who claimed to have spirits speaking through them. This is the same word (in the LXX) used in **1 Samuel 28:3-11** (designated **1 Kingdoms 28:3-11** in the LXX).
 4. In the NKJV, the passage reads: "Give no regard to *mediums and familiar spirits*; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God." (**Leviticus 19:31**, NKJV)
- iii. Beware the occult practices of the land.
 - iv. My own culture: Halloween was popularly enjoyed in my neighborhood as a child. I have heard that our popular observances associated with this holiday have their roots in Scottish and Irish paganism.
 1. The name of the holiday is tied to the old Christian calendar, where All Saints Day (All Hallows) was celebrated on November 1. Therefore the evening immediately before that was called 'All Hallows Eve', hence the name 'Halloween'.
 - v. Only realized this problem as an adult.
 1. We must not mix paganism with Christ.
 2. Breaking with the popular culture around us in rejecting Halloween was initially unpopular with my children.
 3. Halloween unfortunately is celebrated with particular gusto in Massachusetts, especially North Shore (with Salem, a city historically associated with witchcraft, as the epicenter).
 4. Anything associated with the occult is dangerous, and should be avoided by Christians, like the plague. We are dealing with powerful forces of evil here. This is nothing to joke about!

III. Rise Before the Gray-Headed Man

- a. Read **Leviticus 19:32**.
- b. Clement of Alexandria said that men should not dye their hair, in an attempt to look younger than they really are. Dyeing one's hair was an ancient practice, and one that is still popular in our own time!
 - i. "For it is not dreadful, it is not dreadful to *appear* old, when *you are not able to shut your eyes to the fact that you are so*.
 - ii. "The more, then, a man hastes to the end, the more truly venerable is he, having God alone as his senior, since He is the eternal aged One, He who is older than all things. Prophecy has called him the 'Ancient of Days; and

the hair of His head was as pure wool,' says the prophet (**Daniel 7:9**). 'And none other,' says the Lord, 'can make the hair white or black.' (**Matthew 5:36**) How, then, do these godless ones work in rivalry with God, or rather violently oppose Him, when they transmute the hair made white by Him?

- iii. "The crown of old men is great experience," says Scripture (**Sirach 25:6**); and the hoary hair of their countenance is the blossom of large experience. But these dishonour the reverence of age, the head covered with grey hairs. It is not, it is not possible for him to show the head true who has a fraudulent head.
 - iv. "'But you have not so learned Christ; if so be that you have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man (not the hoary man, but him that is) corrupt according to deceitful lusts; and be renewed (not by dyeings and ornaments), but in the spirit of your mind; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' (**Ephesians 4:20-24**)"
1. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 275)
 2. Some of the points made by Clement in the above quote include:
 - a. We should not feel bad about becoming older. God is older than anything; in a sense we are becoming *more like God*!
 - b. The Lord was manifest as the Ancient of Days, having *white hair*. Again, growing older and one's hair turning white are not things to avoid.
 - c. We should seek to be transparently honest, and not to try to deceive others regarding our age.
 - d. God alone makes our hair black or white. We should not try to compete with God – by attempting to undo what He has done *in turning our hair gray*!
 - c. We are called to honor those who are elderly.
 - i. In contrast, for the most part in modern American society:
 1. The elderly are considered disposable and no longer needed. They are considered unproductive, just taking up space and

using resources but no longer providing any real benefit to the rest of society.

2. Our society reveres youth, physical beauty, wealth, impressive accomplishments, athletic prowess, and the popular fame of 'stars'.
 - a. However, God holds up *wisdom* as being of much greater value.
 3. In many traditional cultures (including in Asia and Africa) great respect is still shown for the advice and wisdom of parents and other elders.
 - a. Those older still have an important role, and are considered valued advisors.
 - b. In some cases the younger people rely heavily on their wisdom even in very personal matters, such as who to marry. (This is the rationale behind *arranged marriages*, a concept that is unfathomable to those raised within modern Western culture.)
- ii. The story of Rehoboam, son of Solomon, is a classic story of what happens when someone foolishly disregards the wisdom of older advisors.
1. Read **1 Kings 12:5-13** (designated **3 Kingdoms 12:5-13** in the LXX).
- iii. Even in many church circles, youth is exalted.
1. **Personal Example:** When I first began to attend a large church many years ago at age of 28, I was older than anyone on the staff of the church.
 - a. While the church had elders, they had delegated almost all aspects of running the church to their young full-time staff.
 - b. Terrible mistakes and abuses resulted from lack of wisdom on the part of these youthful leaders.
 2. Even today when I occasionally hear other Christians lament about poor policies or decisions made by their church leaders, sometimes it strikes me that these mistakes are to a large degree the natural product of a *lack of experience and wisdom*, (rather than malevolence on the part of the leaders).

- a. I ask myself, “What foolish things *was I doing* or *advocating at their age?*”; and often conclude that these younger leaders actually are ahead of where I was *at their age!*
- iv. In my own profession of consulting engineering, wisdom is highly valued.
 - 1. I have made mistakes on prior projects, and have seen up close the impact of mistakes made by others, throughout my engineering career. However, from those mistakes I have learned valuable (if painful) lessons that have benefitted me and others on subsequent projects. After working for about four decades in my field of engineering, I have reached a point where I am asked to check the work done by other engineers, before those designs are considered ‘final’ and ready for construction. Some of the things I discover in these reviews of the work of other engineers (benefiting from ‘lessons learned’ through past mistakes and failures), include:
 - a. While the design looks good on paper, can someone actually *build* it?
 - b. When the system that is designed breaks or needs maintenance work, how can it be repaired?
 - c. What happens when unexpected extreme bad weather happens (ice storms, rain, local flooding, etc.)?
 - d. What disastrous thing could happen in the event of a power failure, if someone closes a valve by mistake, or if a monitor malfunctions?
 - 2. Read **Sirach 34:9-12**.
 - a. Experience can make one wiser!
 - i. This is the benefit of travel, reading history (learning from the past), and reaching an advanced age.
 - b. **Example:** In David Adams’ front steps reconstruction project, in the midst of which the mason uncovered an unexpected rotted wood structural sill plate.
 - i. Since I had personally encountered and repaired a very similar problem when working on my own home, I could give knowledgeable advice on

how to proceed, and what the best options were to repair this.

- c. **Example:** At the end of the recent U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan War, those old enough to remember the end of the Viet Nam War (early 1970's) would NOT have been surprised by what was discovered (since they saw the same things in Viet Nam decades earlier). These included:
 - i. A pattern of lies and misrepresentation from the U.S. military and/or administration regarding how well they were doing in the war, and how militarily competent our allies were.
 - ii. Massive corruption.
 - iii. Prompt collapse and disaster facing those who were left behind.
- d. **Example:** Socialism has become quite popular among the youth of the U.S. recently. However...
 - i. Ask those who actually lived under communism in Cuba, Argentina, Ukraine, Russia, Eastern Europe. Ask them what *they* think about socialism / communism!
 - ii. If you want to learn from mistakes of the past (in Russia) regarding where this road leads, you can read *Gulag Archipelago*, by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.
- e. **Example:** Investing one's money.
 - i. Those who are young can tend to believe "stock market always goes up" or "real estate always goes up" (since that is all they have ever seen).
 - ii. Those old enough to have lived through depressions, major recessions, market bubbles bursting, bank failures. etc. have a different perspective.
 - iii. Ask those who have lived through money-printing episodes in Weimar Germany, Zimbabwe, Argentina about the dangers of reckless money-printing by the government!

3. "The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, If it is found in the way of righteousness." (**Proverbs 16:31**, NKJV; see **Proverbs 16:29** in the LXX)
 - a. Old age *in righteousness*!
4. There is a reason why Paul says that those who direct the affairs of the church should be elders (= older men).
 - a. **Question:** But, *how old* should a man be to be a candidate for 'elder'?
 - b. In the Apostolic Constitutions, it indicates that is generally was preferred in the early church that an elder be at least 50 years old. However, it also states there that this was not a hard rule. In smaller communities, where the pool of candidates was smaller, an elder could be younger than that.
 - c. For more information regarding the age of elders in the early church, see *Apostolic Constitutions* book 2, section 1; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 396. See also introductory note before the writings of Gregory Thaumaturgus, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, p. 3.

5. Challenges:

- a. Seek to learn from those who are wiser, and respect those who are older, who have persevered in righteousness!
 - i. Read **Sirach 6:32-37**.
 - ii. Find a wise man among the elders, and attach yourself to him!
- b. Those who are older: seek to be a wise, respected resource for those who are younger.
- d. Read **Leviticus 19:34-37**.
 - i. Love even the *resident alien* as yourself.
 1. Think of the story in **Luke 10** about the Good Samaritan, where Jesus is asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?"
 2. If the man who questioned Jesus had read **Leviticus 19** more thoroughly, perhaps he would not have needed to ask that question!

3. God explained back in **Leviticus** that we need to *love even the resident aliens*, the strangers dwelling among us, as we love ourselves. Therefore, it seems to me that Jesus was not introducing an entirely new concept in the Good Samaritan story of **Luke 10**.
- ii. We must not use a “double standard”.
1. You cannot have have two different sets of measurements (one for buying, and a different set for selling). Use the same, honest measurements for everything.
 2. God’s people must be truthful and honest with all people.
 3. My siblings tended to complain that one was being treated differently than the others (unfairness).
 4. Same measure of justice for all (regardless of race, wealth, status, political position, conservative/progressive ideology, etc.).
 5. God is fair toward all. He does not discriminate based on outward things, and He wants His people to show the same integrity and fairness toward all, without favoritism.
 - a. This is the essence of true justice.