

**Proverbs**  
***An Age against Age***

---

Sunday, July 11, 2010

**Introduction**

We have seen that Solomon repeatedly appeals to his sons to listen to his instruction (1:8; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1, 10; 5:1, 7; 6:1, 20; 7:1; etc.).

Now, no one that I know of—no scholar, that is—believes that Solomon intends these appeals only for his own children. He clearly has a much larger audience in mind. He addresses himself to everyone who will listen, whether they are *his* children, *other people's* children, or adults. In fact, the subject matter of many of the proverbs lead us to believe that he has young adults in mind. But no matter how wide an audience he has in mind, he assumes the role of a *father* to his readers. It is often the case that teachers assume this role to their disciples. Think, for instance, of what Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).

The appeals which Solomon makes throughout the book are the appeals of an old man to those who are still young and inexperienced in life. Throughout the Bible—and throughout the ancient world generally—we find that a premium is placed upon age and the wisdom that comes from age. This stands in very stark contrast to our day, at least in the Western world.

We in the West place a premium on youth and beauty. This is because we are an *image-oriented* society, indeed an *image-saturated* society. This is due in no small part to our technology, especially television. We communicate very differently today than we did before the advent of modern technology. Our means of communication are far more visually oriented than they used to be.

Take the news, for instance:

Television news is very different in kind than print news (newspapers and magazines); it's the difference between visual versus verbal communication. Even print news today is very different than print news of a hundred years ago. Newspapers have had to change their format *because of the influence of television*. There is far less depth in reporting today than there used to be, because people are not as accustomed to reading as they used to be, and people are not as accustomed to reading as they used to be, because they have been trained by watching television to have short attention spans...

If you have a choice after a long day's work to catch up on the news and you can either sit and read a newspaper or turn on the tube, what are going to do? It's easier to watch television than it is to read a paper. It takes less energy. It takes less personal interaction. And it takes less critical thought.

The vast majority of people today get their news through television news broadcasts. But I have no hesitation to say that you *cannot* have an adequate grasp of the issues simply by *watching* the news; the

nature of the medium of television does not permit anything like an in-depth analysis of the issues. What you get on television is necessarily superficial, and viewers are much more susceptible to being manipulated by slick production features. In television generally, and this goes for the news as well, image is everything. And it doesn't lend itself well to developing the powers of critical thought. People tend to be influenced more by what they see than what they hear.

The 1960 presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon is a good example of this. This was first televised presidential debate. It gave the nation the first real opportunity for voters to see their candidates in competition, and the visual contrast was dramatic. A month before the debate Nixon had seriously injured his knee and spent two weeks in the hospital. By the time of the first debate he was still twenty pounds underweight, his color still poor. He arrived at the debate in an ill-fitting shirt, and refused make-up to improve his color and lighten his perpetual 5:00 o'clock shadow. Kennedy, by contrast, had spent early September campaigning in California. He was tan and confident and well-rested. He looked good.

Those who heard the first debate on the radio pronounced Nixon the winner. But the 70 million who watched television saw a candidate still sickly and obviously bested by Kennedy's smooth delivery and charisma. Those television viewers focused on what they saw, not what they heard. Studies of the audience indicated that, among television viewers, Kennedy was perceived the winner of the first debate by a very large margin.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=kennedy-nixon>

Television viewers were distracted by what they saw. In word-oriented communication there is usually a better use made of one's critical faculties of discernment to sort out truth from error. There is greater value placed on that which appeals to the mind, to the judgment; whereas image-oriented communication (which is what predominates today) tends to place a greater value on what appeals to the eye.

In our day we are so influenced by visual media that we tend to prize what looks good to the eye rather than what is in accord with sound judgment. And so we prize youth and beauty over age and wisdom. And as long as we do so we will find ourselves at odds with the priorities of Scripture. Not that youth and beauty are unimportant in God's world, but age and wisdom are clearly given a place of prominence in Scripture that is almost wholly lacking in our culture.

Throughout Proverbs we have the admonitions of an older man to his younger students. There is an assumption in Proverbs (as there is throughout the Bible) — there is a bias — in favor of age, and the wisdom that comes with age, not only directly from God's law, but through long experience in applying God's law to life. It's a seasoned judgment that is valued — a judgment that cannot developed in a day.

Young ministers often mistake knowledge for wisdom. They've read a book in seminary about pastoral counseling, for example. And now they know how to counsel. They know nothing of the sort; not until they themselves have experienced life.

It's not for no reason that leaders in the church are called elders. Normally,

they're going to be older men who have taken a great many trips around the sun. Only they are going to have the seasoned judgment to provide the kind of leadership a church needs.

It's also not for no reason that our Constitution has age requirements for elected office.

Members of the House	25
Senators	30
President	35

The greater the responsibilities of the office, the greater the age requirement

Wisdom is with the aged,  
and understanding in length of days (Job 12:12)

A little reflection confirms that there is much wisdom in having age requirements for bearing office, both in the church and in the state. It is definitely *not* a blessing to have young leadership.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child (Ecc. 10:16)

Why? Because it will be ruinous to have someone who is immature and inexperienced making decisions of great importance on behalf of the nation, someone who is wholly unqualified to do so. In fact, so ruinous is it that God even threatens Israel with it as a curse!

**Isaiah 3:1-5**

There are a couple of things to note here. First, he expects them to understand it to be a curse and a punishment (not a blessing!) when he says “I will make boys their princes, and infants shall rule over them.” In other words, he will give them rulers who are immature and inexperienced and it will prove to be Israel’s undoing.

Second, he says that it would be a time when “the youth will be insolent to the elder, and the despised to the honorable.” There is something particularly galling to see some young punk show disrespect to an elder, even more so when the elder in question is one’s own father. The prophet Micah laments the signs of apostasy he sees in day when he says,

son treats the father with contempt,  
the daughter rises up against her mother (Micah 7:6)

Ezekiel, also, 150 years later lamented the same condition.

Father and mother are treated with contempt in you (Ezek 22:7)

Job took it very ill that as a result of the reversal of fortune he suffered men younger than he mocked him.

But now they laugh at me,  
*men who are younger than I,*  
whose fathers I would have disdained  
to set with the dogs of my flock (Job 30:1)

It is always hard to endure ridicule, but especially from young punks who think they’re something when really they’re nothing.

And while in our image conscious society gray hair and wrinkles are looked down upon and considered a disqualification for being taken seriously, in Proverbs we read just the opposite:

Gray hair is a crown of glory;  
it is gained in a righteous life (16:31)

In other words, gray hair is evidence of long life; and long life is evidence of a righteous life, because God promises long life to the righteous. Listen to some other passages on this theme in Proverbs.

The glory of young men is their strength,  
but the splendor of old men is their gray hair (20:29)

Consider also how Jesus is described Revelation 1: “The hairs of his head were white like wool, as white as snow” (v. 14). Judges used to wear white wigs...

Listen to your father who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old (23:22)

These Proverbs, of course, are rooted in the fifth commandment:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged  
in the land which the LORD your God gives you (Ex. 20:12)

This commandment, you realize, is not just for minor children; in fact not even *primarily* for minor children. It was originally directed to adult children who are charged with the care of their elderly parents. Jesus makes this application in **Matthew 15:1-7**.

And listen to this from the book of Leviticus.

You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:32)

Contrast this commandment with what we read in **2 Kings 2:23-24**. Now there is more going on here than just the fact that these young punks were mocking Elisha's age and bald head. They were mocking a prophet of the living God!

Peter also speaks of the deference younger men should have toward their elders when he says in chapter five of his first epistle,

You who are younger, be subject to the elders (1 Pet. 5:5)

---

Now, have you noticed that sometimes someone with a *little* bit of experience is worse than someone with no experience at all. Why is that? Because someone with no experience often has enough sense to know it, and to ask for help, for counsel. But someone with a little bit of experience has a tendency to be wise in his own eyes. He's got a little experience under his belt and he thinks he's wiser than he really is. And he feels like he's got to prove that he can play with the big boys. This is why sophomores are called sophomores. Do you know what the word *sophomore* means? It means wise fool...

Rehoboam was a wise fool when he rejected the wise counsel of the elders and went with the advice of the punks he grew up with (**1 Ki. 12:1-20**).

Consider Elihu's deference to Job's friends (**Job 32:1-20**). He held back and deferred to his elders until he perceived that their answers were inadequate.

Compare this with our culture's fixation on the importance of youth, and the wisdom of youth:

Bumper stickers and mottoes:

"Question Authority" – It's okay to question authority, so long as it is done so respectfully

"Don't believe anyone over 30"

You reap what you sow. These knuckleheads are now in their 70s and they're finding that young people don't respect them. Well, they themselves laid the groundwork for their own dishonor. They have no one to blame but themselves.

---

Movie plot lines—children find themselves opposed in some endeavor by their parents (choice of boyfriend/girlfriend, chasing a dream, etc.) or other adults. Of course, the presupposition is that the children are right and the adults are wrong. But the tension is the story; and the resolution comes when the adults realize their mistake and come to embrace their children's position.

---

The difficulty in older men finding work, even in jobs that do not require manual labor

Now we must be careful because there are always exceptions. It is not always the case that the old are wise or that the young are foolish or naïve. We have all known old men who are foolish and young men who are wise beyond their years.

We find this in Scripture, too.

Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king (Ecc. 4:13)

Even though Timothy was an officer in the church, and his ministry was sanctioned by an apostle, he was nevertheless instructed to have a proper regard for the difference in age between himself and the older men of the congregation he served.

Timothy was a young man, as we learn from 1 Tim. 4:12. This shows that age, although preferred in a church officer, is not an absolutely necessary requirement of the office. What *is* necessary is a good grasp of the content of Scripture, godly character, and sound judgment.

So even though Timothy was young, he was commissioned by Paul as an officer of the church and invested with the authority that came with the office. But when it was necessary to correct an older man, he was to do so with a proper consideration for the respect due to the man's age (**1 Tim. 5:1**).