

Whatever Happened to Respect?

1 Samuel 10:17-24

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Sometimes I wonder if we have largely lost respect as a virtue within our culture today.

Just attend a graduation service.

Watch how people treat each other on Black Friday as we try to purchase presents for Christmas. Go to a ball game and listen to the trash talk from opposing fans, and I'm talking about Little League and children's soccer games as well as high school.

Wherever there is an intersection of people that are different from one another in color, language, culture, beliefs, religion, social status, or wealth, there is loss of respect and it is noticeable in how the people treat each other. If we would just use the *Golden Rule*.

Our national leaders have failed to set the tone and the example for the rest of us in how those that are different from us and those we disagree with us should be treated.

Our religious leaders need to set the tone for us, too, but so many of them mirror the actions and sound bites of the national leaders that they have not helped much either.

I have noticed in the last year more and more examples of athletes, and politicians refusing to respect their counterparts by extending a traditional handshake.

“According to one anthropologist, the handshake evolved in medieval Europe, during the times of knights. It seems not all the knights were virtuous.

More than a few would approach opponents with concealed weapons and when within striking distance pull out a dagger or a sword and plunge it into the unsuspecting opponent.”
(<https://virtuefirst.org/virtues/respect/>)

That is not a fair fight.

“To fend off the fear of this kind of nasty business, knights took to offering their open and visibly empty hand to each other. It was a kind of surety, a gesture of trust which said, ‘See, I am unarmed, so you may safely let me approach.’” (Ibid)

“As the story goes, soon the gesture itself took on meaning and the less noble, less lethal man on the street adopted the handshake as the proper way to greet others.” (Ibid)

Today when we don't extend a traditional handshake, it carries meaning. It says, “I have no respect for you. You are not my equal. I am better than you. You are not worthy to be my opponent.” Some people today opt for a fist bump. They see it as less germey.

To the teachers in the room, I want to thank you for the work you are doing. We are living in a day when many parents have lost respect for your profession. We should respect you more by paying you what you are worth. You are part of the glue that helps hold our society together and we should hold you in the highest esteem among our occupations.

Those you educate respect you less because they have not been taught respect at home. To be taught, respect has to be modeled.

We teach children respect by teaching them how to take care of themselves and their belongings, how to have responsibilities, and how to get along with their peers.

Unless a child is taught how to show respect at home, it is unlikely that a child will show respect anywhere else.

One of the reasons the church is important is that we are another part of the village needed to help parents teach their children respect. Teaching respect starts at home and ends at home. But every base a family can add to help their child run the diamond of respect, the better chance that child will have of becoming a respectful adult.

The school can help. Organizations like Scouts, FFA and 4-H Club can help. Sports can help if the coach models respect for the opposing team and among teammates.

The church's role in all of these is unique because what we teach seeps into every other area of life. If people embrace what the church teaches about respect, it can help people transform a deficiency of respect in their lives at home, school, work, among their peers, or even within one's own self.

To reclaim respect as a virtue, we must have

- 1.) Respect for Self
- 2.) Respect for Others
- 3.) Respect for Authority

Let's start with Respect for Self.

A lot of people have respect for self because of their abilities, their looks, their jobs, their personality, or something which has helped them develop a positive self-esteem.

This can be a blessing and a curse.

First the blessing. If you have worked extremely hard to earn a degree and secure a job, establish a career, become an athlete, raise a child, overcome a major obstacle, strive for and achieve goals of any kind, these things can help you feel good about who you are as a person. By achieving anything, we gain a measure of self-respect. We have a bit of pride or confidence in who we are as persons.

Now the curse. What if we have not earned all we hoped we'd earn at this stage in life? What if we haven't achieved all we hoped to achieve? What if we have failed to reach some of the goals we hoped to achieve? What if we feel like a failure?

There are many people that have achieved a lot. There are people that are handsome and beautiful and they work at staying that way. Those around them might think these people are happy and content. You would think they would love themselves, but so many people do not for many reasons.

Some can never measure up to the expectations of parents or have never been blessed by parents or told they are loved. Some have been told all their lives that they are not good enough. Despite all they do, or will do, they can't seem to ever find it within themselves to respect themselves.

Saul was a man who struggled with self-respect.

Let's set the stage. Saul lived about 1100 B.C. Until Saul, God had been Israel's king. He'd sent prophets and judges to lead and deliver truth and to help them with issues with their enemies.

After they asked God for a king like other nations, the prophet Samuel had the job of finding their first one, a job that brought him grief, because he told the people that this was not going to turn out well for them.

Nevertheless, God told him to give the people what they asked for.

Samuel chose a man from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of Israel's tribes

Saul didn't have a clue that he was king material. Yet he is described as an "impressive young man without equal among the Israelites---a head taller than any of the others."

Saul did not get the job as king because he was a head taller than all the rest, but his height didn't hurt his resume. People couldn't help looking up to him.

As a person of shorter stature, it's been my observation that taller people get more respect in life, all things being equal. Then again, I may just have a fragile little ego.

So, I did a little research and found that the U.S. National Library of Medicine concluded in a study that taller people enjoy an increased social status and upward social mobility, which leads to improved health because of their increased interpersonal dominance.

(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4342156/>)

When I read that, I heard Randy Newman singing:

Short people got no reason/

Short people got no reason/

Short people got no reason/
To live

As all of you know, just because you are blessed with height, that doesn't mean you are blessed with natural leadership skills or even good self-esteem. In fact, many people struggle with self-esteem growing up because they are so much taller than everyone else.

Self-respect has to come from within and not from without. The fact that Saul had been chosen didn't mean that Saul could see in himself what God or others could see in him.

One day Saul was out looking for his father's lost donkeys in the hill country. Saul was more than content just to leave because they could not be found, but the servant that was with wasn't willing to give up.

The servant suggested that they go to the Man of God, a seer, someone who might have insight where they could look. The servant had a shekel of silver to pay him.

That's when Saul got the surprise of his life. He left home looking for donkeys. He returned home anointed the king of Israel.

That's right. When the two men met Samuel, much to the objection of Saul, the prophet took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him and anointed him as Israel's new king.

This is where Saul should have found his self-respect. Saul had done nothing to deserve his anointing as Israel's new king. That honor and responsibility came as a gift. God affirmed him and blessed him. Saul knew himself and knew he was undeserving. But he also knew he had been anointed, blessed, and given a charge.

What if Saul had adopted the same self-respect as his successor David?

Listen to the Words of the Psalmist

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be. (Psalm 13:13-16)

The Psalmist found his identity and self-respect in God. He believed God had created him for a purpose which God had laid out before he was created.

That doesn't mean that we are destined to live it out. That is something we still must choose.

God chose Saul for a task but from the very beginning.

The problem was that Saul could not embrace it.

Samuel met the people of Israel at Mizpah to announce the new king. Saul had not said anything to anyone. Who could blame him? Who would believe him? Who would believe that he went looking for donkeys one day and came back anointed as the first king of Israel?

However, this part is interesting. Samuel made the announcement dramatic.

He went through each tribe, eliminating them one by one until he came to the tribe of Benjamin. Then he eliminated the people clan by clan until Matri's clan was chosen.

Then when the name Saul, Son of Kish was called, no one could find him.

Finally, someone found him. Saul was hiding himself among the baggage.

Again, the Bible says, "They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Instantly, Saul was given respect.

Again, He hadn't even done anything to earn it. Yet just because he had assumed an office, a new office called king, the people gave him respect.

The question was whether Saul respected himself. The answer was, "No, he did not."

Do you respect yourself?

The world can be pouring on the praise. People can be pinning on the medals. We can be winning championships. We can be getting promotions. We may have all the respect and accolades anyone could ask for and still not respect ourselves because no one knows us like we know ourselves.

To have self-respect, our lives need to be connected to God, and we must find our peace with God through his son Jesus.

To have self-respect, we have to be honest with ourselves. Being authentic and transparent is important. We must have integrity, show humility, be able to admit our failures to God.

To have self-respect we need to know that our self-worth must not be based on our performance but rather in a newness that will give us a sense of belonging. That comes through a relationship with Christ.

Paul wrote to the church of Corinth: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” 1 Corinthians 6:20.

We don’t have to hide among the baggage. God helps us deal with all that old stuff. He helps us put it in perspective. Despite it all, we can know that we are created by God, and saved through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is where we get our self-respect.

Respect for others begins with self-respect. If you do not respect yourself, how are you going to have any respect for others?

Once we know and understand that we are created and loved by God, then we realize that our neighbor is created and loved by God also.

Who is your neighbor?

That was a question Jesus posed to a group he was teaching when he told them a story about a man falling into the hands of robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho.

Two religious men of the man’s own race came by and looked at the injured man and each decided that he didn’t want to get involved and passed by on the other side.

The man that ended up helping was a Samaritan, a man of a different race. He used his own money and resources to help the injured man.

Jesus’ lesson that day was about being a neighbor. The one that was a neighbor was the one who showed compassion. We might also say that it was the one who showed respect for life, and human dignity.

We should have respect for others because Jesus taught us to show respect to others in all our actions.

Jesus taught us to love our enemies. Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek. Jesus taught us to go the extra mile. Jesus taught us to pray for those who persecute us.

Jesus ate with those that disagreed with him. He accepted invitations to dine with tax collectors and Pharisees. He had respect for and from women and even showed a measure of respect to Romans by following their laws without bowing down to them in any way.

In every way, Jesus set the example for how we are to respect one another.

This happened on American airlines.

A white woman in her 50's arrived at her seat and saw that the passenger next to her was a black man.

Visibly furious, she called the stewardess. "What's the problem, ma'am?" the stewardess asked her.

"Can't you see?" the lady said – "I was given a seat next to a black man. I can't sit here next to him. You have to change my seat."

"Please, calm down, madam" – said the stewardess.

"Unfortunately, all the seats are occupied, but I'm still going to check and see if we have any."

The stewardess left and returned some minutes later.

"Madam, as I told you, there isn't any empty seat in this class", which was economy class.

But I spoke to the captain. He said that the only seats we have left are in first class."

And before the woman said anything, the stewardess continued. "Look, it is unusual for our company to allow a passenger from the economy class to change to the first class. However, given the circumstances, the captain thinks that it would be a scandal to make a passenger travel having to sit next to an unpleasant person."

And turning to the black man, the stewardess said: "Which means, sir, if you would be so nice to pack your items, we have reserved you a seat in first class."

Finally, we are to respect authority.

For Christians, there is no higher authority for us than God. The Ten Commandments teach that no other gods should come before God. That means that there is no government, no law, or person, that has the right to come between us and our God and we have a moral obligation to honor God first.

People have been martyred because they have kept God as their supreme authority while others have demanded their allegiance.

Yet when Jesus was arrested by the Romans, stood before Pontius Pilate and King Herod, he did not disrespect them.

Even when Peter and Silas and Paul were thrown into prison, they did not disrespect those who beat them and jailed them.

As we observed the 50th Anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. this year, we need to be reminded of the nonviolent, methods Dr. King used as he and others led the march for Civil Rights.

He demonstrated that there is a right way and a wrong way to go about initiating change with a government that has laws that are oppressive and unjust. Respecting authority does not always mean agreeing with authority or even being passive.

Jesus certainly wasn't passive when he cleared the temple.

Respect for authority generally means that we are going to follow the rules and obey the guidelines laid out by those in authority, but God is always our higher authority.

If we believe laws are unjust or unfair, we have a moral obligation to work to change them.

Some people don't like authority, so they believe that people in authority can be treated with disrespect. Nowhere and at no time is this kind of behavior justified by Jesus.

Even as we seek change, at every point possible we should treat people the way we want to be treated. It is a fundamental ethic of Jesus that applies to all people in all situations.

It begins with respecting ourselves because we are created by God, loved by God, and saved by the grace of Jesus.

That helps us extend respect to others knowing that the same God made them, loves them, and seeks to save all who come to Him through Christ.

Therefore, all people should be given a measure of respect, not because all people deserve it by merit, but because we are gracious people who believe that everyone should have a measure of human dignity and treated that way.

We feel this way because God is our authority and commands us to love Him first and foremost but also to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Jesus has taught us that the definition of neighbor is very broad and should include people of all races, customs, beliefs, ages, religions, and nationalities.

- 1.) Respect for Self
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Which of these do you struggle with the most?

Remember, self-respect begins not with your goodness but with God's love and acceptance of you. God wants you to learn to love yourself because he loves you, despite your imperfections.

Respect for others?

You must respect yourself to respect others. Who are you struggling to show respect for? Most respect is earned. However, respect for some people is a gift. It's polite acknowledgment that they are persons loved by God, so we love them, too, respect doesn't have to be earned.

Finally, respect for authority begins with respecting God, who is the ultimate authority. If we show no respect for God, then we often set ourselves up as the ultimate authority, and that will lead us to a path of destruction.

Now, during this invitation, you are invited to listen to God and find the additional respect you need in your life.

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