



HOMOSEXUALITY AND RELIGIOUS FAITH IN COMBAT: X-RAYING THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS THERAPIES

CLIFFORD MEESUA SIBANI

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
08037948880 clifford.sibani@ust.edu.ng

JACKSON, ETIOWO ASUQUO

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt
08030497753 etiowo.jackson@rsu.edu.ng

Abstract

Homosexuality and religious faith in combat: X-raying the socio-religious therapies stands as the subject matter of this research. Homosexuality is an abominable form of sexual intercourse between male and male or female and female. This research investigates the longstanding conflict between homosexuality and religious faith, analyzing both the historical roots and modern impacts of this clash within religious and homosexual communities. Traditional doctrines in major religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, have generally viewed homosexuality as incompatible with their teachings. These views, reinforced over centuries, have influenced societal attitudes, leading to exclusion, discrimination, and significant personal struggles for homosexual individuals who seek to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs. The consequences are profound, affecting mental health and well-being, as homosexual individuals experience stigmatization, familial rejection, and internalized conflict within religious settings. To address these challenges, this paper explores remedies aimed at fostering reconciliation, acceptance, and support for homosexual individuals within religious contexts. Theological reinterpretation by progressive scholars advocates for new interpretations of scripture that embrace inclusivity and compassion. Counseling services and support groups offer resources that respect both faith and identity, while interfaith dialogues encourage understanding and shared values across diverse communities. Policy changes and anti-discrimination laws further support homosexual rights, prompting religious institutions to reconsider exclusive practices. Through these paths, faith and homosexual identity can coexist harmoniously, creating a more inclusive and compassionate future for all. This research utilized books, journals, internet sources, etc and employed the analytical method. It recommends that religious bodies should help in



the transformation process of homosexuals since they are helpless and need a loving and caring community.

Keywords: Faith, Homosexuality, Interfaith, Reinterpretation, Religious

Introduction

Homosexuality and religious faith are two aspects of human identity that often intersect with great complexity, particularly in communities or regions where religious beliefs form a central pillar of cultural and social life. Around the world, many individuals who are identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) face unique challenges when their sexual orientation conflicts with the teachings of their faith. In religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, traditional interpretations of sacred texts often portray homosexuality as incompatible with the ideals of spiritual purity, family structure, or moral conduct. These religious doctrines have historically influenced societal attitudes toward homosexuals, often leading to marginalization, discrimination, and even criminalization of homosexuality in certain cultures. For homosexual within religious communities, the struggle to reconcile these identities can lead to profound internal conflicts, strained family relationships, and broader social isolation.

In recent years, the clash between homosexuality and religious beliefs has taken on new dimensions as homosexual rights movements gain momentum worldwide. As society increasingly advocates for inclusivity and equality, religious institutions face a dilemma: how to maintain the tenets of their faith while acknowledging the rights and identities of homosexual individuals. This conflict is visible across both secular and religious settings, with religious groups differing widely in their responses. While some religious communities resist changes to long-standing beliefs, others actively seek ways to reinterpret or evolve their doctrines in support of inclusivity. This ongoing conflict between sexuality



and faith raises questions about how individuals, communities, and institutions can find pathways to understanding, respect, and even reconciliation.

Biblical condemnation of same-sex acts reflects ancient cultural norms rather than an eternal moral principle, and he advocates for an inclusive reading of scripture (Vines, 2014). Religious doctrines on homosexuality vary considerably, with some traditions maintaining strict prohibitions while others adopt more nuanced or inclusive interpretations. In Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, traditional teachings have often condemned homosexuality, yet modern re-evaluations are increasingly shaping new paths toward acceptance. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous beliefs generally exhibit greater tolerance, though acceptance levels vary based on cultural contexts. Understanding these diverse religious perspectives provides essential context for analyzing the complex relationship between religious beliefs and homosexual identities, which will be further explored in this research.

Religious Views on Homosexuality

Throughout history, major religious traditions have largely condemned homosexuality, shaping the attitudes and policies of societies in ways that persist today. While interpretations and practices vary across and even within religions, most religious doctrines have traditionally considered homosexual behavior to be morally incompatible with religious ideals of family, sexuality, and purity.

In Christianity, the dominant historical stance on homosexuality has been negative, with particular passages in the Bible frequently cited as evidence. Leviticus 18:22, for example, labels homosexual acts as an “abomination,” and Leviticus 20:13 prescribes severe punishment. The Apostle Paul’s letters, especially in Romans 1:26–27, also condemn homosexual acts as “unnatural,” presenting such behavior as a departure from God’s will. These verses have profoundly shaped Christian views, leading



many Christian denominations to prohibit homosexual relationships or consider them sinful. However, interpretations vary, with some modern denominations re-examining these passages. For instance, scholars like Matthew Vines (as cited in Brownson, 2013), argue that biblical references to homosexuality should be understood in their ancient cultural context, which differs significantly from contemporary understandings of sexual orientation.

In Islam, traditional views on homosexuality are also conservative, rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Several verses in the Quran (e.g., Surah Al-A'raf 7:80-84) recount the story of the people of Lot, often interpreted as a condemnation of homosexual behavior. Islamic jurists have historically classified homosexual acts as sinful and have prescribed punishments ranging from fines to severe penalties under Sharia law, depending on the school of jurisprudence and historical period. However, like in Christianity, contemporary interpretations of Islamic scripture vary. According to Kugle (2014), these verses may not necessarily apply to consensual same-sex relationships as understood today. The Quran does not explicitly address consensual same-sex relationships as they are understood today. Kugle (2010) viewed that homosexuality in Islam suggests that the Quranic condemnation of the people of Lot focuses on issues like lust, inhospitality, and violence, rather than on consensual, loving relationships between individuals of the same gender. This is a very strong argument on the issue of homosexuality and religious acceptance.

Social Attitude towards Homosexuality

Religious teachings have not only shaped theological views on homosexuality but have also significantly influenced societal attitudes across historical periods and cultures. In regions where



religious authority intertwined with governance, religious beliefs became embedded in social norms and legal codes, often leading to widespread stigmatization and criminalization of homosexuality. In 2006, the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly issued a ruling allowing same-sex relationships and ordination of homosexual rabbis, though individual congregations retain autonomy in their practices. This approach reflects the Conservative movement's commitment to both tradition and contemporary ethical values, (Herdt & Howe, 2007).

In medieval Europe, Christian doctrine heavily influenced laws and social attitudes toward homosexuality. Homosexual acts were criminalized under laws enacted by Christian rulers and were punishable by severe penalties, including imprisonment or death. This condemnation of homosexuality persisted through the Middle Ages and the early modern period, where acts perceived as morally deviant were harshly punished, particularly in Christian states, (Vines, 2014).

In Islamic societies, traditional interpretations of Sharia law shaped legal and social norms around sexuality, often leading to the criminalization of homosexual acts. Many Muslim-majority countries maintain laws prohibiting homosexuality, influenced by both religious teachings and colonial-era legal codes that were often retained post-independence. In certain Islamic societies, homosexuality remains highly stigmatized, with punishments ranging from imprisonment to, in extreme cases, the death penalty. However, societal attitudes vary, with some countries and regions adopting more lenient approaches, particularly where secular governance coexists with religious influence. In Orthodox communities, traditional views on homosexuality often result in stigmatization and exclusion of homosexuals, (The Interfaith Alliance, 2020).



Homosexuality and Religious Faith in Modern Society

As society has shifted toward greater secularization and advocacy for human rights, attitudes toward homosexuals have evolved significantly, often coming into conflict with traditional religious beliefs. While secular movements have championed homosexual rights, some religious groups continue to resist these changes, holding on to doctrines that view homosexuality as incompatible with their faith. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed significant secularization in many parts of the world, as well as a growing emphasis on individual rights and freedoms. Secular movements have played a pivotal role in advancing homosexual rights by advocating for separation of religious doctrine from civil law and emphasizing the importance of human rights and equality.

1. Secularization and Legal Reforms:

As societies have become more secular, laws based on religious morality have increasingly been re-evaluated and, in many cases, removed from the legal system. In the United States, for example, the landmark 2003 Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas* struck down laws criminalizing homosexual conduct, setting a precedent for the legal recognition of homosexual rights. This case marked a significant shift in how the law approached issues of personal morality, reflecting secular values of privacy and equality over religiously motivated prohibitions, (Keshet, 2018). Similarly, in countries like the United Kingdom and Canada, secular values have influenced the decriminalization of homosexuality, marriage equality, and anti-discrimination protections. These changes highlight the shift from religious-based law to secular legal frameworks that prioritize individual freedoms and equality for homosexuals.



2. Human Rights Movements and Homosexual Advocacy:

Human rights movements have been instrumental in promoting homosexual rights by framing discrimination based on sexual orientation as a violation of fundamental human rights. Organizations like Amnesty International, the Human Rights Campaign, and Out Right Action International advocate for homosexual rights globally, often challenging laws that are based on religious beliefs, (Johnson & Vanderbeck, 2014). In the international arena, bodies such as the United Nations have increasingly recognized homosexual rights as human rights. The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been used to advocate for the decriminalization of homosexuality worldwide, underscoring the principle that all individuals are entitled to dignity and equality. This secular human rights framework is instrumental in challenging laws in regions where religious beliefs continue to shape negative attitudes toward homosexuals.

3. Public Opinion and Cultural Shifts:

Secularization has also led to changing cultural norms, particularly in Western societies, where public opinion on homosexual issues has become more favorable. This shift is reflected in media representation, educational initiatives, and the rise of pride movements, all of which have helped normalize diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. This cultural shift is particularly evident among younger generations, who are generally more accepting of homosexuals and less influenced by traditional religious teachings. As secular values become more mainstream, these changes further reinforce acceptance and inclusion, (Greenberg, 2004).

Religious Resistance to Social Change

Despite the growing secular acceptance of homosexual rights, many religious groups continue to resist these changes, often based on doctrinal teachings that regard homosexuality as abomination, sinful or



morally unacceptable. This resistance manifests in both public opposition to homosexual rights and internal policies that uphold traditional beliefs on sexuality.

1. Opposition to Marriage Equality:

One of the most visible forms of religious resistance to homosexual rights is opposition to marriage equality. In the United States, for example, conservative Christian organizations like the Family Research Council and Alliance Defending Freedom have actively lobbied against same-sex marriage. They argue that marriage should remain defined as a union between one man and one woman, based on their interpretation of biblical teachings, (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw & Crowell, 2015). In countries with strong religious influence, such as Russia and many Muslim-majority nations, marriage equality is not recognized, and religious authorities often lead the opposition. In these societies, religious beliefs are often intertwined with national identity, and opposition to homosexual rights is seen as a defense of cultural and moral values.

2. Conversion Therapy and "Reparative" Ministries:

Some religious groups promote conversion therapy, a practice that claims to “cure” homosexuals of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Organizations like Exodus International, before its closure in 2013, advocated for conversion therapy based on Christian teachings. Similarly, some Islamic and Orthodox Jewish groups have promoted conversion therapy practices in an attempt to align homosexuals with traditional religious norms. Conversion therapy has been widely criticized by Medical and Psychological Associations as ineffective and harmful. Despite these condemnations, certain religious groups continue to support such practices, viewing them as a means to “redeem” homosexuals from what they perceive as sinful behavior, (Barnard & Curry, 2012).

3. Religious Exemptions and Anti-Discrimination Laws:



In response to expanding homosexual rights, some religious groups have sought exemptions from anti-discrimination laws, arguing that being compelled to accept homosexuals violates their religious freedom. In the United States, for instance, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) has been used to defend businesses and religious organizations that refuse to serve homosexuals on religious grounds. This debate over religious exemptions highlights the tension between freedom of religion and the rights of homosexuals. Proponents argue that religious institutions should not be forced to act against their beliefs, while opponents maintain that religious freedom should not justify discrimination, (The World Council of Churches. (2022).

Implications for Homosexuals in a Socio-Religious Context

For homosexuals, family is often the first source of identity and support. However, when families hold conservative religious beliefs that denounce or marginalize homosexual identities, individuals may experience isolation, guilt, and internalized shame.

1. Internalized Shame and Religious Guilt:

Homosexuals from religious backgrounds frequently grapple with internalized shame, especially if their religious teachings label homosexuality as immoral, abominable or sinful. This internal conflict is often referred to as "cognitive dissonance," where the individual's personal identity is in direct opposition to religious beliefs. Research shows that this dissonance can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and worthlessness, Barnes & Meyer (as cited in Barnard & Curry, 2012). Religious teachings can amplify these feelings, especially when homosexuals try to reconcile their identity with their faith. Some may attempt to change their orientation through prayer or counseling, hoping to "resolve" the



dissonance. However, research shows that these attempts, often labeled "conversion therapy," can have detrimental effects on mental health, leading to increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

2. Family Rejection and Acceptance Struggles:

Homosexuals may also face significant challenges within their families, especially when coming out to parents or relatives with conservative religious beliefs. Family rejection, whether in the form of direct exclusion or indirect disapproval, has been associated with increased risks of substance abuse, depression, and even suicide (Ryan et al., 2009). Many homosexuals from religious families are at risk of being disowned or forced into environments that prioritize religious teachings over acceptance. Homosexuals whose families offer some level of acceptance, there is often a long period of negotiation, where family members attempt to balance their beliefs with their love for their child. This negotiation can create an ongoing sense of tension and instability for the individual.

3. Pressure to Conform or Remain Closeted:

Many homosexuals raised in religious families face pressure to conform to heterosexual norms or remain closeted. This may manifest as pressure to pursue heterosexual relationships, attend religious counseling, or keep their orientation hidden. Hiding one's sexual orientation or gender identity can have long-term effects on self-esteem and identity development, leading to issues with self-worth and chronic stress (Herek et al., 1999).

4. Exclusion from Community Life:

Homosexuals often experience exclusion from religious practices and community life, including leadership roles, religious education, and sacraments like marriage. In Christian denominations, for example, many congregations limit LGBTQ+ participation, sometimes refusing membership or religious rites such as baptism for same-sex couples, (Boswell, 2024). This exclusion can lead to



feelings of alienation and a sense of unworthiness. Homosexuals may struggle to find a sense of belonging in communities that reject their identity, often leading them to distance themselves from their faith entirely.

5. Discrimination in Religious Organizations and Schools:

Discrimination within religious organizations and schools is common, particularly in environments that uphold strict moral codes. Many LGBTQ+ students and employees in religious schools' face expulsion or termination based on their sexual orientation, creating an environment where they must choose between expressing their identity or being a part of their faith community Higa et al., (cited in Ryan et al., 2009). The secular educational arm of the church should be fortified with sound moral teachings, to meet children and youth needs. The contemporary youth is such that is overly exposed through information & Communication Technology (ICT), to many things. Unless thorough teaching of the word of God is incorporated into their secular educational system, youths and children would be misinformed on the issue of homosexuality, and they would be overly expose and indulge in the practice. Youths should be made to understand potential threats and dangers posed by their indulging in homosexual practices. The danger inculcates such, affecting self and relationship between others and with God, (Onotere & Ufuoma, 2024).

6. Stigmatization and Social Ostracism:

Homosexuals in religious settings often face a form of social ostracism known as “shunning,” where community members avoid or exclude them based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. And this identity can be demeaning if not well guided (Oko and Ogbodo, 2022). In conservative communities, being openly homosexuals can lead to ostracism at social gatherings, public events, or within neighborhood networks, often leading individuals to feel isolated and disconnected.



Stigmatization can manifest in indirect ways, such as gossip, avoidance, or silence on homosexual issues within the community. This creates a culture of unspoken discrimination, where LGBTQ+ individuals feel marginalized and unsupported. The fear of ostracism can lead to self-censorship, where individuals suppress their identity to avoid conflict or exclusion.

Mental Health Impacts on Homosexuals

The mental health consequences of homosexuals living within unsupportive religious environments shows the increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, and suicidal cases.

1. Increased Rates of Depression and Anxiety:

Homosexuals in conservative religious settings are more likely to experience higher rates of depression, higher levels of psychological distress and anxiety. The experience where individuals face chronic stress due to societal stigma and prejudice, is particularly intense for LGBTQ+ individuals within religious communities. This stress is exacerbated by the added pressure to reconcile religious beliefs with personal identity, which can lead to persistent feelings of guilt and shame. This culminates in high risk of suicidal and self-harm. These feelings are often compounded by isolation and lack of access to supportive networks or mental health services, creating a cycle of distress that can be difficult to escape.

2. Family Rejection and Internalized Homophobia Impacts:

Family rejection has been identified as a major risk factor for poor mental health among LGBTQ+ youth. Studies by the Family Acceptance Project reveal that LGBTQ+ youth rejected by religious families are at significantly higher risk of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts (Ryan et al., 2009). Internalized homophobia, or the internalization of negative societal and religious beliefs about one's sexuality, is another significant mental health issue. homosexuals who internalize these



beliefs may experience self-hatred, low self-esteem, and self-destructive behaviors, all of which contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

Ho

Homosexual Therapies: A Socio-religious Approach

1. Christian Reinterpretation and Inclusive Theology:

In Christianity, some theologians, such as Matthew Vines and James Brownson, advocate for reinterpretations of key Biblical passages commonly cited against homosexuality. In his book *God and the Gay Christian*, Vines argues that verses historically used to condemn homosexuality—like those in Leviticus and Romans—reflect cultural norms rather than God’s eternal love and commands. He suggests these texts should be understood in the context of monogamous, loving relationships, which were less recognized in ancient times. Brownson (2013) says, in *Bible, gender, sexuality*, contends that the Bible’s references to same-sex relationships are not condemning committed, loving LGBTQ+ relationships. Instead, he highlights the historical context in which these verses were written, suggesting that the Bible’s overarching message of love and acceptance should guide Christian attitudes toward LGBTQ+ inclusion.

2. Progressive Islamic Thought:

Islamic scholars like Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle (2014) offer reinterpretations of Quranic verses that have historically been used to denounce homosexuality. Kugle (2010) argues that the Quran’s passages on homosexuality are open to interpretation and that the Quran itself contains themes of diversity and inclusion. Kugle’s work encourages Muslim communities to focus on principles of justice and compassion rather than strict condemnation. These reinterpretations open up discussions within



Muslim communities, where LGBTQ+ Muslims can find validation for their identities within the framework of Islamic faith.

3. Homosexual Acceptance in Jewish Thought:

Jewish scholars within Conservative and Reform Judaism have increasingly called for LGBTQ+ inclusion. Rabbi Steven Greenberg, an openly gay Orthodox rabbi, advocates for reinterpretations of Torah passages related to same-sex relationships, arguing that these references address specific behaviours rather than sexual orientation. His work supports LGBTQ+ acceptance within Jewish law, allowing observant LGBTQ+ Jews to reconcile their faith with their identity.

4. Faith-Based Counselling for Homosexual Acceptance:

Faith-based counselling programs, such as those offered by organizations like Beloved Arise or The Reformation Project, provide LGBTQ+ individuals with resources to process their experiences within a faith-based framework. These organizations prioritize non-judgmental, inclusive counseling that respects both an individual's faith and sexual orientation. By focusing on self-acceptance and compassion, they provide support for homosexuals seeking to balance religious and personal identity. Programmes like these also offer guidance for family members and friends, helping them develop a deeper understanding and acceptance of loved ones who are homosexuals. By fostering open conversations about faith and sexuality, counseling services help bridge the gap between LGBTQ+ individuals and their religious communities.

5. Support Groups within Faith Communities:

Many LGBTQ+ affirming churches and faith communities offer support groups specifically designed for LGBTQ+ members. Groups like the United Methodist Church, Reconciling Ministries Network and the Catholic New Ways Ministry serve as inclusive spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can discuss



their experiences and find community within their faith, (Badgett, 2020). Support groups also empower them to engage with religious leaders, advocating for more inclusive practices within their faith traditions. By fostering collective understanding, these groups contribute to a broader cultural shift within religious settings.

6. Role of Mental Health Professionals with Religious Literacy:

Mental health professionals with an understanding of religious beliefs can offer specialized counseling for homosexuals from conservative religious backgrounds. Counselling and care are expected to inspire a new spirit of compassionate love for the ingenerated adherents of religion in Nigeria (Oko, 2015: 298). Therapists trained in both LGBTQ+ issues and religious dynamics are better equipped to help client's process religious guilt, shame, and internalized homophobia without compromising their spiritual beliefs.

Conclusion

The adversarial relationship between homosexuality and religious faith, highlighting historical roots, doctrinal interpretations, personal and social impacts experienced by homosexuals within religious settings have been examined. For centuries, many religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, have maintained doctrines that conflict with homosexuals, often leading to exclusion, discrimination, and internalized struggles.

The paths to reconciliation and inclusion are emerging. Theological reinterpretation offers a new lens through which religious texts are understood, allowing for inclusive interpretations that emphasize love, mercy, kindness, compassion, and justice. Counseling resources and support groups provide



homosexuals with affirming spaces to explore and reconcile faith with identity, while interfaith dialogues promote mutual understanding and respect between religious and homosexuals.

Ultimately, these approaches underscore the potential for faith and homosexuals to coexist in harmony. Through continued dialogue, compassion, and an evolving understanding of sacred texts, religious communities have the opportunity to cultivate inclusive environments where homosexuals can embrace both their faith and identity. The journey toward reconciliation is ongoing, yet it offers a promising vision for the future—one in which religious faith and homosexuals no longer need to be in conflict, but rather can thrive together within supportive, understanding communities.

References

- Badgett, M. V. L. (2020). *The economic case for LGBT equality: Why fair and equal treatment benefits us all*. Beacon Press.
- Barnard, C. J., & Curry, T. J. (2012). The relationship between religious identity, internalized homophobia, and mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals in religious settings. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 15(9), 925-936.
- Boswell, J. (2024). *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. University of Chicago Press.
- Brownson, J. V. (2013). *Bible, gender, sexuality: Reframing the church's debate on same-sex relationships*. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Dehlin, J. P., Galliher, R. V., Bradshaw, W. S., & Crowell, K. A. (2015). Psychosocial correlates of religious approaches to same-sex attraction: A Mormon perspective. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 19(2), 184-206.
- Greenberg, S. (2004). *Wrestling with God and men: Homosexuality in the Jewish tradition*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Herdt, G. H., & Howe, C. (2007). *21st century sexualities: Contemporary issues in health, education, and rights*. Routledge.
- Herek, B. J., et al., (1999). *Psychological impact on homosexuals*. MacCole publishers.



- Johnson, P., & Vanderbeck, R. M. (2014). *Law, religion, and homosexuality*. Routledge.
- Keshet, J. (2018). *Supporting LGBTQ+ individuals in Jewish communities: A guide for Synagogues and community leaders*. Keshet Press.
- Kugle, S. S. (2010). *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims*. Oneworld Publications.
- Kugle, S. S. (2014). *Living out Islam: Voices of gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims*. NYU Press.
- Oko, A. E. & Ogbodo, C.N. (2022). Rediscovering and Preserving African Identity in Globalization Process. *NIU Journal of Humanities*, Vol.7.(2):19-27.
- Oko, A. E. (2015). The Role of Christian Association of Nigeria in the Management of Socio-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria. *Contemporary Journal of Inter-Disciplinary Studies*. Vol. 2 (2):287-305
- Onotere, D. U. & Ufuoma, E. U. (2024). Homosexuality: An African Christian ethical perspective. *Research Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 10(4), 86-96. <https://www.iiardjournals.org/get/RJHCS/VOL.%2010%20NO.%204%202024/HOMOSEXUALITY%2086-96.pdf>
- Ryan, H., et al., (2009). *Remediation of LGBTQ+ individuals*. Utopos publishers.
- The Interfaith Alliance. (2020). *Interfaith perspectives on LGBTQ+ Inclusion: A guide to dialogue and understanding*. www.interfaithalliance.org
- The World Council of Churches. (2022). *A pathway to inclusivity: Faith and LGBTQ+ rights in global contexts*. World Council of Churches Publications.
- Vines, M. (2014). *God and the gay Christian: The biblical case in support of same-sex relationships*. Convergent Books.



Social Welfare for Older Persons in Biblical Scripture: An Analysis Through a Modern Social Work Lens

Gbeminyi Mujaheed Adegbola PhD

Department of Sociological Studies
Tai Solarin University of Education
adegbolagm@tasued.edu.ng, 08163881377

&

Professor Olatubosun Tope Omotayo

Department of Adult and Development Education
Tai Solarin University of Education
omotayoot@tasued.edu.ng; 08060486168

Abstract

This article explores the biblical foundation for the social welfare of older persons, drawing exclusively from scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. Through thematic analysis of key passages, the study identifies core principles concerning the dignity, caregiving, justice, and community responsibility owed to the elderly. Scripture presents a holistic model of elder care that includes familial obligation, community-based support, and social justice imperatives. The article examines commandments such as "honor your father and your mother," gleaning laws, prophetic calls to defend widows, and the early church's structured care for ageing widows, revealing a moral framework deeply concerned with the well-being of older adults. Parallels are drawn between these biblical teachings and modern social work values particularly respect for human dignity, intergenerational solidarity, advocacy for vulnerable populations, and inclusion of older persons as active contributors to society. The analysis demonstrates that the Bible not only prescribes compassionate elder care but positions it as a sacred duty and societal cornerstone. These insights provide a theological foundation that can enrich contemporary gerontological practice and inform faith-based approaches to elder welfare in policy and caregiving.

Keywords: Older persons, Social welfare, Biblical scripture, Social work, Elder care.



Introduction

The ethical treatment and care of older persons is a central concern in contemporary social welfare and social work practice. Interestingly, this concern is not new as the Bible, across both the Old and New Testaments, contains numerous teachings on the dignity, care, and justice due to the elderly. In ancient Israel and the early Christian church, there were no formal state pensions or structured social care systems; instead, responsibility for the welfare of older adults rested on families, religious institutions, and the broader community. Biblical scripture reflects a culture that highly valued its elders, viewing longevity as a blessing and expecting society to honor and provide for those of advanced age. As McKinney and Hill (2017) note, biblical perspectives reveal that “honour and care of the elderly is an integral part of the Christian vision of life” (p. 59).

This article explores key biblical passages related to social welfare for older persons and analyzes them thematically through the lens of contemporary social work principles. The themes addressed include the dignity and respect accorded to elders, family responsibility and caregiving for ageing parents, community support systems for the elderly, justice and protection of vulnerable older adults, and the inclusion and participation of elders in society. Each section will cite scripture from both the Old and New Testaments, interpret the passages in context, and draw parallels to current social work values and practices.

Practically focusing exclusively on biblical scripture, we aim to understand how care for older persons is both mandated and modeled in Judeo-Christian texts, and how these ancient principles align with or inform today’s approaches to elder care. The analysis will demonstrate that many core values in contemporary gerontological social work such as promoting dignity, ensuring social justice for



vulnerable elders, strengthening family and community support, and fostering active ageing, strongly resonate with biblical teachings written millennia ago. This congruence underscores the enduring wisdom of biblical ethics regarding the elderly. We begin with the biblical call to honor the dignity of older persons.

Dignity and Respect for the Elderly in Scripture

One of the most apparent biblical themes regarding older persons is the call to treat them with honor, respect, and dignity. The Bible explicitly commands reverence for the elderly as a demonstration of reverence for God. In the Old Testament, for example, the Law of Moses states: *“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord”* (Leviticus 19:32, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This injunction links respect for older people with piety toward God, implying that honoring the elderly is a sacred duty. The imagery of rising in the presence of the aged suggests a cultural norm of deference, akin to how one might stand for a judge or a king. In other words, the elderly are to be treated with a high degree of esteem. This principle affirms the inherent dignity of older individuals. From a modern social work perspective, this resonates with the core value of respect for the dignity and worth of the person, a foundational principle in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021). Social workers today combat ageism by promoting positive views of ageing and advocating that older clients be treated with respect. Biblical law anticipated this value by discouraging disdain or neglect toward the elderly.

Ancient wisdom literature further reinforces the honor due to old age. Proverbs 16:31 declares: *“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness”* (NIV, 2011). In Israelite culture, gray hair, often symbolic of advanced age, was regarded not as a liability, but as a “crown of glory.”



Similarly, Proverbs 20:29 states: *“The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old”* (NIV, 2011). These proverbs poetically affirm that long life and the wisdom presumed to come with it are honorable. Rather than glorifying youth and productivity alone, the Bible elevates the dignity and contribution of older adults. This view challenges modern societies, which often prize youth, to also value the contributions and insights of elders. In contemporary practice, social workers embrace strengths-based approaches with older adults, recognizing their life experience, resilience, and wisdom as assets to families and communities. The biblical exaltation of gray hair as a “crown” parallels this strengths-based model, emphasizing that a person’s worth is often enhanced and not diminished by age.

In the New Testament, the ethos of respect for elders continues within the early Christian community. The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy, a young church leader, on how to relate to older congregants: *“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father... Treat older women as mothers”* (1 Timothy 5:1–2, NIV, 2011). While given in a church leadership context, this guidance reflects a broader principle of treating elders with familial respect and gentleness. Even when correction is necessary, younger persons are instructed to approach older men as they would a father, with humility and deference and to regard older women with the care accorded to one's own mother. Such instructions reinforce the norm of dignity in communication and interaction with elders. This approach aligns closely with contemporary person-centered care, which emphasizes respectful interaction, empowerment, and relational dignity when working with older clients.

Beyond direct commands, Scripture provides narrative examples that highlight respect for the elderly. A poignant instance occurs at the crucifixion of Jesus, where even amid his suffering, he ensures that



his mother Mary will be cared for. Observing her and the disciple John, Jesus says, “*Woman, here is your son,*” and to John, “*Here is your mother*” (John 19:26–27, NIV, 2011). From that hour, the disciple took her into his home. In this scene, Jesus honours his mother by entrusting her to a faithful friend, ensuring that Mary will not be left alone or vulnerable in her old age. The implicit message is that older persons deserve care, security, and familial love. Jesus’ action exemplifies the fifth commandment: “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12, NIV, 2011) in practice. For contemporary social workers, this story illustrates the principle of filial responsibility and respect. Across many cultures, caregiving for ageing parents is seen as a moral and sometimes legal duty, and social workers often support families in fulfilling this obligation. The dignity accorded to Mary reflects a broader biblical ethic in which older women and men are recognized as deserving of honour and protection. Taken together, these scriptures affirm a coherent biblical ethic: to respect, honour, and care for the elderly is a sacred duty, one that aligns with the core social work values of dignity, compassion, and justice.

Family Responsibility and Caregiving for Aged Parents

Biblical scripture places the primary responsibility for the care of older adults on their families, particularly their children. This is most clearly rooted in the Ten Commandments, which enjoin, “*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you*” (Exodus 20:12, New International Version [NIV], 2011). While “honor” certainly includes respect, it also has very practical implications: adult children are expected to support and care for their parents in old age. The promise of longevity attached to this commandment suggests that a society in which the young honor the old is one marked by continuity and stability.



In ancient Israel, there was a strong expectation of reciprocity between generations: just as parents cared for and raised their children, adult children were morally obligated to support their parents as they aged. This reciprocal responsibility is explicitly described in the New Testament: *“If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God”* (1 Timothy 5:4, NIV, 2011). Here, caregiving is framed as a form of repayment, an act of justice and duty as much as one of love. The notion of filial piety is thus deeply rooted in both testaments, establishing a spiritual and ethical foundation for intergenerational care.

The New Testament continues to reinforce this ethic. Paul writes, *“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”* (1 Timothy 5:8, NIV, 2011). This strong condemnation reflects the seriousness with which the early Christian community viewed familial caregiving. Failure to support ageing relatives was not only a moral lapse but a spiritual failing. Even non-Christians, the text suggests, understood the inherent duty to care for one’s family. In modern social work, this ethic is echoed in the assumption that families are the primary caregivers for older adults. While governments and institutions offer supplemental services, policies often presume that families, when available, will bear much of the financial, emotional, and physical responsibility of elder care (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). Social workers help support these caregivers through counseling, respite services, and practical resources. Paul’s writings align with this model, advocating for concrete family involvement in elder support and condemning its absence.



Jesus Christ also upheld the commandment of honoring one's parents, and He criticized those who tried to evade this responsibility. In the Gospel of Mark, He exposes a loophole used by some religious leaders who would declare their wealth "Corban" (dedicated to God) to avoid using it to support their parents. He rebukes them: *"But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'Corban' ... then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition"* (Mark 7:10–13, NIV, 2011). By labeling this behaviour as a nullification of God's law, Jesus underscores that caring for ageing parents is not an optional act of generosity but a divine mandate. From a social work perspective, this passage could be seen as a critique of cultural, legal, or religious rationalizations used to justify elder neglect. The principle Jesus affirms is clear: no pretext whatsoever, religious, financial, or otherwise can excuse failure to care for ageing parents.

While family support is prioritized, the early church also created safety nets for elderly individuals who had no relatives. In 1 Timothy 5:16, Paul advises, *"If any believing woman has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need"* (NIV, 2011). The phrase "widows who are really in need" likely refers to older women without family or social support. Paul's counsel suggests a structured approach: family care first, community care when family is absent. This balance reflects an ordered ethic, where personal responsibility precedes communal obligation. Social workers apply similar logic today, for instance, exploring family-based caregiving options before organizing institutional or state-based services. The concept of prioritizing those "really in need" remains essential in triaging care and allocating limited social resources.



Biblical narratives also provide illustrative examples of familial caregiving. In Genesis 47:11–12, during a time of famine, Joseph by then a high-ranking official in Egypt, provides generously for his father Jacob and extended family, ensuring that Jacob’s final years are lived in dignity and comfort. In the Book of Ruth, a striking example of filial commitment is found in Ruth’s relationship with her ageing mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth not only returns with Naomi to Bethlehem but works tirelessly to support her. She famously declares: *“Where you go, I will go... your people will be my people and your God my God”* (Ruth 1:16–18, NIV, 2011). Ultimately, Ruth’s son Obed becomes Naomi’s grandson and caregiver, as the women of the village proclaim that he *“will renew your life and sustain you in your old age”* (Ruth 4:15, NIV, 2011). These stories depict intergenerational solidarity not only as duty but as devotion motivated by love, loyalty, and divine guidance (McKenzie, 1999).

In sum, Scripture strongly promotes family-based caregiving as a cornerstone of social responsibility. This theme is consistent with contemporary social welfare principles that view the family as the primary unit of support in old age. While modern interventions have expanded to include professional and governmental care, the ethical framework provided by the Bible affirms that family caregiving is a foundational and sacred expression of social justice and moral responsibility.

Community and Religious Support Systems for the Elderly

While the family holds primary responsibility for elder care in biblical teaching, the broader community is also called upon to establish support systems especially for those who are widowed, poor, or without family. Ancient Israelite society maintained a form of social welfare embedded in religious law, designed to ensure subsistence for its most vulnerable members. Among the key provisions were the gleaning laws, which required farmers to leave the edges of their fields and any



overlooked sheaves for the needy. *“When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands”* (Deuteronomy 24:19, New International Version [NIV], 2011). In this context, “the widow” often referred to older women who lacked male financial support, and therefore stood among society’s most vulnerable.

The placement of widows alongside orphans and foreigners in Israel’s legal codes (Deuteronomy 26:12) indicates that elderly women were viewed as a protected category deserving of ongoing material support. The triennial tithe, for example, was to be shared with *“the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow”* so they might “eat in your towns and be satisfied” (Deuteronomy 26:12, NIV, 2011). From a modern lens, such measures resemble food assistance programs and community food banks designed to meet the nutritional needs of those who are socially or economically isolated. Social work institutions today mirror these ancient structures through food security initiatives, community-based nutrition programs, and faith-based charity services.

In the New Testament, this communal ethos of elder care is further institutionalized. Acts 6:1 records one of the first major administrative challenges of the early church: a dispute over the distribution of food to widows. *“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food”* (Acts 6:1, NIV, 2011). The apostles responded by appointing seven men commonly viewed as the first deacons to manage the food program, ensuring fair and equitable service delivery (Acts 6:2–3). These “widows,” likely older women without spousal support, became early beneficiaries of structured church-based care.



The appointment of culturally representative leaders (e.g., Greek-named deacons) to resolve a service equity concern reflects principles found in modern culturally competent social work (McKinney & Hill, 2017). What began as an unmet need within a marginalized group led to a practical, programmatic response that addressed hunger and upheld community cohesion. This biblical narrative parallels the roles that today's religious institutions and nonprofits play in community development particularly as partners with social service agencies addressing elder hunger, poverty, and isolation.

Moreover, the early church established eligibility criteria for continued support. In 1 Timothy 5:9–10, Paul outlines that only widows over sixty years of age, known for good works and without family support, should be “put on the list” for church aid (NIV, 2011). This closely resembles modern public welfare eligibility models that prioritize aid based on need, age, and absence of familial resources. Sixty years of age, in antiquity, marked a significant threshold, as average life expectancy at that time was far lower. Scholars suggest the age qualification reflected an acknowledgment of diminished capacity for employment or remarriage (Tamas et al., 2016). Thus, the church assumed a surrogate family role for older women, offering both sustenance and inclusion.

The Epistle of James adds a theological imperative to such care: “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...*” (James 1:27, NIV, 2011). Through elevating care for widows as a measure of authentic religious practice, James underscores a spiritual and moral obligation to care for society's most vulnerable. In social work ethics, similar emphasis is placed on the notion that how a society treats its elderly and marginalized members is a test of its moral standing.



Acts 4:34–35 further demonstrates a communal pooling of resources: “*There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money... and it was distributed to anyone who had need*” (NIV, 2011). Though not limited to older adults, such generosity undoubtedly supported elderly members, especially those widowed or infirm. These texts echo principles found in cooperative housing models, benevolence funds, and mutual aid societies that address elder housing and subsistence in contemporary contexts.

This model of community and religious care for the elderly has had historical resonance. Monasteries, convents, and religious charities throughout Christian history established almshouses and shelters for the elderly poor. Today, many faith-based organizations continue this legacy by operating nursing homes, senior centers, and charitable foundations. Social workers frequently collaborate with these groups to deliver culturally and spiritually appropriate elder care (Knight, 2014).

Importantly, the tone of biblical elder care is not one of reluctant duty, but of compassionate solidarity. Widows in the early church were not passive recipients of aid but were encouraged to remain spiritually active (1 Timothy 5:5). This reflects modern social work’s recognition of older adults as whole persons whose needs include not just material support, but relational, emotional, and spiritual inclusion. Programs such as friendly visiting, intergenerational mentorship, and parish nursing initiatives all echo this holistic approach.

In summary, Scripture presents a proactive, justice-driven vision of community support for the elderly. This tradition finds modern expression in both government programs and the ongoing efforts of community and faith-based organizations to ensure the dignity, welfare, and inclusion of older adults



Justice and Protection for Vulnerable Elders

Beyond the provision of material needs, the Bible emphasizes justice for vulnerable elders and condemns those who exploit or oppress them. Widows often representing older women, are frequently grouped in scripture with marginalized populations such as orphans, foreigners, and the poor, reflecting God's special concern for these groups. In the Mosaic law, God warns: *"Do not mistreat or oppress a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry"* (Exodus 22:22–23, New International Version [NIV], 2011). This strong statement includes divine consequences for those who abuse or neglect the defenseless. Similarly, a curse pronounced at Mount Ebal declares: *"Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow"* (Deuteronomy 27:19, NIV, 2011). These texts portray elderly widows as legally protected persons under divine law, with community members morally and spiritually accountable for ensuring their welfare.

From a modern social work perspective, these verses highlight that elder care is not merely a charitable act but a matter of justice. Contemporary advocacy efforts against elder abuse, healthcare discrimination, or age-related poverty echo these concerns. Social work upholds that safeguarding older adult, particularly those who are isolated or disabled, is not an act of pity but a commitment to their rights and dignity (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). The Bible's insistence on justice for widows validates this position, asserting that the mistreatment of elderly persons is both a moral and societal failure.

The biblical prophets frequently call for justice in defense of the vulnerable. Isaiah urges: *"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the*



widow” (Isaiah 1:17, NIV, 2011). The metaphor of “pleading the case” evokes legal advocacy, suggesting that believers should serve as defenders for those unable to represent themselves which is an image consistent with the modern roles of elder rights attorneys, adult protective service agents, and social workers advocating on behalf of older adults. In ancient Israel and many contemporary societies, elderly widows often faced barriers to property ownership, inheritance rights, or legal representation. The prophetic demand for justice echoes the mission of modern advocates working to prevent elder exploitation and to protect their autonomy and access to justice.

Jesus continues this theme in the New Testament, delivering sharp rebukes to religious leaders who prey on the vulnerable. In Luke 20:47, He condemns those who “*devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers,*” promising they will be “punished most severely” (NIV, 2011; cf. Mark 12:40). This statement suggests financial abuse such as taking advantage of widows, perhaps through coercion, fraud, or manipulation under the guise of religious authority. In today’s terms, this resembles financial elder abuse, where individuals in trusted positions exploit an older adult’s resources. Such scenarios are the subject of intense scrutiny in contemporary elder law and protective services, and Jesus’ harsh warning affirms the seriousness of such offenses.

James, too, raises the issue of withheld wages and oppression in a broader justice context: “*The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you*” (James 5:4, NIV, 2011). Though focused on laborers, the sentiment parallels the biblical indictment of those who defraud widows and orphans. As in Malachi 3:5, where God promises to judge those who “oppress the widows and the fatherless,” the consistent message is that justice for the vulnerable, including the elderly, is central to God’s moral order.



Psalm 68:5 refers to God as a “*father to the fatherless and a defender of widows*” (NIV, 2011), affirming divine identification with those who lack human protection. In modern terms, this can be understood as a theological foundation for creating systems that defend older persons’ rights and welfare through elder law protections, secure pension systems, and anti-discrimination statutes. Tamas et al. (2016) interpret this as a divine endorsement of ontological responsibility for elder welfare, extending beyond individual virtue to collective justice.

Narrative examples further illustrate community-based protection for the elderly. In the Book of Ruth, Boaz publicly redeems Naomi’s land at the city gate (Ruth 4:9–10), restoring her financial security and preserving her late husband’s lineage. This legal action carried out in the communal legal space ensured that Naomi, an elderly widow, would not be left destitute. Similarly, the appointment of deacons in Acts 6 to resolve distribution disparities between Hellenistic and Hebraic widows demonstrates the early church’s commitment to procedural fairness and equity in community services.

From these accounts, a robust biblical ethic emerges: justice for older persons is a collective and moral responsibility. It is not left to private discretion but is a public duty with spiritual consequences. This aligns with modern macro-level social work practices, including elder rights education, policy advocacy, and anti-ageism efforts. Just as biblical prophets and Jesus demanded fairness and condemned exploitation, social workers today continue to advocate for systems that ensure protection, dignity, and justice for all older adults.

Inclusion, Contribution, and Dignity in Later Life

A comprehensive biblical view of the elderly extends beyond seeing them as passive recipients of care; it also emphasizes their ongoing value, participation, and contributions to the community. This outlook



resonates with modern gerontological principles such as “active ageing” and “productive ageing,” which highlight social inclusion, engagement, and the empowerment of seniors. The Bible reflects this framework by presenting older individuals as reservoirs of wisdom, spiritual mentors, and moral exemplars.

Job 12:12 affirms the value of lived experience: *“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long-life bring understanding?”* (New International Version [NIV], 2011). Biblical elders often served as leaders and counselors. The term “elders of Israel,” referring to literal older men entrusted with community decisions, appears frequently throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 3:16; Deuteronomy 27:1). In the New Testament, “elders” (Greek: presbyteroi) functioned as both spiritual and administrative leaders in early Christian communities (Acts 14:23). Though it evolved into a formal title, the term originally connoted maturity and moral authority associated with age. This structure affirms the active role of elders in communal governance and spiritual guidance, an ideal that aligns with contemporary social work strategies that promote elder leadership through senior advisory councils, mentoring roles, and volunteerism (Knight, 2014).

In Titus 2:2–5, Paul articulates the mentoring responsibilities of older adults: *“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent... then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children...”* (NIV, 2011). These verses assign older men and women clear mentoring and teaching roles, fostering moral development in the younger generation. The intergenerational relationships envisioned here mirror Erikson’s psychosocial stage of “generativity versus stagnation,” in which fulfillment in later life is achieved by guiding the next generation (Erikson, 1982). In social work,



intergenerational mentorship programs and legacy-sharing initiatives similarly serve to strengthen the well-being and self-worth of elders while enriching youth with life-tested insights.

Scripture further emphasizes that old age is a period of ongoing purpose and vitality. Psalm 92:14 affirms: *“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green”* (NIV, 2011). The imagery of a flourishing tree suggests continued relevance and productivity, reinforcing the belief that ageing is not synonymous with decline. Psalm 71:18 expresses a similar desire: *“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.”* This prayer reflects the spiritual vocation of the elderly to instruct, testify, and inspire. Contemporary gerontological practices such as life review therapy, digital storytelling, and legacy-building echo this biblical view by affirming that ageing adults have valuable knowledge and spiritual insight to pass on (Tamas et al., 2016).

Narratives throughout Scripture reinforce the active participation of older adults. Moses was 80 when he led Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 7:7), and Anna, the prophetess in Luke 2:36–38, served as a spiritual witness in the temple despite her advanced age. In 1 Peter 5:5, the younger are exhorted to submit to their elders, indicating mutual respect and intergenerational balance. In many modern cultures, however, older adults are often socially segregated or institutionalized. The early church, by contrast, operated as an intergenerational family, where older and younger believers worshipped and shared meals together (Acts 2:42–47). This model supports today’s calls for “ageing in place,” community integration, and intergenerational community centers that resist the isolation of elders.

Respect for elders also includes patience and accommodation for their limitations. Leviticus 19:32, which commands believers to “stand up in the presence of the aged,” may also suggest practical



accommodations such as giving space, showing deference, or assisting frail elders. Paul advises Timothy: *“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father”* (1 Timothy 5:1, NIV, 2011), highlighting the need for patience, gentleness, and cultural humility. This anticipates modern person-centered care and trauma-informed practice, which emphasize the importance of respectful engagement and autonomy for older clients.

A poignant example of respecting elder autonomy occurs in 2 Samuel 19:33–37, where Barzillai, an 80-year-old man, respectfully declines King David’s invitation to live in royal luxury. Citing his age and desire to remain in his hometown, Barzillai’s wishes are honored without coercion. This narrative affirms the elder’s right to self-determination, a concept central to social work ethics (NASW, 2021). The principle remains: capable older adults must be consulted about their preferences and supported in living independently as long as possible.

In conclusion, the Bible does not present older persons as a burden to society, but as dignified and indispensable members of the community. They are to be included, empowered, and valued for their spiritual depth, life experience, and wisdom. This scriptural ethic aligns with strengths-based social work models, where emphasis is placed not only on addressing deficits, but also on enabling elders to thrive. Contemporary eldercare policies and social work interventions that promote empowerment, intergenerational solidarity, and purposeful ageing are rooted in this timeless biblical vision of inclusion and reverence for older adults.