

Biblical Living(18) – Ageing Graciously

Churches often fail to prepare Christians to age graciously. Because of this, sins such as stubbornness, self-centeredness, and pride mark many elderly believers, rather than the humility and other-focused attitudes of Christ.

Key verse: 2 Corinthians 4:16. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. (see Ecc 12:1-7)

Key observation: *I suggest that we think of aging as a process of loss.*

- loss of stamina
- loss of companions and friends
- loss of independence and mobility
- loss of job
- loss of finances
- loss of home
- loss of life

A biblical view of old age

- 1) Old age is an honorable gift from God (Prov 16:31; 20:29).
- 2) God is faithful to sustain the elderly (Is 46:3-4; Ps 116:15).
- 3) Because of their age, elderly believers have a unique opportunity to witness to others regarding God's goodness (Ps 71:17-18; Ps 145:4).
- 4) Elderly believers can serve Christ in spite of the growing limitations of their age (Ps 92:12-14).
- 5) Pastors must confront an elderly believer's sin, but this should be done gently and with respect (1 Tim 5:1).

Special challenges of old age

- 1) *Humility.* Aging can be thought of as a process of growing backwards towards childhood. A child does not control his own schedule, can't go out by himself, lacks physical strength, and is incapable of making difficult life decisions. All of these (and more) find parallels in an elderly person. And the truth is, growing backwards toward infancy (i.e., complete dependence) requires Christ-like humility.
- 2) *Excusing sin on the basis of age.* Some elderly believers seem to think that stubbornness and self-focus are the prerogatives of being over the age of sixty-five. But as long as a person remains

mentally competent, stubbornness, pride, complaining, and so on, are sins that must be repented from.

3) *Drift – purposeless action and inaction.* No longer able to do what they used to do, some Christians retire from life and Christian service although they could remain active for the Lord.

4) *Discouragement, depression, and despair.* Longing for "the good ol' days" is not biblical: *Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this (Ecc 7:10).*

5) *Loneliness.* Aloneness and loneliness are not necessarily the same thing. However, many elderly people do spend too much time alone. This is not always by their own choice, but when it is – or when it is due to their grumpy, demanding attitudes – it can be corrected.

6) *Self-centeredness.* At times elderly people make life decisions with little or no regard for how their actions will inconvenience others: *I've lived in this house for fifty years, and I'm not about to move now, no matter what my children say!* An elderly Christian should be encouraged to anticipate the changes that accompany old age. This includes seeking counsel from his children about the timing of life changes and an active concern for the convenience of those who will be caring for him. It's no shame to need help, but it is shameful for a Christian to be hard to help (Phil 2:3-4).

7) *Worldly mindset.* Elderly counselees might have an undue attachment to a specific house or other worldly possessions, an attachment that might not reflect the mindset of one who is a heavenly citizen and an alien and stranger on this earth (Phil 3:20; 1 Peter 2:11; Matt 6:19-21).

8) *False expectations.* *As I grow older, my children and grandchildren will give me all the attention and satisfaction I desire ... I'll still be able to work with my hands... be physically active... serve in the church in the same way I always have ...* However well intentioned, such expectations can lead to anger, bitterness, disappointment, and manipulation.

9) *Planning and scheduling.* *It is my observation that very few elderly people plan their days with any sort of rigor .*

10) *Introspection.* Ungodly introspection needs to be replaced by other-focused activity and attitudes, as illustrated by Paul in 1 Tim 1:12-17 when he was in his sixties.

11) *Complaining.* For some elderly people, complaining is the only sport that they are still able participate in, and they do so on an Olympic level. Grumbling is not a sport; it's a sin that Jesus died for (Phil 2:14).

12) *Death of a spouse.*