
Old Age

Many people have a tremendous dread of growing old. A great deal of activity during the working years is aimed at preventing as many of the problems of old age as possible: dependency on others, lack of money, boredom, ill health, and so forth. The very fear of the problems of old age often make mental and physical wrecks of people -- they become old before their time.

God's Plan is that old age be the crowning glory of a person's lifetime. The Word of God shows that old age can have promise, productivity, vitality, confidence, and a great deal of happiness, providing that spiritual preparation has taken place during the younger years.

AGE DIVISIONS IN THE BIBLE

The Bible indicates that there are three broad divisions of a lifetime.

The period of **youth** lasts up to about 40 years of age. Moses began to sense his responsibility to Israel and to the Lord when he was about 40, Acts 7:23. He spent 40 more years in training, however, before he became leader of the people of Israel. It was during the years from 80 to 120 that he did his great work.

In Acts 4:22, a man is healed and the Sanhedrin wanted to ridicule his testimony. However, "the man was above forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was shown", indicating that he was mature enough to know what had happened.

In 1 Tim. 4:12, Paul writes, "Let no man despise thy youth." Timothy was in his thirties at the time.

The period of **middle age** last from about 40 to 60 years of age. In 1 Tim. 5:9, a 60-year-old widow's retirement was into a full time ministry of prayer supported by the church. Many believers hit their top pace in

the middle years. The high priest's work load was heaviest between 30 and 50.

Old age is the period from 60 on. In Daniel 12, Daniel, at age 90, was told to stop acting like a dead man and to get going. In Luke 2:36-38, a woman of great age (84) was very active in serving the Lord.

SOME PRINCIPLES OF OLD AGE

Old age is a mental attitude as well as a physical problem. People shudder when you discuss old age. Next to the subject of death, it is the least favorite topic. There are many ways people try to postpone old age. They try various products to keep on looking and feeling young. They try traveling to relieve boredom and to give a sense of fulfillment. They use gadgets and programs to postpone old age.

But, the older one becomes as a believer, the better life should become! God's Plan is bigger than any problem this life can produce. Of course, to take advantage of this plan, a person must understand Salvation and receive Christ as Saviour. Then, the individual must get Bible teaching every day over a period of years to make it possible to obtain the maximum out of every day of life. According to God's Plan of Grace, which includes the concept of Dying Grace, the last day of your life should be the best.

But some of the most miserable old people around are Christians. They are cantankerous and obnoxious. Their youth is no longer there to protect them. They are seen for what their souls really are, without the camouflage of youth. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Youth is excused for bad behavior; but youth is no longer there to cover up. Old age exposes all the faults, habits, obnoxious characteristics, and degeneracy of soul.

When King Solomon reached old age, he wrote Ecclesiastes; and he has some advice for

youth. A young person can prepare now to have a happy old age. Happiness is not in working, and it is not in retirement; it is not in this diversion or that. True happiness is in Christian growth, the production of the Fruit of the Spirit, operating on Divine Viewpoint, having a healthy edification structure in the soul -- having the inner beauty of soul.

"Rejoice, O young man!" "Find happiness when you are young." Then you can carry your happiness around with you, the inner mental happiness found in the Word of God, a happiness which does not depend on conditions, circumstances, people, or the details of life. This leads to a marvelous old age!

"And let thy heart cheer you in the days of your youth." Then you won't fight old age; old age will be the best age of all. This type of person is the salt of the earth in his old age, an aristocrat of the Christian family.

"Walk in the ways of your heart." Now the young person who is immersed in doctrine uses the Word of God in living the Christian Way of Life. "In the sight of thine eyes." The application of the Word of God to experience.

"But know that God will bring you to judgment; therefore remove sorrow from your heart, put away evil from thy flesh." This is a picture of judgment, chastisement, confession, claiming promises.

Therefore, old age is a mental attitude developed during a lifetime. The older one becomes as a believer, the better life should become. Happiness in old age is dependent on what is built up during the previous years of youth and middle age.

PROBLEMS OF OLD AGE

As you read the following listing of the problems of old age, meditate on the Word of God and try to think of the doctrinal "antidote" for each problem. The prescription will be given in the succeeding sections of this article; but try finding answers in your own repertoire of doctrine.

- Old age may bring on a lack of mental sharpness. This can occur because of physical debility. Also, if the mind has been neglected, especially if the Word of God has been neglected, there will be a failure of the mentality.
 - In old age, there can be a disorientation to life from the standpoint of success standards. A person looks back and regards life as a failure. Maybe he set goals, and now he is old and never realized the goals. There is a great danger of disillusionment.
 - There is a tendency for great increase in mental attitude sins in old age, with emphasis on criticism and judgment. These things are often overlooked in youth; but they are horrible in the elderly.
 - There is often a lack of security in old age, especially if the old people can't take care of themselves financially. Their children are in the prime of their lives and often the children's plans do not include them.
 - Old age may bring an inability to concentrate, forgetfulness, inability to converse, to hear, to see. So the old person gets used to sitting in a chair daydreaming, vegetating, saying nothing.
 - There is sometimes a lack of motive to live, too much idle time, and too much time for complaining. There may be a desire to travel but no means to do so. So there is a lack of significant things to do.
 - Old age brings future shock. Old age finds itself out of phase with the younger generations of children and grandchildren. Therefore a dangerous trend can get started toward hypercriticism.
 - The older believer may have stopped growing spiritually, or worse, may never have got started. There is, therefore, no edification, no occupation with Christ, no desire for the Word. There is a tendency to stagnate, to become jaded, to rely on the study done years before.
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- There can be a tendency toward the negatives of Titus 2:3, becoming false accusers, gossips, evil speakers, vicious in criticism.
- There is a tendency among older believers to drink quite a lot when they don't have anything else going for them.
- Then, there is the tendency to think that getting old means that a person has some wisdom. So there is the garrulous senior citizen who never stops talking and inflicts continuous boredom on his listeners with his platitudes and homely chatter.

A GODLY AND GRACE-FILLED OLD AGE

Coming into old age, the mature believer is assured of his redemption; and he comes into old age as a knowledgeable, productive Christian. He understands both salvation and spirituality. He knows how to claim promises. He understands suffering, has lived through some of it, and looks forward to greater tests. He is ready for both suffering and happiness in old age.

This person comes into old age able to apply the Word of God to experience. Even his mind is saved, according to the principles of Romans 12:2. He realizes that there are many books, but only one Book, the mind of Christ, the Word of God.

The elderly believer uses the Faith-Rest principles of life. While the body is getting weaker, there is this promise of 2 Cor. 4:15.

"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEAUTIFUL OLD AGE

Review the following scripture passages to get a thorough understanding from Bible examples just what an exciting and productive old age can be like.

In 1 Tim. 5:5-10, there is the example of a widow alone who faces the occupational hazard of widowhood in loneliness. However, this woman trusts in God, uses the promises of the Bible, and keeps on praying. A widow who is "well reported for good works" is making the most out of old age.

In Acts 11:36-43 is the story of Dorcas, "full of good works", given to hospitality, who "washed the saints feet", made garments, relieved the afflicted with her nursing skills, and was a producer of divine good. She had mastered the details of life.

In Tim. 2:1,2 there is a discussion of the characteristics of godly elderly men. They are to be healthy minded, alert, sharp, with Christlike character, masters of the details of life ("temperate"), "sound in faith", having spiritual healthy because of doctrine, being free from mental attitude sins such as bitterness, envy, hostility, having mental attitude love.

In Tim. 2:3 ff are listed the characteristics of godly older women. Their shining inner beauty reflects the glory of God. They are not false accusers or guilty of maligning, evil speaking, or gossip, and they are not vindictive. They are also temperate and able to teach good things to the younger women. They had skill and wisdom and had the willing attention of younger women. They taught the young women to be healthy minded, emotionally stable, to have sound judgment, to be poised, in control of themselves, thoughtful, to be free from carnality ("chaste"), to be morally good, and to respond to their husbands.

From these illustrations we conclude that there is plenty to do in old age, that old age can be a golden age, not necessarily in

reliving the "good old days", but in actively enjoying the present and the future.
