

DEATH AND AFTER

Dying Before Death Or Growing Old Christianly Psalm 103:13-18

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The fact of growing old is a frightening and dreaded experience of many people. We live in a western society that exalts youth, beauty, stamina, athletics and virility. Youthfulness is like a god to many and old age is looked upon as something terrifying and unwanted. Even some Christian people, who are not afraid to die, are haunted by the fact that they must grow old.
- B. There is a dying process before death; in fact, the moment one begins to live he begins to die. From a practical standpoint, a person reaches the zenith of physical life in the mid-twenties and from there he moves down hill. The dying process becomes noticeable at age 40 and after 50 there is an intensifying of this struggle with dying.
- C. The Bible declares that a good length of life for a person is 70 or 80 years (Psa. 90:10). However, when persons pass the milestone of a half century, it may be proper to refer to them as older people. NOTE: A clean distinction must be made between age and attitude. A person may be 60 and be physically and psychologically old, but another person may be 70 and have a tremendous attitude toward life. Old age is relative and much of it revolves around attitudes. A distinction must also be made between "older" and "elderly." An elderly person is anyone over 70 but this is also relative in our society.
- D. The purpose of this study is to help Christians who are going into the latter part of their lives to be aware of the pitfalls of old age and to help them find a useful and meaningful existence in the family, society and church. This study should help Christians move into old age, not with panic, but with serenity and confidence.

II. THE BEAUTY OF OLD AGE

- A. Experience: The Lord God gives a very special place to old age (Ex. 20:12; Prov. 3:1-2). Only experience can give a person wisdom and experience comes with time (Lev. 19:32). Experience may bring a rich store of memories and provide a wide range of skills and interests to use as resources. NOTE: A person seasoned with age and Bible knowledge should be the best of all counselors.
- B. Sensitivity: With age comes a deep appreciation of life. Enjoyment of art, music, drama and literature may ripen with extended experiences which are denied the young. A person may take on a greater peacefulness as he approaches old age. He may gain a better perspective of himself and learn more and more to be content with life and make the best of what he has. NOTE: A musician and a statesman come into their own between the ages of 40-65. These may also be the years for a minister. Some of the most productive years of one's life are 40 to 60 because these are the years, not of activity, but of using the tremendous backlog of experience to the wisest use. As men get older they do not work harder but they work smarter. Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper" and Handel's "The Messiah"

were done in the later years of their lives. J. Edgar Hoover served as head of the FBI until after 80 years of age.

- C. Redirected Drives: An older person usually finds a decrease in sexual drive which energies now may be channeled in other areas of endeavor. The sex impulse (while God-given) in man is responsible for many of the decisions of youth, and when not controlled this urge can be a monster.

The aging man may be induced to look upon the diminution of his sexual appetite as philosophically as did Sophocles in Plato's Republic, who, when asked, "How does love suite with age?" replied, "Peace, most gladly have I escaped from a mad and furious master." (Maves and Cedarleaf, Older People and the Church)

- D. Stability: As one grows older, little things may not matter so much. One may be able to look at disturbing events and irritating circumstances with greater sense of objectivity and detachment. A well-adjusted older person no longer places too much emphasis on the opinions of his contemporaries and can think for himself based on a wealth of experience.
- E. One of the most fundamental compensations of growing older may be a maturing religious experience. One may have a deeper religious faith and a walk closer to God. As the body wanes, the spirit may wax in awareness of itself and its relationship to Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:16-18).

III. THE PITFALLS OF OLD AGE

- A. Change: As a person grows older, he must adapt to change which is going on inside and outside of his own person and all around him in the world. Right attitudes towards change are the key to proper mental health for older Christians (Rom. 12:1). Old age produces an emotional upheaval in many because they have not been walking with a divine viewpoint from early in life.

It is our attitude toward ourselves amid the oncoming tides of the aging process that keeps us in balance. If we have been able to adapt to changes at various stages in life, then we will come into the senior years in reasonably good mental health. If, on the other hand, we hold before us thwarted ambitions, unfulfilled goals, and harbor resentments, we bring into the years of maturity infantile patterns of behavior that cause emotional illness. (Brown, Counseling With Senior Citizens)

NOTE: Old age brings new adjustments and new responsibilities to operate in a Christian manner.

- B. Physical Adjustments: One day, perhaps in the late thirties or early forties, a person becomes acutely aware of the aging process – bones creak, hair grays and falls out, skin wrinkles, breath shortens, eyesight fails, hearing is not always clear and a hundred other little things tell us that old age is approaching. The awareness of these waning physical traits causes emotional stress. These things become a threat to self and this is a major test to one's character and his faith in the Living God. Will a person reject and deny old age or accept and affirm it? To reject it or run away from it will set up great frustration and this is dodging God's plan for one's life. God knows all about our physical deterioration (Psa. 103:14). NOTE: As one

gets older, he faces a loss in sexual virility and this is a great threat to many men and women. This is why many men and women cheat on their mates because they cannot stand the loss of sexuality.

- C. Work Adjustments: In our western culture which refuses to honor age, people are forced to retire at age 65 or sooner. Retirement is a threat to older people. Younger men are constantly seeking the jobs of older people which keeps the pressure on. Often an older person fails to admit his shortcomings and tries to forcefully compensate for his waning physical abilities. Older people are often hesitant about turning over authority to younger people because there is a distrust that they can do the job as well as they once did. NOTE: The aging process may rob many people of financial security and social prestige they had hoped for in their earlier years. Most men have big hopes but very few ever see the fulfillment of their dreams. NOTE: An older person will probably experience the emotion of uselessness, for he may feel he is not needed at home, on the job or at church.
- D. Social Adjustments: As people grow older, they have fewer social contacts. This is due to self-centeredness or to lack of energy to make as many contacts with people. After retirement, a person does not make as many social contacts because he is not on the job and with people as much. NOTE: One of the main adjustments older people must make is to loneliness. Loneliness usually comes from three sources: uselessness, the loss of friends and the death of loved ones. God may become an older person's closest companion (Deut. 31:6). It is the fear of loneliness that often drives older people to use attention getting means such as sickness and talking about their aches and pains. NOTE: Extreme loneliness can often drive an older person to deep depression, in which that person completely separates and isolates himself from his environment.
- E. Mental Adjustments: Mental dullness and forgetfulness are common to older people. There are two reasons for mental dullness: (1) hardening of the arteries and (2) lack of interest in current events. Because of forced retirement and loss of self-esteem, older people take refuge in memories of previous undertakings and remember "the good old days." Older people tend to read less and know less about what is happening around them. NOTE: Age often brings rigidity of thought and an unwillingness to try new things. People of age may have settled convictions and are not willing to change because if it worked for them in their generation it can work for any generation. NOTE: Older people at times tend to look upon the bleak side of life and have a negative attitude towards current events. They have lived and seen much evil and it is hard to think in a positive manner. Older people often develop a very critical attitude about life.
- F. Spiritual Adjustments: Older people have many spiritual needs, especially as death is facing them. They have a great need to feel wanted and needed in the local church. There is also a need for companionship with their peers. Because older people have more spare time, they have need for Bible studies, fellowships and service outlets (Titus 2:2-3). NOTE: Older people in positions of leadership in a local church often become set in their ways and buck change of any kind. Older leadership is often slow to turn the leadership of the local church to qualified younger leaders. NOTE: Older people often feel as though they are neglected by the people and the pastor of the church. (NOTE: With age people tend to simplify their theology and not fight for small theological and Biblical truths. They tend to harp on certain subjects.)

IV. SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES FOR AGING CHRISTIANS

- A. Develop Good Habits in Early Life: The basic spiritual patterns that we have set during our younger days will affect our patterns in later life (Psa. 90:10, 12; Eccl. 12:1).
- B. Accept the Plan of God for Your Life: If God permits you to grow old, this is His plan for you and old age is designed to make you a more mature Christian (Rom. 8:28). You must accept old age and thank God for it (I Thess. 5:18).
- C. Keep Growing in Your Christian Life: You must continue to read your Bible and operate on Biblical principles. Continue to pray and share your faith in Jesus Christ with both young and old. Make an effort to fellowship with younger Christians so as to keep up with their thinking.
- D. Learn to be Content With the God You Love: God wants us to have Christian contentment and this is doubly true for older Christians (Phil. 4:11-13). Your later years can be your best years spiritually, providing you learn the secret of Christian contentment.
- E. Stay in Tune With the World About You: Read the newspaper, read books, watch some T.V., so you can know what is happening in the world and then changes will not make you bitter about life.
- F. Develop Your Talents: Cultivate your talents for music, art and literature. Try to have some hobby to keep you occupied.
- G. Keep in Contact With People: Go out of your way to cultivate friends so you will not become self-centered and grumpy. Get involved somehow in the work of the local church, even if it is doing menial tasks.
- H. Keep in Contact With Your Pastor and Elders: Both the minister and you need one another. It might be well to call the pastor occasionally or ask him over for a short visit so that contact with the church is maintained.
- I. Develop Some Kind of Exercise Program: Vigorous exercise, plenty of rest and a good diet are a great help in warding off the old age syndrome. Even in our twilight years we can walk daily for exercise (I Tim. 4:8). There is a direct relationship between physical health and good attitudes.
- J. Work Hard on a Positive Attitude: By faith, we must seek to have a positive divine viewpoint towards life. We are never too old to think God's thoughts after Him (Phil. 4:8-9). NOTE: The desire of every Christian should be that he has served the Lord Jesus well and finished the work that God would have him to do on this earth (Phil. 4:6-8). NOTE: Psalm 39 may well be the cry of an older person who grows critical, hard and grumpy but sees the folly of this attitude before God and repents of his critical attitude.