

OLD AGE

I. WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE PROBLEMS AND PARTICULARLY THE DANGERS FACED BY THE OLDER GENERATION?

II. WHAT CAN BE DONE BY THE AGED THEMSELVES, THE YOUNGER GENERATION, THE PASTOR AND THE CONGREGATION SO THAT GOD'S BLESSINGS MAY REST UPON THE AGED?

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"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19). With these words God announced part of the curse that was to rest upon man because of his sin. Man was originally created by God perfect, to live in both body and soul forever. But man sinned against God, and brought upon himself the fulfillment of God's warning, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). Not only had man fallen away from God spiritually, not only would he without salvation die eternally, but he was also now subject to physical death. From the point of his birth, he would have a limited time to live in this world. Unless death plucked away his life prematurely, he would go through childhood, youth, maturity and in due time reach the stage of old age, that which usually precedes the hour of death. His body, once physically perfect, would now be subject to sickness and disease, accident and harm, ageing and decay, until it finally returns to the dust from which it was taken.

Not just Adam and Eve, but the whole human race would be subject to this. Despite some extraordinary ages of the early Patriarchs (Adam, 930 years; Seth, 912 years; Enos, 905 years; Cainan, 910 years; Mahaleel, 895 years; Jared, 962 years; Methuselah, 969 years; Lamech, 777 years; Noah, 950 years), some living to almost a millennia (Imagine having lived for the last 1,000 years), inevitably that day arrived when they saw fulfilled the words of the Lord, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27). They too passed through the valley of the shadow of death into eternity. In due time after the Flood, the ages of man began to decrease (Abraham, 175 years; Isaac, 180 years; Moses, 120 years), until they reached the average three score years and ten (70) spoken of in the Bible (Ps 90:10). Yet one thing did not change - the inevitability of death, and ordinarily the need to precede this by the period of old age.

Old age is clearly recognized but not clearly understood by most of the human population. Infants and children rarely think about getting old, unless perhaps an important person in their life, e.g. a grandparent, passes away. All people above a certain age (20?, 30?) are looked upon as being old. They associate older people with "Being grown up," "Having wrinkles," "Being slow" or "Having strange ways of doing things," with little knowledge of what it really means to be old. Youth have begun to understand a little more of old age. They chuckle at the ways their parents or grandparents do things compared with what is the "in-thing." They even look forward to being older, when they can share more privileges that being older brings. They can't wait until they are "grown-up." If only they could truly understand the words of a dear lady stated recently, "Children, these are now the best days of your life." Very soon the time of maturity arrives, and with it many responsibilities, job, marriage, upbringing of children, congregational responsibilities. Life seems to pass by like a blur. When a moment occasionally arrives for quiet reflection, thoughts often turn to "the good-old days," with the wish, "Oh, I wish I were young again!" Suddenly the time arrives (50?, 60?, 70?) when we realize, "I am getting old! I am not that far away from retiring!" Though there may be regrets, nothing can change this ceaseless march into old age. At what age can we be classed as being old? I don't want to offend anyone. I'll leave that up to you to decide. Sooner or later we quietly will have to admit that we too have entered the category of, "being old." Ordinarily we all must pass through the time of old age. Hence the importance for all of us to consider this topic.

Why study this matter? Old people will ever be a part of society. With Eliphaz we can say, "With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men" (Job 15:10). It is an important and inevitable part of life. Valuable time is spent examining the responsibilities of children, the problems associated with youth, the duties of couples within marriage, the upbringing of children, and many other areas of human responsibility. We need to care also for what is a growing part of the population of society, the aged. In searching for helps in writing this essay, I found only one other essay dealing with the topic. Yet the Bible mentions much about older people. We all have an important responsibility towards them. Let us therefore look at the theme of:-

OLD AGE.

We will ask ourselves two questions:-

I. WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE PROBLEMS AND PARTICULARLY THE DANGERS FACED BY THE OLDER GENERATION? and

II. WHAT CAN BE DONE BY THE AGED THEMSELVES, THE YOUNGER GENERATION, THE PASTOR AND THE CONGREGATION SO THAT GOD'S BLESSINGS MAY REST UPON THE AGED?

WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE PROBLEMS AND PARTICULARLY THE DANGERS FACED BY THE OLDER GENERATION?

What changes take place when one enters the stage of old age? Childhood is commonly characterized as a time of innocence. Youth are usually spoken about as full of energy, but sometimes lacking in wisdom. Middle-aged people have gained some of that wisdom, but are now burdened down with responsibilities. Life just rushes by. Once these responsibilities have gradually passed (children get married, the younger ones take over), people have far more time on their hands, but prefer to sit and relax, rather than bustle about and use up energy. Once old age comes, what are the characteristics which make it different from other stages of life?

Young people, there is a positive side. All is not doom and gloom. Older people have gathered together a lifetime of wisdom and knowledge. They have accumulated much knowledge from their reading and study. They have had many life experiences from which they have learned. They have made their mistakes too and seen the results. They are like history - great teachers. Younger ones, never be so foolish as to despise the wisdom of the aged. Older people are generally retired or have left behind some of life's responsibilities. As a result they have (as a general rule) more time on their hands. Though this can be a danger (An idle mind is the devil's workshop), it can also be a tremendous blessing. They can now do things they were unable to do when they were younger. Though many have an interest in ancestry, most family histories are drawn up and completed by those who are older. Grandparents can be highly valued by their married children for being able to step in and assist with family responsibilities, as long as they are not taken for granted, and used in a way beyond what is fair and reasonable.

Some older people seem not to lose their vigor with age. They are like Moses, of whom it is said he, "was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut 34:7). Caleb, who at the age of 85 wanted to fight a battle for Hebron as an inheritance, stated, "As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in" (Josh 14:11). Likewise the Bible tells us, "There was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years (She was now 84 years old), which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:36-37). I am sure you all can state examples of people who in old age seem to be almost as active as when they were young. Yet this is hardly the norm.

The words of Solomon are true, "The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head" (Prov 20:29). Indeed "gray hair," has with it a beauty and dignity, if it crowns the head of one whose life glorifies God.

By their very position in society and the church, older people have an influence on the younger generation as well as one another. Young people are influenced by their peers, but also should be in a position to follow the example of the older ones. If this is a good influence, what an important role the aged can take in the Christian upbringing of the youth! Yet it is also true that older people can do a lot, if they are misled, to lead the young away from God's Word. Most groups of people leaving an orthodox church for sinful reasons have done so because a bad example was set for them by an older person. Likewise many formerly orthodox Christians have remained in a false teaching church, because the older leaders who knew better did not take a stand and remained.

Yet most changes in old age do tend to involve the negative. It is not an easy thing to be growing old. Dr Zorn gives a description of old age in a commentary on Eccl 12:1-7. He writes:

"In old age the exuberance of youth is gone. Luther: 'An old man has no gusto anymore for anything.'

"Would it not be misery to have to look back in old age on a wasted and misspent youth? But even at best, old age are days and years about which every one must say, 'They please me not.' In old age the 'light,' the symbol of joy and happiness, is not shining brightly anymore, because the sensitivity for these things is diminished; there is nothing to hope for or to look joyfully forward to anymore. In old age the clouds, instead of the sunshine, return after the rain — one difficulty is followed by another. The vigour of the body is gone and the buoyancy of the mind is slackened. Little hardships become burdens or problems. All these burdens of old age are, in God's providence, a final 'purging' of the godly before they enter eternal light and glory; but for the ungodly they are a warning and foretaste of eternal darkness that should move them to seek His grace and eternal light.

"In old age the 'keepers of the house (of the body) tremble.' The 'keepers' are the arms that defend the body. In old age 'the strong,' the legs, that in youth were firm like pillars, bow and bend in weakness. The 'grinders,' the teeth, can't do their work, because they are but few. And 'those that look out of the windows,' the eyes, are darkened, Gen. 27: 1, and

'the doors shall be shut to the streets;' old people are often hard of hearing; they cannot hear what is going on in the streets and they have a hard time understanding what is being said. And 'the sound of the grinding is low,' the resonance of the voice is weak. The aged are afraid of that which is high; they get out of breath when ascending stairs; and there is 'fear in the way,' fear that they might fall and break their fragile bones. And 'the almond tree shall flourish' — the hair is getting white. 'And the grasshopper (that eating plague) shall be a burden' — many frailties plague the aged. And 'desire shall fail,' the gusto of youth is gone.

"All what Solomon has described here are the natural symptoms and forebodes of the nearing dissolution of body and soul." (Divine Consolation, p. 71-72).

Pastor Kleinig stated in a sermon: We all must come to the boundary line when we step over into the world of eternity. This is Satan's last opportunity. Satan comes with his last savage attack on each of us when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death. This warning of Pastor Kleinig is especially pertinent to the aged. They are in the latter part of their life. Death is not very far away. Satan wants to destroy their souls in hell. He does not have long to achieve his purposes. Especially on the death-bed he makes his most concerted attack. Can he destroy their faith in Jesus, the only way to heaven? Can he cause them to doubt God's forgiveness? Can he bring up some sin of the past and cause them to think, "This is too great to be forgiven?" Despite the many years they have been faithful, all he needs to do is achieve victory in these last few hours, and he has destroyed them eternally. It is not the Christian who is faithful most of his life and then falls away, but "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt 24:13). How they can cope and overcome the devil will be dealt with in the second part of our essay.

Old age often brings with it loss of memory and poor health. Aches and pains come where before the body was fine. The body after a lifetime of activity like an old machine begins to wind down. One health problem after another begins to show up. Some can be cured. Others remain and with them the aged have to learn to cope. More and more pills are prescribed by the doctor to deal with health issues, the pills themselves bringing difficult side-effects. Ps 90:10 is correct, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

The Bible spends a little time describing the afflictions of old age. We are told of Isaac, "It came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see" (Gen 27:1). Likewise Jacob, "Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see" (Gen 48:10). Yet Jacob, despite his ailments, continued his work, as we read, "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Heb 11:21). Of Eli we learn, "It came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see" (1 Sam 3:2). And again, "Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see" (1 Sam 4:15). Of David it is said, "Now King David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he got no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat. So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. And the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him: but the king knew her not (There was no sexual relationship, GLW)" (1 Kings 1:1-2).

Whereas in Bible times, it will simply say, "He fell sick and died," today medicine has the names for most of the ailments of old age. We have senility, dementia and Alzheimer's disease. These involve loss of memory, repetition, change of personality. Apart from a myriad of other diseases, improvements in medicine have provided treatments for once untreatable conditions as heart problems, stroke and cancer. Whereas these once lead to certain death, the sufferer today can find treatments which will prolong life for many years. Yet often the body is left in a weakened condition and the sufferer is left to cope longer with the inclemency of old age. Though there is more time to enjoy the pleasures of life, Satan also has more time to inflict his temptations. Scripture speaks of the time of youth as being the time of greatest earthly pleasure (Eccl 11:9).

Responsibilities of the aged person have changed. As parents with children of a young age, they had been in charge of their children's lives with direct control over them. Now they have seen their children leave home and no longer have direct control over them. They also see grandchildren whom they love very much, but have little direct control in their upbringing. It gives great heart-ache to see these young sometimes stray from the Christian faith. "Why can't they see what they are doing?" is the question asked with a shaking head. What a heavy load if this takes place in one's own family!

Eli shared this grief knowing, "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD" (1 Sam 2:12). Though he tried to warn them, we are told, "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father" (1 Sam 2:25). When he heard of the punishment that would come upon them, he could not change their sinful ways. He could only say, "It is the LORD: let Him do what seemeth Him good" (1 Sam 3:18). Ultimately he was informed of the news, which brought an

immediate result on Eli, "Thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy." What a dreadful burden this old man carried in his last days. Many of our older Christians carry a similar burden.

It has been said that a society shows it is civilized by its treatment of those who are its weakest members. Society today seems to be losing its compassion towards the aged. It sees little use in an older person. They have become a burden. Many are put into old-age homes and then cut off almost completely from families and neglected by children. Some older people are made to feel they are a burden to their family. They may have needs which only family can fill, but they do not want to ask because they do not want to bother others. They become very limited and find it difficult to perform tasks they once found easy. Once such tasks such as a trip to the shop, traveling to church and cleaning the house were a breeze. Now they are either impossible, or take a great deal of planning and effort to achieve.

Inevitably, an older couple who have shared their lives together will find that their partner passes into eternity. Experience shows that it is more often the wife left behind to cope than the husband. Suddenly things change. Loneliness sets in. Formerly they spent many hours together; now there is nothing but the four walls. Many tasks their partner could handle now have to be handled by oneself. A wife who has relied on the husband to do many of the daily tasks (e.g. things mechanical), now finds themselves lost. They can't call on the family all the time, yet nevertheless need to struggle on. What a blessing if the partner left behind has their eternal Partner - the Lord. "What a Friend we have in Jesus," the hymn writer explains.

Since the aged have no direct income through work, they have to rely on their limited finances and what income is offered to survive. Though many have planned well for retirement, others fall short and have to make do with their meager resources. This often results in worry about earthly provision. The older person also finds the world hard to keep up with. "Things are going mad," they often say. "It was not like this in my day." Reference is then made to shop-prices, electronic gadgets, and various signs of the last days such as violence and earthquakes. Advances in modern society they find hard to understand.

Is it any wonder that many old people find it hard to cope? Can you understand why some nearing old age don't want to get old? They look at it with despair. Some even want to avoid it in a sinful way by making suicide pacts or resorting to euthanasia. However this is not an alternative for the Christian. He has a tremendous source of spiritual and earthly help towards which he can turn.

Dr August Pieper once stated that the three stages of life are subject to three special problems, the Youth to sexual sin; the Middle aged to lust for power and honour; and Old Age to covetousness and fear that financial resources will not last until death. Though this is an oversimplification, it does give indication that the aged face unique dangers and temptations to sin because of their special circumstances. Covetousness and worry about financial resources are indeed sins that the aged are particularly subject to.

We are reminded of the sin of Noah, who planted a vineyard and became drunk in his old age after the Flood (Gen 9:20-21). The Bible does not tell us the circumstances that may have lead him to this, but we may wonder. Was he depressed after the disastrous events of the Flood on the human race? Was he worried about how he and his family would survive in this new world? Likewise it is said of Solomon, "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father" (I Kings 11:4-6). How could a man, who in his youth started out so well as a king, now so shamefully desert his Lord?

So also the aged are subject to particular sins. When they feel the heavy burdens of life upon them, despondency and depression are often associated. Especially if they have had less contact with the Word, Satan has more opportunity to fire this dart at them. It is easy to become negative, always looking at the bad side of things. Visitors come and all the elderly person may do is complain and murmur about their poor health, and the many other problems they have. Visitors go away depressed, wondering why they visited in the first place, reluctant to come back and be "dumped on," again. They are tempted to worry about all kinds of things, health, finances, ability to cope, family, death. Extra time on their hands allows their thoughts to wander in this direction.

Little to do also gives opportunity for other sins. One common one is fault-finding and unjust criticism of others. It is easy to say, "The Pastor should be doing this. So and so shouldn't be doing that," when often the circumstances behind it are not known. Whereas their bodies have become frail, their tongues have remained sharp. This can lead to bitterness towards others (Heb 12:15). What danger is there that the person die with unforgiveness in the heart (Mark 11:26)?

Pride can also take hold of the heart, which adds the danger that the person will not acknowledge and repent of their sin when admonished.

The aged can be guilty of leading an ungodly life and thus setting a bad example for others, which may then result in the straying of other souls from Jesus. Age may bring with it stubbornness, which causes the person to become set in some false teaching or way of life they have fallen into. "I can't change now," is sometimes their response when their sin is pointed out to them. Since older people have done things a certain way all their lives, they are tempted to interfere and force their ideas on their married children. They do not understand the meaning of the words "leave his father and his mother" (Gen 3:24) in God's definition of the marriage relationship. When children object this results in conflict with them. The prevalence of "mother-in-law jokes," is a sign of the frequency of this problem. As we shall soon learn, there is no sin, also of those of the aged, which is not too great to be forgiven by the Saviour.

Let us now ask:-

II.

WHAT CAN BE DONE BY THE AGED THEMSELVES, THE YOUNGER GENERATION, THE PASTOR AND THE CONGREGATION SO THAT GOD'S BLESSINGS MAY REST UPON THE AGED?

After Job had undergone all his trials, the Bible says, "The LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). A description is given of his old age, "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days" (Job 42:12-17). Nowhere has God promised to us the blessing of riches Job had before he died. Yet only unbelief, turning away from Christ, can cause us to miss out on the spiritual blessings which Job had in his old age. He had been shown by experience that he had a Saviour who loved him, wanted him to be in heaven and would look after and preserve him to his end. This is the greatest blessing an aged person can have. All other blessings are in addition to this one. How can our aged people be sure they have and maintain these blessings?

All of us are ageing. The only difference is that some are further along the road than others. We all must see to it that our hearts are ready to meet the Lord. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves," says the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 13:5). However when traveling along the road of this life, it is when we are nearing the end of our journey that the words of Amos become especially important, "Prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). Why has God permitted the ageing process? Why did not God work it that always in good health of body we are suddenly taken to eternity without suffering the trials of old age? Ageing is certainly a result of sin, to which we all are subject. Yet it is obvious that God has connected the latter years of poor health with the closeness of eternity with this purpose in view. He tells the old person: You can see that you do not have a lot of years to live. Your earthly pilgrimage is drawing to a close. Soon you will hear the words, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20). Eternity is close at hand. I am giving you an opportunity to prepare for this. As the Lord said to Hezekiah, "Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live" (Is 38:1).

God has appointed a time that each of us must cross the borderline into eternity. However the older knows for certain: That appointed time is close at hand. Old age gives a different outlook on life, as well as a different understanding of eternity. The aged person can say, "I don't have long to live in this world anymore. My future is not here. My future is in the next life. I hope to have a happy eternity. Therefore I will make absolutely certain that though nothing is guaranteed for me in this world, God will guarantee that my soul is in heaven in the next." Thus the importance of spiritual things is magnified. An old person would naturally take these things more seriously.

What is a heart that is prepared for eternity? It is a heart that accepts the same message preached by John the Baptist, who said, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" (Matt 3:3). John wanted the hearts of the people to be prepared to meet the Lord at His first coming. The Lord wants us to be similarly prepared for death or Christ's second coming. Therefore we must also heed the central point of John's message, "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). God prepares our hearts through the Law and the Gospel. Through the Law He tells us: "Because of your sin, you are lost and condemned to hell. Your good works cannot pay the awful penalty of your sin. As you stand, you are doomed." The pain and suffering of old age teach that, without repentance, there is a much greater pain and suffering awaiting in eternity as a punishment for sin - hell. In our despair the only comfort is in the Gospel which says, "Jesus has suffered and died to pay the penalty of your sin. Turn to Him in true faith. If you believe in this message you have forgiveness. You can be sure

that your soul will go to heaven.” There can be no more comforting thought to an older person than the certainty of a happy and blessed eternity.

Nevertheless, the aged Christian is not always blessed with a strong, unwavering faith. We saw earlier how Satan wants to destroy him and drag him down to hell. His opportunities to do this are fading as the Christian nears eternity. Therefore he goes to extra effort in these last hours to place before the Christian’s heart such doubts as, “Can you be sure you are forgiven? You are too great a sinner to be saved.” When such thoughts come, what should we do? Pastor Kleinig has the answer when he says: Successfully meet him with Scripture. Bring to him Bible passages and say with Christ, “It is written” (Matt 4:4). The Bible has some beautiful Gospel passages. Have these on hand, commit them to memory and be ready to use them when Satan comes.

-Is 53:5, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

-John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

-Rom 5:8, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

-1 John 1:7, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

With these passages the Christian can challenge the devil and say, “I believe in Him, so I’m cleansed. So, Satan, what can you do?” Though the devil may come repeatedly, repeatedly the embattled Christian can turn to this Gospel comfort whereby the Lord turns his heart heavenward.

The thought of death does not naturally bring to man happiness. He is ordinarily afraid of it. Especially he who knows that he is closer to the hour of death, may be confronted with thoughts of fear concerning the “unknown.” But with trust in Jesus, the aged believer need not fear. He knows his earthly pilgrimage is almost complete. He can face death with confidence. Death is but the doorway to an eternity of happiness in heaven with Jesus. He can be sure that the faithful God will answer his prayer, “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth” (Ps 71:9). “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not” (Ps 71:18). Has not God promised, “Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar (grey) hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Is 46:4)? As the hymn writer points out, God promises,

E’en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be born. (ALHB, 376, v6)

What a wonderful example Luther has set for the Christian as a model for a blessed death (Life of Luther, p. 91-95). With the apostle, the Christian can shout, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:55,57).

In order to put off the cares of this life, the aged Christian should turn his thoughts heavenward. Paul admonishes us, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:1-2). He should remember, “Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb 13:14). When the trials of old age seem unbearable, he should remember, “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17). He should rejoice at the Lord’s Prayer for him, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which thou hast given Me” (John 17:24). This will help him to realize something vital about the troubles of this life, “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).

In order to achieve this, every effort should be made to make regular use of the Word of God. The Lord promises, “Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Ps 92:13-14). We are told, “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High” (Ps 46:4). Bible, Hymn book, the valuable devotional books, tapes and doctrinal articles should be read and re-read. What beautiful meaning can be found in these if we but sit, read and study them in detail. Scripture passages which they have learnt in childhood will now be extra precious. Hymns which they have sung all their lives will now take on special meaning. A valuable essay of which I have been recently reminded is Nickel’s *The Marvelous and Mysterious Government of God*, which explains the ways, strange to man’s human reason, in which God operates in this world. The more our minds are occupied with spiritual things, the less time Satan has to lead us astray. He cannot stand up to the words of the almighty God.

One of the most vital areas where the aged can bring blessing is to influence others by setting a good example in regard to their Christian life. Young people watch those who are older than them and ask, “What are they doing?” Given the habit of following the patterns that others set, they are likely to say, “I will follow the example they set for me.” “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov 16:31). Note the condition, “If it be found in

the way of righteousness.” What a crown of shame that old person wears if through their sinful actions the young are encouraged to stray from their faith! The Lord urges, “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb 10:24). It is a wonderful thing when we see believers of 80 and 90 years of age still seeing to it that they are found in the Lord’s house regularly. They do not say, “I am too old. It’s too much trouble.” Thereby they are imparting the message to the youth, “God’s Word is important for your souls. Don’t stay away from it.” It is sad to see that many older Christians are more regular in their church attendance than some of the younger ones.

What an influence for good the older ones can be. We are told of Enoch who was taken to heaven by the Lord at age 365 years, “Enoch walked with God” (Gen 5:23). Pious Samuel could say to the people, “I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day” (1 Sam 12:2). Of Zechariah and Elizabeth, when they were both well-stricken in years, we are told, “They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” This was one of the ways in which they lead their family, though small, on the right pathway.

In regard to the future affairs of the aged, there is much uncertainty. Will their financial arrangements be sufficient to care for their need? Will their health hold up? Will they be able to manage in their daily and weekly tasks? How long will their spouse be with them to support them? Though ultimately they will recognize that that things of this life are vanity (Eccl 12:8), one thing will not fail them. That is the care and protection of the Saviour. He promises, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Ps 103:13). He promises, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (Matt 7:11). “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). Read the beautiful passage, Matt 6:25-34, where the Lord teaches us not to worry, but put our trust in Him.

The apostle Paul devotes two verses to describe the duties of the aged. He says, “That the aged men be sober (Gk: abstain from immoderate use of alcohol), grave (Gk: reverent), temperate (Gk: self controlled, curbing ones desire and impulses), sound in faith (Gk: in the faith i.e. true and uncorrupt in doctrine), in charity (Christian love to God and the neighbour), in patience (Gk: steadfastness in trials). The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour (Gk: conduct on all occasions, including dress and behaviour) as becometh holiness (reverent, befitting things sacred to God), not false accusers (Gk: slanderers, 8th Commandment), not given to (Gk: enslaved to as a confirmed drunkard) much wine, teachers of good things.”

But an old person may say, “I am set in my ways. I can’t change now. The way I am you will have to put up with.” This is not so. Despite the saying, a “leopard” can change his spots. Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil 4:13). The Lord gives the way: Acknowledge that sin in true repentance; ask Jesus the Saviour for forgiveness; and from faith make every effort to avoid the sinful way and lead a godly life. Paul pointed out that he preached, “To the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” Faith shows it is genuine by a change from sinful ways to the service of the Lord. There will be a genuine attempt to put aside the old sinful ways and follow the new God-pleasing ones.

Where there has been depression, despair and negativity, he will try to adopt a cheery spirit. “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet 4:13). Where there has been complaint and murmuring, contentment will follow. Says Paul, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil 4:11). Worry will be replaced by trust in the Lord. God has promised, “Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Is 46:4). Faultfinding will be replaced by a desire to speak well of others. Especially since the Pastor’s care for the young is so vital, he will be careful not to criticize the pastor in their hearing, lest they too lose respect for him and reject his pastoral care. Rather the aged person will raise the matter, if it is genuine, before the pastor himself privately. He will fight against the sin of pride, and rather be humble, even if he has achieved much in life. “Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5). Interference in the lives of others will be replaced by a spirit of quiet friendliness, which is prepared to offer counsel at the appropriate time, characterized by a strict control of the tongue. Even though the elderly may have to struggle with bad habits learned over a life-time, there will a genuine desire to fight against the old adam, and strengthened by the Word follow the prompting of the new man. The Lord promises, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Cor 9:8).

Older people generally have more time on their hands. Many are the natural interests and hobbies they have. Nevertheless they will try to use their time responsibly and beneficially. How much time has been wiled away on rather useless or even harmful pursuits, which could have been used for some worthwhile purpose in God’s kingdom. Of Anna we learn she, “Departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Luke 2:36-37). Though David was old, yet he used his time preparing for the construction of the temple. “David said, Solomon my son

is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" (1 Chron 22:6). There are many jobs the aged can do for their children's families, for their congregation and pastor, in the assistance of their neighbour. Much of the charitable work done in society is done at the hands of able retired people. Society would be at a great loss without their help. If any are unsure what to do - go and ask your pastor.

When explaining the duties of the aged, Paul stated they, especially the women, should be, "Teachers of good things." He then went on to instruct them, "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:3-5). Clearly the elderly play an important role in giving godly counsel. The Psalmist David instructs, "When I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed Thy strength unto this generation, and Thy power to every one that is to come" (Ps 71:18). Joel instructs us, "Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation" (Joel 1:2-3). It is of tremendous value to parents if they know there is some older person (a mentor) who will develop a relationship with their child and carefully impart sound Christian advice on spiritual matters. With the pastor's heavy workload, it brings great joy to see his godly preaching from the pulpit being backed up by personal counsel to those in need. Especially when youth stray from God's Word, hearing the same advice from someone apart from pastor and parents may be just what is required to bring them back to the Saviour. Let their prayer be, "My tongue also shall talk of Thy righteousness all the day long" (Ps 71:24).

The Bible gives us many examples of godly counsel to the younger generation. Of the aged Moses we learn that he counseled the Israelites, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day" (Deut 11:26-27). Of Joshua we are told, "Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age... behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof" (Josh 23:2,14). Before David died he, "Called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel" (1 Chron 22:6). We learn of Rehoboam that, "He forsook the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up with him, and which stood before him" (1 Kings 12:8) This got him into much strife. On the other hand Jesus on the cross instructed His disciple John in regard to the care of His mother (John 19:26-27).

Older people love children and especially grandparents adore their grandchildren. "Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers," says wise Solomon (Prov 17:6). Of Joseph and his grandchildren we learn, "Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees (Gen 50:22-23). There is much that grandparents can do to bring up grandchildren in godly ways. Even Divorce laws recognize the input that grandparents have in their grandchildren's lives. Yet it must be done with responsibility, recognizing that the parents have direct control over their children's lives. They must know both when to become involved and when to withdraw. Especially they will avoid the mistake of Jacob which brought great strife in his family, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." Ultimately it brought him misery in his old age (Gen 42:38). They should be sure to love their children and grandchildren equally.

One final vital task that the aged have is prayer. Even if health problems mean that they can do little in body, in their hearts and minds they can take the needs of all in their sphere of contact to the Lord, asking for His help and assistance on them. Promises the Lord, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Psalm 71 is a prayer offered up by the elderly to the Lord.

Much has been said of the duties of the aged. But what duties have others towards their welfare, their children, the younger generations, the pastor and the congregation?

Scripture requires of all to give the aged respect. Lev 19:32 states, "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD." Of the respect shown to his age, Job said, "When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up' (Job 29:7-8). Because of his youth Elihu, out of respect to those who had spoken earlier, was reluctant to speak, as he said, "I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion" (Job 32:46). In 1 Tim 5:1-3, Paul encourages respect to the elderly, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a

father;... The elder women as mothers;... Honour widows that are widows indeed." I am sure we remember what happened when Elisha was going up to Bethel and, "There came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head" (2 Kings 2:23). Nevertheless, if the elderly are acting in an ungodly way, they should expect to receive respectful rebuke from others. Jacob found it necessary to rebuke his selfish, idolatrous and dishonest father-in-law Laban (Gen 31).

It is important that the younger ones, especially their children, go to their parents for advice and guidance. Particularly of children it is said, "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old" (Prov 23:22). What a treasure of wisdom the elderly can offer to the younger generation when important decisions are to be made in life. Do not foolishly ignore this and say, "I know best. I am not going to be told what to do."

Family is very important to the elderly. Don't neglect to keep in touch with them and give them support. If we are to, "Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10), how much more should we seek to help our parents and the elderly in their old age. The Lord commands, "Let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite (Gk: repay) their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God" (1 Tim 5:4). Sometimes when they first refuse help, it is not because it is not needed, but because of pride or because they feel they do not wish to bother others. Joseph (Gen 47:12) and Ruth (Ruth 4:15) are fine examples of caring for parents in their old age. Also the youth must learn to be patient with the elderly and their often slow ways. Since they will one day be old too, they should follow the Golden Rule, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt 7:12).

Also pastor and congregation must not forget their obligations to the elderly. Particular care should be paid to their spiritual needs, with hospital and home visits if they are not able to attend church regularly. Devotions will be offered which deal with their particular needs. As 1 Tim 5:4,8,16 points out, the first responsibility to provide for the bodily welfare of their elderly parents is with their children. However the congregation may need to step in and offer help if for some reason the widows are not provided for (1 Tim 5: 4-16). The wealthy in the congregation of Jerusalem were prepared to sell their possessions and give the money to the Apostles that their poor, and particularly the widows, were cared for (Acts 4:34-35; 6:1). Especially the congregation should see that their elderly have a ride to church to see that they do not miss out on the blessings God's Word will bring to them.

In Zech 8:4 the Lord gives a beautiful figurative description of the spiritual Jerusalem, heaven, with the words, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." Though sin and all its effects, including the aging process, will be no longer with their resurrection bodies, both old and young who on Judgment Day were gathered on the Lord's right hand will be found in that great place. The elderly have a special reason to look forward to this day, because they know that there, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4).

May they therefore be able to pray with the hymn writer,

And if a longer life, Be here on earth decreed me,
And though through many a strife, To age at last wilt lead me,
Thy patience within me shed, Avert all sin and shame,
And crown my hoary head, With pure untarnished fame.

Let me depart this life, Confiding in my Saviour;
Do thou my soul receive, That it may live forever;
And let my body have, A quiet resting place
Within a Christian's grave; And let it sleep in peace.

And on that solemn day, When all the dead are waking,
Stretch o'er my grave Thy hand, Thyself my slumbers breaking;
Then let me hear Thy voice, Change Thou this earthly frame,
And bid me to rejoice, With those who love Thy Name. (ALHB, 364, v 6-8).

Written in Christ's Name,
Pastor Gavin Winter. 14/3/10