

CHALLENGES OF AGING (01).

April 15, 2007.

Introduction

Please turn to **2Cor.4:7-18**. (**read**). On May 1st, 1977, when I began my ministry in this church, we were generally a young adult church. Thirty years later, the young adult generation of the church has become the old adult generation in the church. In thirty years we have witnessed many changes in the world and some earth-shaking events. But as we have grown older, we have also experienced and witnessed many changes in our bodies, some good and some bad. Growing old is a fact of life, a stark reality everyone has to face if the Lord is pleased to spare and grant the allocated seventy years, or as the **KJV** says, “three score and ten years”. Today, with the Lord’s help, I want to turn you to God’s word and seek to deal with the challenges of aging. And it is my prayer that the Lord will use His word to encourage, exhort, admonish and strengthen the hearts of both young and old.

Mankind’s Allotted Years.

In **Gen.1:26-31** we are told that God created mankind in His own image and likeness. And man’s diet was “every plant yielding seed ... and every tree which has fruit yielding seed.” In **Gen.2:6** we are told that “a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.” In other words, there was no rain. The idea in this verse is that water came up from underground and watered the earth. In **Gen.3** mankind fell into sin and everything changed.

It is to be noted that despite the fall, the people who lived before the flood normally lived for eight to nine hundred plus years. Then came the forty days of rain and the flood and further changes took place. Firstly, man diet changed. God added meat to man's diet. In **Gen.9:3** the Lord said to Noah and his family, "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant."

It is to be noted also that the length of man's life was radically altered. This is clearly evidenced for us when **Gen.5** and **Gen.11** are compared. Noah was both pre-flood and post-flood and he lived for **950** years. But his son Shem lived for just over **600** years. Shem's descendants lived for less and less years. **Gen.11** ended with Terah, Abraham's father. And we are told that Terah lived for **205** years. Abraham lived for **175** years. (**Gen.25:7-8**). And we are told that he died "in a ripe old age". Isaac lived for **180** years. (**Gen.35:28**). Jacob lived for **147** years. (**Gen.47:28**). Genesis ended with Joseph's death and we are told that Joseph lived for **110** years. (**Gen.50:26**).

Now let us fast forward to **Psa.90:10**. This psalm was written by Moses and he wrote, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years. Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away." If you were to plot an age graph from Adam to Moses, your line would make a sharp downward drop after the flood and it would level off with the statement in **Psa.90:10**.

Sins' Ravages.

Please turn to **Rom.5:12**. Here Paul wrote, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." One man, one sin and everything changed. That's all it took to change the physical and spiritual quality of man's life. And the truth is, far too often, that's all it will take to change the physical and spiritual quality of your life – one sin.

Adam was the gateway through which sin entered the world of mankind. And sin was the vehicle that brought death into the world of mankind. Note the verb “**spread**”. It contains the force of distribution. Death permeated the whole human race. Death made its way to each individual member of the human race.

The end for every human being is death. And so we read in *Gen.5:5* that Adam lived **930** years, “and he died.” And Methuselah lived **969** years, “and he died.” (*Gen.5:27*). “So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years.” (*Gen.50:26*). David died at age **70**. (*2Sam.5:4-5*). “And he died”, “*and she died*”, have become the final words of every person’s life on this earth. *Heb.9:27* says, “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment.” Thousands meet their appointment with death every day. Life’s experiences have taught us that not everyone will live to **70** or **80** and beyond. People die even before they are born and they die at every possible age.

Sin brought death but the pathway to death is manifold. The natural pathway to death is aging. I have known people who have lived healthy lives many years beyond the allotted **70** years. And then suddenly they become ill and die. And the only medical explanation is that their vital organs just gave up and quit on them. Aging brings in its train physical deterioration and manifold diseases that, in turn, bring to us a variety of health challenges.

There are a couple things I want you to note here. Death is linked to sin. Aging is linked to sin. Diseases are linked to sin. Diseases, aging and death are, in general, God’s judgments upon mankind because of mankind’s fall into sin. Now I know for a fact that some diseases people experience are linked to specific personal sins in their lives. They are reaping in a very specific way what they have sown. But this is not the general picture. The general picture is that there is disease, aging and death in this world because sin entered the world. As a Christian you may suffer and die from diseases despite the fact that you have lived and continue to live a godly life. You are simply reaping the general effects of mankind’s fall into sin.

The word of the God recognizes the fact that physical deterioration and aging will take place. Turn again to **2Cor.4:16**. Paul wrote, “Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” The key expression is, “our outer man is decaying.” I want you to take note of the verb “**decaying**”. It describes an ongoing and irreversible process. At some point our growth and youth would peak and then begins the downward trek. At first it is slow and may even be imperceptible. But one fact is sure – the downward trek of decay is taking place and it is irreversible. Paul’s simple point is that our mortal existence will begin to constantly waste away and eventually rush headlong towards death and the grave.

Philip Hughes noted that the “**outer man**” *“should not be understood in a merely material sense, for it indicates the human constitution with all its faculties and energies, mental as well as muscular, perceptive as well as practical.”* In other words, what the wise man described in **Eccl.12:1-8** is what will happen to you if you live to **70** years and beyond. Please turn to **Eccl.12:1-8**. (**read**). Consider with me the following brief exposition of this passage.

Firstly, there is the rationale of old age expressed in the words, “before the evil days come and the years draw near.” The phrase, “the years draw near” describes the onset of old age, that time when you know that your youth has slipped away irreversibly. The description, “evil days”, is used synonymously with “the years draw near”.

But the focus of the description, “evil days”, is on the inevitable and irreversible physical decay that begins to take place in your body as age increases and that removes from you the delight in and the pleasure for life. The focus is on when life gradually ceases to be a thing to enjoy and gradually becomes a thing to endure. As the debilitations of age take hold, people begin to say, “I have no delight in them.” I have no pleasure, no enjoyment in these years of my life. **Gordon Keddie** wrote, *“The thought that years will come when we will say, “I find no pleasure in them”, is as disturbing as it is unappealing.”*

From vs.2 onwards Solomon proceeded to give us in poetic language a detailed description of the debilitations that old age brings. Let us quickly survey Solomon's descriptions. In vs.2 "light" represents joy and "clouds" represent trouble or distress of one form or another. Solomon is saying that *"all joys are dimmed very materially in old age. And one trouble is replaced by another even as in the rainy season the cessation of one shower marks the beginning of another."* (Leupold).

Vs.3 : "The watchmen of the house tremble" refers to the trembling of the hands and arms. "Mighty men stoop" refers to the weakening of the legs. "The grinding ones stand idle because they are few" refers to the loss of teeth. "Those who look through windows grow dim" refers to the dimming of the eyes. In other words, your eyesight will begin to deteriorate and your hands will begin to get shorter.

Vs.4 : "The doors on the street are shut" refers to the loss of hearing. "The sound of the grinding mill is low" refers to the voice weakening and becoming a whisper. "One will arise at the sound of the bird" refers to sleeping lightly. The idea is not that of being awakened by the singing birds. The idea is that you are already awake, being unable to sleep, and at the sound of the birds you get out of bed.

"All the daughters of song will sing softly" has two possible meanings. The first is, when you are asleep, people will keep quiet for fear of awaking you. You will hear adults saying to children, *"Be quiet, grandpa (grandma) is sleeping."* The second meaning is the loss of appreciation for music. All tones become indistinct and melodious notes are no longer appreciated. Barzillai said to King David in *2Sam.19:35*, "I am now eighty years old. Can I distinguish between good and bad? Or can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Or can I hear anymore the singing men and women?"

Vs.5 : "Men are afraid of high places" refer to the loss of the sense of a sure foot and steady balance. "Men are afraid ... of the terrors on the road" refers to the magnified apprehension of danger and fear for a world that now pose threats that were never

experienced before. “The almond tree blossoms” refers to the graying of the hair. “The grasshopper drags himself along” refers to movement that is slow and painful. “The caperberry is ineffective” refers to the loss of sensual desires and powers. The caperberry is an aphrodisiac, your ancient version of natural Viagra.

The questions arise : as a Christian, how do you deal with old age? How should you respond to old age and all that old age brings into your life? I want to set before you the following answers.

Your Health.

The **first** point I want to set before you is that you should continue to take the best possible care of your health. Now I know that health care can be costly and the health care you may be able to afford may not be the best that money can buy. But you are responsible to take the best possible care of your health in keeping with what you can afford and / or what is available to you. Sometimes, the best principles of health care that you can follow do not cost you anything.

A word here to those who are young. Taking good care of your health now will be very helpful when you reach the mountain-top and begin the downward journey. Neglect your health now and the journey down will be more tumbling down than trekking down.

The culpable failure to take care of your health has sixth commandment implications for you. The sixth commandment says very simply, “You shall not murder.” (*Exod.20:13*). The specific emphasis in this command is on the act of premeditated murder. But its application is not limited to the act of premeditated murder. Jesus applied this command to anger. (*Matt.5:21-22*). The apostle John applied this command to hate. (*1Jn.3:15*).

In *Deut.22:8* the sixth commandment against murder is applied to the culpable failure or neglect that results in the death of another person. This principle of culpable failure is

applicable to the issue of health. We can apply this violation of the sixth commandment to a government's culpable failure to provide proper healthcare for the nation and especially the poor of the nation.

We can apply this violation of the sixth commandment to those who practice medicine and their culpable failure in the death of a patient. We can apply this violation of the sixth commandment to the culpable failure of parents in providing healthcare for their children. And we can apply this violation of the sixth commandment to you as an individual if there is culpable failure on your part to take basic and proper care of your health.

By this culpable failure, a government becomes guilty of murder. By this culpable failure, a person who practices medicine becomes guilty of murder. By this culpable failure, parents become guilty of murder. And by this culpable failure you can become guilty of committing self-murder.

Timothy had health problems. We do not know what they were. We are not told whether or not Timothy was careful to take care of his health problems. What we do know is that Paul was concerned about Timothy's health and gave to him the following counsel, "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." (*1Tim.5:23*). Wine was not only a beverage in ancient times. It also had medicinal purposes.

The second example I want to set before you is one we looked at earlier this year. It is the example of King Asa. We are told in *2Chron.16:12*, "In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians." As Christians we are to seek the help of doctors when we have health concerns. But seeking the help of doctors must be coupled with seeking the Lord's help. As a matter of fact, in this coupling, the first step must be to seek the Lord.

Now there is no guarantee that taking care of your health would prevent major or minor diseases with the onset of old age. Some of you will remember our dear Brother, **Pastor Dean Allen**. He was a health conscious person. Yet he died at age **47** with incurable cancer. The primary reason why diseases come upon us is sin, the sin that infected us when Adam sinned. And the primary reason why we seek to take good care of our health is because God requires of us to do this. And regardless of the harsh realities that exist in the world because of sin, we must obey God.

Now you may have the attitude of some who say, “Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” (cf. **1Cor.15:32**). But the reality and inevitability of death is no excuse for failing to obey God and take care of your health. The reality and inevitability of death is no excuse for you to start digging your grave with your teeth. God requires that you do all in your power to live the allotted **70** plus years. God requires that you choose life over death.

Hezekiah chose life over death. Turn to **Isa.38:1-5**. (**read**). Hezekiah could have resigned himself to the fact that this was God’s will for him. But he did not. And God granted him fifteen more years of life.

Paul also chose life over death. Turn to **Phil.1:21-26**. (**read**). Paul had every reason to want to choose death over life. He was now an old man. In **Phile.1:9** he described himself as “Paul, the aged.” He had faithfully served the Lord. He had suffered tremendously while serving the Lord. He was now in prison. And he was now enduring the increasingly painful effects of the physical sufferings he experienced.

For Paul, “*Oh my aching body*”, was far more than the cry of a man or woman with arthritis. Paul was suffering the effects of eight beatings with scourges and rods. Add to this that once he was stoned and left for dead. Each beating left his back and chest a bloody mess. Five times he receives from the Jews thirty-nine lashes with the scourge. (**2Cor.11:24-25; Acts 14:19**). To all this we must add the fact that Paul had severely

diseased and painful eyes. (*Gal.4:14*). Paul knew that to die and enter heaven would bring an end to all his physical sufferings. Yet he chose life over death.

Despite Paul's age, the physical condition of his body and the severity of the pains he had to endure, Paul did not curl up in a bed as an invalid, moaning and groaning, filled with self-pity and seeking pity from others. Despite his physical condition, Paul had the ability to continue his gospel labors and this he chose and this he did with great effectiveness for a few more years after he was released from prison. As a matter of fact some believe Paul may have traveled as far as Spain to preach the gospel after he was released from prison.

Now Brethren, I am not saying to you that you should seek to hold on to life come what may and despite your physical condition. There may come a time in your life when you may properly seek the Lord for release from this life and entrance into the glory the Lord has prepared for you. But this is not a decision that one must make carelessly or lightly. And this is not an issue that I am prepared to deal with publicly. So let us move on to our next point.

Common Sufferings.

I want to begin my **second** point by turning you to two passages. The first is *1Cor.10:13*. (**turn**). Paul wrote, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." The second passage is *1Pet.5:9*, "But resist him (the devil), firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

The point I want to set before you is found in two expressions in these verses. Firstly, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man." Secondly,

“knowing that the same experience of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.” The things you will suffer in this life, from youth to old age – be they diseases, accidents, stress, emotional problems, fear, and whatever else you can add – all of these things are experienced by others in this world. They may not experience these sufferings in the same form or in the same manner or to the same extent. You may find and / or know those who have suffered or are suffering less than you or more than you. But the point is this – the things we suffer because of sin are common to human experience.

We like to think of ourselves as special in our own little cocoon world. We like to think that the things that happen to us are peculiarly our experiences. But a little open-minded investigation will quickly reveal to you that your experiences and / or sufferings are not peculiar to you.

The issue here is not what we suffer because of sin. The issue here is how we suffer. What we suffer is common to man. You name it and somebody had it before you or they are experiencing it together with you. And whether it is cancer, or kidney problems, or bone problems, or arthritis, or heart problems or just plain old age, they all lead to the same common end – death and the grave. In the final analysis there is no difference between the person who died from cancer and the person who died from a heart attack. They are both dead.

Now there are three points I want to make here. *Firstly*, when we recognize and embrace the fact that the things people suffer are common to man and, for the most part, come upon us because of the fall of man and the entrance of sin into this world, we will be very careful how we treat those who may be suffering from some peculiar disease. Because as they say, “*what haven’t met you haven’t passed you as yet*”.

Beware of insensitively pointing fingers at those who have general or peculiar health problems. Beware of speaking ill of them. It may be that they that their lifestyle and / or

failure to listen to counsel brought their health problems upon them. But that is still no reason for you to be insensitive and / or to speak ill of them.

Beware of poking fun at sick people. *Lev.19:14* says, "You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God; I am the LORD." Have you ever seen people curse a deaf man and then laugh and say, "*I could tell him what I want. He can't hear a thing I am saying.*" Such people have no fear for God who hears what they are saying and who will hold them accountable for their words and actions.

Secondly, the knowledge that the things you are suffering are common to man should be a source of comfort to you and should give you the holy boldness to live before your brothers and sisters in Christ with humility and transparency. Because you need the prayers of your brothers and sisters in Christ, you will need to be humble and transparent. But at the same time I want to say to you that your transparency should be a wise transparency. There are some things you can and should share in a larger gathering. And there are some things you should share in confidence with those who belong to your small circle of Jonathans.

Thirdly, the presence of sin in the world and the general consequences of sin upon mankind should put the fear of God in all of us and make us humble before God and man. Because sin is at work and God is actively judging sin, you never know from day to day what small or big calamity may come upon you. Today you are healthy and prosperous and the world is at your feet. Tomorrow someone sees you and wonders, "*My goodness, what happened to him?*" "*My goodness, what happened to her?*" I am sure that such thoughts were not far from John's mind when he wrote his good friend Gaius as follows, "Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." (*3Jn.1:2*). And so I urge you, walk humbly and with fear and reverence before God.

Be Thankful To God.

The third answer I want to set before you is found in *1Thess.5:18*, “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” We could add to this *Eph.5:20*, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

Ingratitude is a serious sin. It is found very early in the litany of sins listed for us in *Rom.1:18-32*. *Vs.21* says, “For even though they knew God, they did not honor (glorify) Him as God, or give thanks.” Ingratitude opens the door to a number of sins, among them grumbling, murmuring and complaining.

But let us look now at the two verses that call us to thanksgiving. Firstly, *1Thess.5:18*. Paul wrote, “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” The first point is found in the words “in everything”. **Hiebert** admits that the injunction is startling. We can see ourselves giving thanks but it is not easy to see ourselves giving thanks “in everything”. “**In everything**” lifts the command above the level of natural practice or possibility. The point is – the thanksgiving God requires of us is not dependent upon gratifying circumstances. “In everything” makes the command all-inclusive. We are commanded to give thanks to God in the midst of every situation, however good or adverse it may be.

Paul’s command does not allow the Christian to meet the adverse circumstances of life with stoic resignation and a grin-and-bear-it thanksgiving. The thanksgiving Paul calls us to manifest is only made possible by the grace that God supplies to you as a Christian. **Hiebert** wrote, “[Thanksgiving] can become a vital reality only when the truth of *Rom.8:28* is experienced. When we realize that God works all things out for good to those who love Him and are yielded to His will, thanksgiving under all circumstances becomes a glorious possibility.” **Gene Green** noted that “the Christian approach [to thanksgiving] is decidedly different [to the Stoic approach to life] since the believer trusts in a sovereign God who can turn any situation to

their good (Rom.8:28) and who can make someone more than triumphant in any adversity or other circumstance (Rom.8:31-39).

Paul's second point is that thanksgiving in all circumstances is God's will for you. This is not Paul's idea or ideal for believers. This is specifically God's will for you as a Christian, His gracious design and purpose for you. The truth stated in this command must become operative in you. **Hiebert** noted that *"the argument is not, 'You must do it, for God so wills', but 'Knowing that it is God's will, you can do it.' God does not demand that which He does not give the power to perform."*

We turn our attention now to **Eph.5:20**, "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." In the context Paul is dealing with the Spirit-filled life. (*vs.18*). And he is saying to us that another characteristic of the life that is filled with the Spirit is the giving of thanks. "Always give thanks" or "**at all times give thanks for all things.**" Thanksgiving to God should encompass all things that come into life's path, and when believers are filled with the Spirit this will be their response. (**Hoehner**).

I stated earlier that the issue here is not what we suffer because of sin. The issue here is how we suffer. How do you suffer when the general consequences of sin begin to take effect in your life? Are you thankful to God for life and general health despite the health challenges you are facing? Are you grateful and rejoicing in the Lord to be alive when thousands are dying every day?

Or do you suffer with a sense of shame and dishonor? Are you embarrassed and ready to hide in a dark room and never come out? The truth is there are people in this church who are suffering in their proverbial dark room and will not come out with any kind of transparency and say, *"Pastor, pray for me. I have such and such a problem."* Sometimes, I do know what they are suffering in their dark room and I pray for them. But I cannot say anything to them by way of counsel or comfort because they are not transparent with me.

Do you suffer with trust in God who is your Heavenly Father who is compassionate, who knows your frame and who is mindful that you are but dust? (*Psa.103:13-14*). Do you suffer with hope – with glorious and blazing hope that the redemption of your body is coming? Do you suffer knowing that there is coming a day when you will no longer have to say, “*Oh, my aching body*”? Do you suffer with glorious and blazing hope in the coming resurrection? Do you suffer with thankfulness to God that one day the curse of sin and its consequences will be no more? (*Rev.22:3*). Do you suffer with rejoicing because you know there is a day coming when tears and pain will pass away? (*Rev.21:4*).

Now Brethren, my hope was to finish this study today. But I still have a few more points to set before you and develop. And I want to ask you, if you think of anything I should deal with, please give me a call. Lord willing, I would seek to finish this study on **April 29**.

It is my hope and prayer that the things I have shared have helped you and encouraged you. But if you are not a Christian, I want you to know that as you suffer the consequences of sin, you have no hope for the eternity that is coming upon you. Your sorrows and pains will not end. I have seen many a sinner suffer terribly and then die in their sins. And I have heard people say, “*well, at least their sufferings are over and they have gone to rest.*”

But I want you to know that if you die in your sins, if you die without salvation in Christ, you are not going to final peace and rest. Despite what you have suffered in this life, the utterly frightening news is that your sufferings have only just begun. And the eternal punishments you will suffer in hell will be infinitely worse than the physical sufferings you endured in this life. *Rev.14:13* says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” They are the ones who enter into eternal rest and eternal peace and eternal joy.

You do not pay for your sins by the things you suffer in this life. The things you suffer in this life are the consequences of the presence and working of sin in this world. You pay

for your sins with death, not physical death but the second death. **Rev.20:14** says, "This is the second death, the lake of fire." And so I say to you, if you want to escape the second death of eternal torment, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and let Him save you. **Rom.6:23** says, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Note carefully that salvation is God's free gift in Christ to you. Eternal life is free. You do not have to pay for your sins. Christ died for your sins. All you have to do is humbly submit to Him and embrace what He did for you when He died on the cross. Why not do so today!