

CHALLENGES OF AGING (02).

April 29, 2007.

Introduction

The apostle 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." (2Cor.4:16). Two weeks ago we began to study the subject of "The Challenges of Aging." In that first study we looked at the following points :

- 1). Mankind's Allotted Years.
- 2). Sin's Ravages.
- 3). Your Health.
- 4). Common Sufferings.
- 5). Be Thankful to God.

I want to briefly survey what we covered before moving on to today's study.

Firstly, we looked at the years man lived from creation to the flood and then from the flood onwards. We saw that man's life began to shorten dramatically after the flood, a shortening that ended with the declaration in *Psa.90:10*, "As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years." The general picture is that God has allotted each human being seventy years.

Secondly, we looked at the reason why man must grow old and die. That reason is sin. Sin came into this world through Adam and death came with sin. There is a movie called "Death rides a horse." That's the picture in *Rom.5:12*. Sin is the horse and death is its rider. *Heb.9:27* says each human being has an appointment with death and final judgment. And the keeping of that appointment is inevitable. Under this point we also

looked at Solomon's graphic description of aging in *Ecc1.12:1-8*. Solomon describe aging as "the evil days" that draw near.

Thirdly, we looked at your responsibility to care for your health despite the inevitable realities of aging and death. You must care for your health because this is what God requires of you. We looked at the application of the sixth commandment as it relates to health care.

Fourthly, we looked at the fact that the things you will suffer by way of diseases and aging are generally common to mankind. They are God's general judgments upon mankind because of the fall into sin. You should not be ashamed of the things you may suffer. Knowing that these things are general and common should be a source of comfort to you.

Lastly, we looked at the command that as Christians we must be thankful to God for everything in our lives. The command does not call upon you to deny your sufferings and pains and diseases. The command calls upon you to be thankful to God in the midst of your struggles.

Indulging in Futilities.

The first point I want to deal with today is : **Indulging in futilities**. The reality is we will grow old. The reality is we will die. The reality is there is no cure for aging. The reality is there is no eternal youth. *Gen.3:22-24* tells us that man had one opportunity to reach out and grab eternal youth on this earth but God effectively blocked man and closed that door. And it was an act of mercy from God when He closed that door to eternal youth. I want you to note that : it was God who closed the door to eternal youth in this fallen world. And despite the grandiose promises from science, that door will stay closed.

Money or not, there comes a point when certain aspects of health care becomes, in the words of Solomon, “vanity of vanities.” (*Eccl.1:2*). The word Solomon used (Heb. *hebel*) and its N.T. counterpart (Gk. *mataios*) have the same basic meaning. Very importantly, *hebel* and *mataios* mean “**idols**”. The first appearance of this meaning is in *Deut.32:21*. The Lord said concerning the Israelites, “They have provoked Me to anger with their idols.” In *Acts 14:15* Paul called on the people of Lystra to turn from their idols (*mataios*) to serve the living and true God. **Trench** tells us that *mataios* means to build houses of sand on the seashore; to chase the wind; to hunt for vain things with idle hope. *Mataios* is the toil that results in nothing.

There comes a point when the battle to hold on to youth is sheer futile and irrational desperation. It is a vanity that can be easily transformed into idolatry. The business world knows the vanity or idolatry that exists in the hearts of men and women. They know that millions of men and women are in a desperate battle to hold on to youth. And they are making multiplied millions of dollars because of this idolatrous and irrational vanity. There comes a point when the battle to hold on to youth is akin to the battle of trying to build a sand castle on the shore of a raging sea.

I want you to understand this morning that there are no secrets to eternal youth. There is no fountain of eternal youth. There is no lotion, no medication, no surgery that can help you hold on to youth. God has decreed that you will grow old. God has decreed that the outer man will decay. God has decreed that your faculties will decay. There is no Ginkgo that can stop that. God has said the evil days are coming upon you and you will be well advised to prepare your heart and soul for them. God has said that one of these days these words would be spoken over you, “and he died”; “**and she died**”. You could call it sunset, departure, sleep or whatever else you want, they all spell one word – **death**.

I want you to understand what Satan has done in this world. He has not changed his mode of operation. God said to Adam, if you eat you will die. Satan said, that’s a lie, you will not die. Adam found out God told the truth and Satan lied. (*Gen.2:16-17; 3:1-*

7, 19). God has said to you that you have an inevitable appointment with death because of sin. (*Heb.9:27*). You will die. Satan is saying that's a lie and he has the world fixated on living forever on this earth. He has the world fixated on scientific research and grandiose promises that will supposedly help men and women beat death. These satanic fixations are futile pursuits. They are vanity of vanities. Every time a person dies, he or she finds out that Satan lied and God told the truth.

God has said that what you need is eternal salvation. Satan is saying that what you need is eternal youth. Why worry about salvation, death and hell when you could live forever in this fallen world? And so Satan has the world fixated on the futile pursuit of eternal youth. And in the meantime the most important need for eternal salvation is totally neglected. In the midst of taking the best possible care of your health, stop this futile pursuit of eternal youth and get your minds focused on the things God would have you to focus upon. If you are not a Christian, get your mind focused on your need for eternal salvation.

Do you know that there is a day coming when you will have eternal youth? God will give it to you, not Satan. You see, Satan is always making promises he cannot keep. He couldn't keep the promises he made to Eve. In *Matt.4:8-9* we are told that Satan told Jesus, "Worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world." But in *Psa.2:8* God the Father said to His Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance." Satan was making an offer to Jesus that was not his to make. There is a day coming when God will give to every human being eternal youth. But eternal salvation or the lack of it will determine where you will spend your eternal youth. So let me ask you, where will you spend your eternal youth, in heaven or in hell?

As Christians we need to wholeheartedly embrace what God has said about aging and death and set about to grow old in a graceful, sanctified and God-glorifying manner. There is something about the mind that you must understand. The mind does not age like the body. Regardless of your age, it feels like yesterday that you were in high school. It

feels like yesterday that you were married and your children were babies. This is one of the reasons why old men and old women want to behave like twenty-year olds.

But how often are you reminded that yesterday was twenty or thirty or forty years ago? When the weather changes, you are reminded. When you can't find your glasses because you need glasses to find your glasses, you are reminded. When you look at an inviting crunchy apple and you dare not bite into it, you are reminded. When, despite your best efforts, you can't memorize Ephesians, you are reminded that your yesterdays were a long time ago.

The psalmist embraced the concept of aging. He prayed in *Psa.71:9 & 18*, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.... And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me." Barzillai embraced his age and its limitations when he said to King David, "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 voice of singing men and women?" (*2Sam.19:35*).

Zacharias embraced the concept of aging and its limitations. He said to the angel Gabriel, "I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." (*Lk.1:18*). In *Phile.1:9* Paul wrote, "I am such a person as Paul, the aged." In *Tit.2:2-3* Paul wrote to and exhorted "older (aged) men" and "older (aged) women".

Some of you may think, "*Why is it the pastor is pressing upon us to behave like old people?*" I am not pressing upon you to behave like old people. I am pressing upon you to begin to think Biblically about this whole matter of aging and the challenges that come with it. I am pressing upon you to prepare your mind for aging and the challenges of aging. I am pressing upon you to begin to think your age, act your age and behave your age. You are not a teenager trapped in an aging body. Your children do not want you to be their peers. They want you to be their parents.

It is not without good reason that Paul exhorted “older men ... to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith....” (*Tit.2:2*). Note the word “sensible”. It is the word used to describe the Gerasene demoniac after Jesus healed him. We are told that after Jesus healed him, the people found him “sitting down, clothed and in his right mind.” (*Mk.5:15*). “In his right mind” is our word “**sensible**”. Paul is saying to older men, behave as if you are in your right mind. There is great divinely inspired wisdom in this exhortation. Far too many aging men behave as if they are the Gerasene demoniac.

Using Your Maturity.

This brings to our second point. Christians who are growing older should become a reservoir of experience and wisdom that you can pass on to those coming behind you, your children and their generation and, if God so wills, your grandchildren. As you grow older, you should be maturing not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. The young should be able to look to you for counsel and guidance. They should be learning from your experiences. They should not be thinking that you are an old fool like Nabal. (*1Sam.25:25*).

The psalmist said, “I have more insight than all my teachers; For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Your precepts.” (*Psa.119:99-100*). It is indeed commendable when the young are manifesting increasing wisdom, insight and understanding. But it is not commendable when your children are able to say, “*I have more insight than my father and more understanding than my grandfather.*”

The Bible commands you to be continually growing or maturing “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (*2Pet.3:18*). Paul says you should become “a mature man” in Christ. And he added, “as a result, we are no longer to be children.” (*Eph.4:13-14*). Childhood is something you leave behind. Being a teenager is something you leave behind. In *1Cor.13:11* Paul said, “When I was a

child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.”

The divinely decreed goal of birth is adulthood. There must be no regression from adulthood. When you regress, that is frowned upon. God frowns upon such regression. This is made clear in *Heb.5:11-14*. It is not natural for adults to behave like children. It is not natural for adults to eat baby food. And this is what was happening to these Hebrew Christians at the spiritual level. They were behaving like spiritual children and feeding upon spiritual baby food. And they received a stinging rebuke from the Holy Spirit.

Those who surround you and who cross your path should benefit from your experiences, your maturing wisdom, understanding and insight. Those who are suffering from trials, testing, diseases of one kind or another and other age related challenges should be able to benefit from your encouragements, comfort, and counsel. You should not be a lamp that is covered but a lamp on a lampstand giving light to all around you. (cf. *Matt.5:15*).

Turn to *2Cor.1:3-11*. (**read**). The things you go through in this life must not be useless non-learning experiences. In everything you go through you must see the hand of your sovereign loving Heavenly Father. As a Christian do you understand and have you embraced the truth that your sovereign loving Heavenly Father is ordering everything in your life, however big or small, for your good and in order to conform you to the image of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ? I used three key words here : everything, big, small. Do you believe that in your life those three words fall within the context of God’s sovereign control?

Jesus’ answer to us in *Matt.10:29-31* is an emphatic “**yes**”. Please turn to *Matt.10:29-31*. (**read**). A “cent” was the smallest copper coin in the Graeco-Roman world. A sparrow was sold for half a cent. Jesus said that a half-cent sparrow does not die without your Heavenly Father’s permission. The application is, “**you are more valuable than many sparrows.**” You are more valuable than many half-cent sparrows. To further

prove His point Jesus said that state of your hair is not outside God's sovereign control. God knows the number of hairs you have on your head and not one of them falls off without His permission.

The point here is that your Heavenly Father is in sovereign control over, concerned about and watching over even the smallest and least valuable things in your body and life, things you may not be concerned about. And if He is so concerned about the smallest and least valuable things in your body and life, how much more is He concerned about you as a whole person?

In our last study we saw that the command, "In everything give thanks" (*1Thess.5:18*), is a startling truth. *Rom.8:28* is also a startling truth. A literal translation of the verse says, "And we know that to the ones loving God, He works all things for good." Note the words "**all things**". God's hands are on the steering wheel. God is actively and continually working all things in your life, big or small, for your good. Do you believe this? You may not immediately see the good. But the heart of faith must lay hold on God and His promise and patiently wait to see the good revealed in His time.

In many ways *2Cor.1:3-11* is a frightening passage for pastors and other church leaders. There are things we go through in this life, not because we need them but because God is preparing us to help someone in the congregation. Let me put it this way. When seemingly unusual things start happening to me, you start praying and get ready. God is preparing me to help you. The Lord moved my heart to preach these sermons because of my wife's health struggles. But I know also that His leading has other purposes we may yet discover.

My Brothers & Sisters in Christ, God's dealings with you are sovereign, holy and loving. They are filled with divine purpose for you and others. You must not allow your life's experiences to be meaningless. You must not allow your life's experiences to be dead-end streets in your life. You must not allow your life's experiences to die with you. You must be open, ready and willing to share so that you can help, comfort and encourage

others. Notice Paul's openness. He said, "we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction." We do not want you to be in a state of ignorance about what we went through, how God dealt with us and how God delivered us.

Paul was not ashamed to say he was in despair. Paul was not afraid to say he felt that God was giving to him more than he could bear. Note Paul's language, "we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength." Paul was not afraid to say that he thought he would die from the afflictions that came upon him. Note again Paul's language, "we despaired even of life." Paul was not afraid to admit how much he needed the prayers of the Corinthians in this time of great peril. I am sure many of you can identify with the apostle here.

Are you in despair over what you may be going through? Are you feeling that God is giving to you much more than you can bear? Paul did not give the impression that it was a sin to feel that way. Are you afraid that your afflictions can break you, even put in you the sentence of death? Then sit at Paul's feet and learn. When we gather to pray get up and say, "*Pastor, I would like to speak to the church.*" And humble yourself before your brothers and sisters in Christ and tell them of your great need for their prayers because you are facing a great peril. Tell them of your trust in God. Tell them of your confidence in the God who is able to deliver you. But tell them also of your need for their prayers. Ask them to join in and help you with their prayers.

I want you to understand also that age does not mean that your service to God and the people of God ends. You may retire from your job or business but you can't retire from your service to God and the people of God. The psalmist declared in *Psa.71:17-18*, "O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come."

In the N.T. we have the example of Paul, the aged, who continued to serve God with diligence and faithfulness after he was released from prison. He told the Philippians that

his prayers are that he would be released from prison and that he would live on in this life because they need him. (*Phil.1:19-25*).

I want to say to you young people that you need those in this church who are becoming aged. You need their wisdom, insight, and understanding. Sit with them, talk to them, question them, tap into their reservoir of knowledge and learn from them and grow. Do not allow the arrogance of youth to rob you of the rich storehouse of wisdom and knowledge that sit in this church. The humble are both teachable and wise.

The world does not think Biblically about aging. As a Christian, you are not of the world. The world is in a desperate fight to find the cure to aging because the world is afraid of death. The sinner does not want to die because the sinner is not ready to die. So instead of the older generations being a help to the younger generations, the older generations are caught up in their own fight and trying to help themselves stay forever young. The Christian is not afraid to die. The Christian is ready to die. But the Christian chooses life over death in this fallen world and prays that the Lord would graciously grant him / her the allotted seventy years for Biblical reasons, not because of the desperate fight to hold on to youth.

As a Christian you have a self-less responsibility to the coming generations. *Heb.13:7* says the coming generations must be able to examine your life, consider the results of your life and be able to imitate the principles of your life and your faith. Are you living the kind of life that is worthy of imitation by the coming generations? Will you die happy knowing that your son is imitating your life? Will you die happy knowing that your daughter is imitating your life?

The song says : "Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful; May the fire of our devotion light their way; May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe; And the lives we live inspire them to obey." Is this your desire? Is this your prayer? It is inevitable that you will grow old and die. But it is not God's will that

you find some dark corner to wither away and die. May the Lord give you the grace and strength to be a shining light to the coming generations until the day you die.