



The Bible Speaks on Aging

By Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty staff – Jan. 24, 2006

One out of eight Americans is 65 years of age or older. Every day more than 5,500 Americans observe their sixty-fifth birthday. The number of aging people is expected to grow rapidly in the years ahead.

As the percentage of older people in the population increases, problems, attitudes, responsibilities, and care related to the aging become matters of increasing concern.

The Bible speaks on aging. There are many helpful Bible teachings on the nature of aging, characteristics of the aged, responsibilities of older people, and the care of older people.

I. Old Age Is a Blessing from God

Attitudes toward aging in general and toward elderly people in particular are especially important for Christians. The Bible teaches that old age is the blessing of God.

1. Old age may be the fruition of a moral life and an indication of God's favor.

"Follow the whole instruction the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess" (Deuteronomy 5:33).

2. Old age is a general part of God's purpose for a normal life.

"He took his last breath and died at a ripe old age, old and contented, and he was gathered to his people" (Genesis 25:8).

"David son of Jesse... died at a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor..." (1 Chronicles 29:26, 28).

"Then Job died, old and full of days" (Job 42:17).

3. Old age may be one reward of those who honor their parents.

"Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, because this is right. Honor your father and mother—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land” (Ephesians 6:1).

“If you walk in My ways and keep My statutes and commandments just as your father David did, I will give you a long life” (1 Kings 3:14).

“Gray hair is a glorious crown; it is found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).

II. Characteristics of Old Age

In the Bible, the aged are perceived as resourceful people with valuable gifts to share for the good of everyone.

1. Wisdom is an attribute of the aged who depend upon God.

“Happy is a man who finds wisdom and who acquires understanding... She is more precious than jewels; nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left, riches and honor” (Proverbs 3:13, 15-16).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by Wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life” (Proverbs 9:10-11).

2. Wise counsel to the younger is a duty of the aged.

“Hear this, you elders; listen, all you inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? Tell your children about it, and let your children tell their children, and their children the next generation” (Joel 1:2-3).

“Remember the days of old; consider the years long past. Ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders, and they will teach you” (Deuteronomy 32:7).

“In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to much wine. [They are] to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, pure, good homemakers, and submissive to their husbands, so that God’s message will not be slandered” (Titus 2:3-5).

3. The aged have continuing moral responsibilities.

“Older men are to be self-controlled, worthy of respect, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance. In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to much wine. [They are] to teach what is good” (Titus 2:2-3).

III. Resources for the Aged

Numerous problems—economic, physical, mental, and spiritual—confront the aged. Resources for meeting these problems are set forth in the Bible.

1. God has promised His abiding presence.

"Listen to Me, house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been sustained from the womb, carried along since birth. I will be the same until [your] old age, and I will bear [you] up when you turn gray. I have made [you], and I will carry [you]; I will bear and save [you]" (Isaiah 46:3-4).

2. God gives strength to endure suffering and infirmity.

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same resolve—because the One who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will" (1 Peter 4:1-2).

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for His body, that is, the church" (Colossians 1:24).

"So those who suffer according to God's will should, in doing good, entrust themselves to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

3. God gives deliverance from the fear of death.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Romans 8:38-39).

"...Look! God's dwelling is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

"Now when this corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

IV. Care of the Aged

Society has a moral responsibility to care for its aging members. Christians are to be especially sensitive to the needs of the aged and active in ministries to them.

1. The aged deserve kindness and respect.

"Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and with all propriety..." (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

"You are to rise in the presence of the elderly and honor the old... I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32).

"Listen to your father who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22).

2. Families have an obligation to provide for their aged members.

"Now if anyone does not provide for his own relatives, and especially for his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

3. Churches have special responsibilities for the aged.

"If any believing woman has widows, she should help them, and the church should not be burdened, so that it can help those who are genuinely widows" (1 Timothy 5:16).

Conclusion

Christian ministry to the aged involves caring for each elderly individual as a person created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and as a person for whom Christ cares (Matthew 25:31-46).

In the Bible, old age is considered the positive and good fulfillment of a life devoted to God. Both the blessings and responsibilities of aging are to be accepted with gratitude and in a sense of stewardship, "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment" (2 Timothy 1:7).

All Scripture is from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.