

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN RETIRE?

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In America we have made age sixty-five to be a sort of magic age. The last day of one's sixty-fourth year he is considered a normal human being but at the stroke of midnight that night he is finished for good and must be turned out to pasture.

The great tragedy is that at this point so many people want to retire not just from their jobs and making a living but from the Lord's work as well. "Oh! I'm just too old to serve the Lord like I used to!" older persons often say. Fine, but do you drive half way across the country to see your children or relatives? Do you work in the yard, digging and mowing?

It is strange that older people can visit Aunt Susie and visit the cemetery and go to garage sales all the time but they are too old they say to serve the Lord like they used to. Some older people expend far more energy walking and jogging each day than they would if they visited unsaved people or sick people or shut-in people or absentees from Sunday church!

Sometimes people fall back on that verse about how the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak as their reason for no longer serving the Lord. But even if the flesh is weak we are responsible to strive against the flesh and the Bible never tells us to quit striving against the flesh.

So many older people retire to a life of sitting in a rocking chair, watching TV, or knitting. I believe that a great many church sponsored senior citizen programs miss the boat as far as why they are set up to do. They sit around and play games and have fun and enjoy themselves rather than being productive and accomplishing something good and worthwhile. Many senior citizens make no contribution to the cause of Christ whatsoever.

As I have observed life in recent years I have been brought face to face with the question of "Should a Christian retire?"

DOES THE BIBLE SAY ANYTHING ABOUT RETIREMENT?

The answer in a word is NO! God's word says nothing about retirement, either from one's every day work or from serving the Lord. God's word simply doesn't deal with the matter of ceasing to work to make one's living when he reaches a certain age.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that it is wrong to retire from working to make a living when one gets older. Sometimes physical infirmities and just plain wearing out of the body requires that people retire from their livelihoods. Retirement in such cases is a matter of necessity. One thing we can say for certain is that it is wrong to retire from serving the Lord. Granted sometimes physical infirmities may require that we change to different tasks in the Lord's service but never does God's word say that a Christian can retire from the Lord's service! People who retire from making a living many times get the "retire syndrome" which thinks and often says aloud, "I'm retired from making a living so I can't work for the Lord anymore either."

God's word teaches that it is a blessing from the Lord when a person lives a long life. The fifth commandment in Exodus 20:12 says "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." A similar reference is found in Psalm 91:16.

Long life is a great blessing from God and God doesn't give us blessings in order for us to sit back and do nothing with them. Older people who have reached the magic age of 65 are just reaching their potential for effective work. They now have a lifetime of experience and wisdom from which to draw. Are they just to put this aside and forget it? Are they to just set it aside and thereby waste it?

Let me ask you older adults a personal question. Why has the Lord given you all that experience and knowledge? Surely not to just place it on the shelf and forget it! Older people have more experience of life and its problems, they have more knowledge of God's word, and yet too often they want to "Let the young bucks do it" when it comes to serving the Lord. I must admit I am not real fond of hearing older people speak about moving aside and letting the younger people do the Lord's work.

Did you know that many churches today force their pastors to retire when those pastors reach the magic age of 65? Sadly it is quite common for churches to pressure their pastors to retire when they reach that magic age of 65 no matter what physical or mental shape those pastors may be in and no matter how those pastors might feel about their continued usefulness. But there is certainly no scripture to support such a practice! At age 65 a pastor is many times just reaching his potential. He is just acquiring the wisdom and experience needed to go with his boldness and ability and people want to stop him cold in his tracks solely because he has reached that magic age and for no other reason.

Robert Browning wrote a poem which expressed the fact that the part of life before age 65 is just preparatory to really living one's life and reaching one's potential. The name of it is "Rabbi Ben Ezra" and stanza one reads:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life
For which the first was made.

Our question is, does God's word say anything about retirement? And the answer is NO! As far as I can determine there is nothing in God's word about a person retiring either from making a living or from serving the Lord.

ARE THERE ANY BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WHO SERVED THE LORD IN THEIR OLD AGE?

The answer to this question is YES! There are many examples in God's word of persons who served the Lord in very old age. Let us consider nine of these here.

First there was Moses who grew up in Egypt until he reached the age of forty. He was a shepherd in Sinai for the next forty years and then at the age of eighty he led the children of Israel out of Egypt and to the promised land. Moses didn't even begin his life work until fifteen years after the age most Americans quit today. And Moses served the Lord until he was 120 years old as he says in Deuteronomy 34:7.

In Joshua 13:1 we read, "Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the Lord said unto him, Thou art old and stricken in years and there remaineth YET much land to be possessed." Even though Joshua was old and well stricken in years God told him that there was great opportunity even YET because there remained VERY MUCH land to be possessed and VERY MUCH was the measure of Joshua's opportunity. God also told Joshua in verse 7 of this same chapter to divide the land they had already conquered among the tribes of Israel and this itself was no small task. Since Joshua was old and there was yet very much land to be possessed he needed to immediately go to work. He needed to get with it, to "make hay while the sun shined."

Another example of an old man who served the Lord is Caleb. Joshua 14:10-12 tells us that Caleb was 85 years old when he came to the land which had long ago been promised him as his inheritance. This land was on a mountain near Hebron and the mountain was the property of the giants, the Anakim who lived in great walled cities. Caleb was a great grandfather at this time.

What did he say when it came his opportunity to possess his land? He did not opt out like so many today by saying "I've done my portion of fighting over the years. I think I'll let the younger men do this." Caleb did not regard his old age as a defeat or an excuse. He said "GIVE ME THAT MOUNTAIN... if so be that the Lord will be with me then I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said." Caleb realized that it was not his great physical strength that would enable him to conquer the mountain but God's enabling power. He was a man of faith who had no confidence in the flesh. Faith has no hesitation because of the magnitude of the work which is to be done for the Lord. Giants and walled cities and old age make no difference.

Eli the priest in Old Testament Israel had a lot of family problems but he was still serving the Lord at the tabernacle who he was 98 years old. According to I Samuel 4:15-18, Eli was still serving at the tabernacle even though he was blind and old and overweight.

In I Kings 12:6-8, we read how King Rehoboam of Israel inquired of the counselors who had worked for his father what he should do about taxation and other matters in his new government now that King Solomon was dead. The scripture says that these counselors were old men. These were men with much experience and wisdom in matters of state and Rehoboam made a fatal mistake because he rejected the counsel of these old men and took instead the foolish advice of his young friends. As a result the kingdom of Israel split in two and civil war resulted.

Daniel served in the king's court in Babylon for seventy plus years the last several of which he served as Prime Minister for two different empires. If he was at least 15 years old when he began he lived and worked until he was at least 85 years old. Not only was he working in the king's court, he was serving the Lord as a prophet and preacher as well.

In Ezra 6:14, we read how the people of Israel led by the older men rebuilt the temple which had been destroyed many years earlier by the conquering Babylonians. Darius king of the Persians had sent them back to Jerusalem and under Ezra's leadership they rebuilt the temple. "And the elders (literal Hebrew is gray headed ones) of the Jews builded and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel and according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia."

As we move into the New Testament we find Zacharias the father of John the Baptist. He was an old man and yet he was still working in the temple as a priest serving the Lord. We read about this in Luke 1:5-8, 18.

John the Beloved Apostle was ninety-five years old when he wrote the book of Revelation. When he did this he was serving time in prison on the Isle of Patmos for his work for the Lord. God's word is full of examples of older people who served the Lord in their old age and who did not retire from the service of the Lord.

In our day President Ronald Reagan was an inspiration to all as he served in the highest office in the land doing the most difficult job in the world and doing it as the oldest man ever to do so. He was 78 years old when he finished his term of office. He was not even elected until after he had reached the magic age.

WHAT CAN OLDER MEMBERS DO IN THE CHURCH?

Christ, the head of the Church has duties for all his people no matter what their ages may be. Tragically our churches today have largely forgotten the God-given responsibilities of their older members. What can the older members of the church do to serve the Lord?

Paul tells us in Titus 2:3-5 that the Lord has ordained a special work for the older women in the church. Here the older women in the church are commanded to teach the younger women. "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 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."

Here are at least seven areas in which older women are to teach the younger women in the church. They are to teach them:

1. to love their husbands
2. to love their children
3. to be self controlled
4. to be pure
5. to be busy at home
6. to be kind
7. to be subject to their husbands

Many of our younger women are watching Dr. Phil and other secular pagans on TV as to how to live rather than studying and obeying God's word. Our older ladies are responsible for teaching these younger women to do the godly things listed by Paul in Titus two. The word *teach* in verse 4 means to train or to school the younger women. This may be done either formally or informally. This teaching doesn't have to be in a classroom situation. It can be official teaching or unofficial teaching.

Women ought to teach women. Older women are better fitted than men to teach the young women especially the young wives. Older women are to reach outside their homes and teach what they have learned to the younger women who are now experiencing things that the older women have already experienced. How can the older women teach the younger women these things? They can teach by example and by verbal instruction.

There are many other things which older members can do in the church. I Peter 5:5 tells us that they are to be leaders in the church because it says to the younger members, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder (aged persons)..." We cannot afford to wait on the younger generation to take the leadership in the churches today. Our whole population is growing noticeably older. Abortion and pressure for smaller families have raised the median age in our country significantly. Think of the time that is wasted in watching TV on which today's programs take God's name in vain and God's people and good in general are ridiculed and shamed! Why not use this time for Christ and his kingdom? Why not lead out in the church?

What can older people do to serve the Lord? They can *visit the sick and the elderly*. James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, *to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction...*" They can *visit the lost*. They can *visit the absentees from their church*. We ought to contact every absentee every week and we ought to visit every absentee. Older people have time to do this. And if they can walk or jog or golf or garden then they are still physically able to go out and visit for the Lord.

But what if a person is just physically unable to get out and visit any more? What can such a person do in the service of the Lord? One of the most important things he can do is to pray. Become a prayer warrior. Pray for the preacher, pray for the lost, pray for the missionaries, pray for revival, pray for the spiritual progress of the church, *pray, pray, pray*. Older persons can also use the telephone, write letters, and invite unsaved people over to their homes to witness to them.

Listen, God gives older people the strength both physical and spiritual to serve Him and to do the work that He gives them. Even in old age the saints of God abound in the work of the Lord, they run and are not weary, they walk and don't faint as says Isaiah 40:31.

Should a Christian retire? Where does God's word say that the older people are to retire from the Lord's work and let the younger people carry the load? I can't find it in my Bible! In fact, I find just the opposite! I find that older people with time on their hands ought to go to work for the Lord! Today's churches are filled with people with time on their hands and there is much that needs to be done in the Lord's service.

THREE MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS

1. If you are an older person and don't like the moral direction our younger generation is taking what are you doing about it? Criticizing? Why not obey God and do something positive like teach the younger people as to the right way to go?
2. Whenever a person cannot serve the Lord *in some way*, does that person any longer have a purpose in life? Is there any reason for him to remain on this earth taking up space and breathing air?
3. We cannot shame people into serving the Lord and we cannot really cause them to serve the Lord for any length of time if we act as cheerleaders pumping people up to serve the Lord! Either a person loves the Lord and wants to serve Him or he doesn't!