

# Getting Old: How Should We View It and Do It?

## What About “Retirement” and Our Christian Walk?

It has been said that nothing is more certain than death and taxes ... and while the certainty of taxes may be questioned, we cannot argue about the certainty of death in the flesh. The subject of death brings us directly to the topic of aging, for without aging there would be no death.

How often do we consider that the flesh was not originally intended to die? Yet, we have irrefutable evidence from Scripture that such is the case. We read of this truth in Genesis 2:16-17.

“And the Lord God commanded the man saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat **for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die**” (emphasis mine).

The implication of this verse is that were they *not* to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but instead eat of the tree of life, they would *not* surely die. This truth may be hard to accept, since we live in a world where everyone sins, even as Adam and Eve did, and we have never experienced someone never dying ... never aging. We know well the truth that “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20), but what is it about sin that initiates aging? Only by eating of the tree of life would Adam and Eve have lived forever (Genesis 3:22), even after their sin.

Nobel prize winner Alexis Carrel, in *Man the Unknown* (page 173), wrote the following about a colony of chicken embryo heart cells that were maintained in a medium of constant chemical composition, temperature, and air exchange.

“If, by appropriate technique, their [the cells’] volume is prevented from increasing, they never grow old. Colonies obtained from a heart fragment removed in January, 1912, from a chick embryo, are growing as actively today as twenty-three years. In fact, they are immortal.”

Other scientists have challenged Carrol’s hypothesis that cellular aging is not an inherent property of cells, but is attributed to external factors such as the accumulation of waste products within the cell. Thus, an entire scientific discipline has been built to try and explain why aging occurs. Not all of our cells can be protected from environmental abuses as can Dr. Carrol’s chicken heart, so in a world outside the Garden of Eden, wherein physical, psychological, and spiritual stresses multiplied when God’s laws were abrogated, the curse of death because of sin — the transgression of God’s laws (I John 3:4) — and the lack of access to the tree of life, which could have reversed this downward plunge towards death (Genesis 3:22), has led to the curse of aging, and eventually the death for every person who has ever lived.



***Aging in the flesh is inevitable, but was not the original design for mankind in the beginning.***

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### Causes of Aging

Some of these theories of aging are as follows.

1. The production of reactive oxygen species in the mitochondria (energy-producing organelles within cells) causes molecular damage to cells, which accumulates over time and

leads to impaired cell function or cell death.

2. The accumulation of “biological garbage” in cells over time reduces their effectiveness to carry out their designed functions, and the cells lose their effectiveness or die.

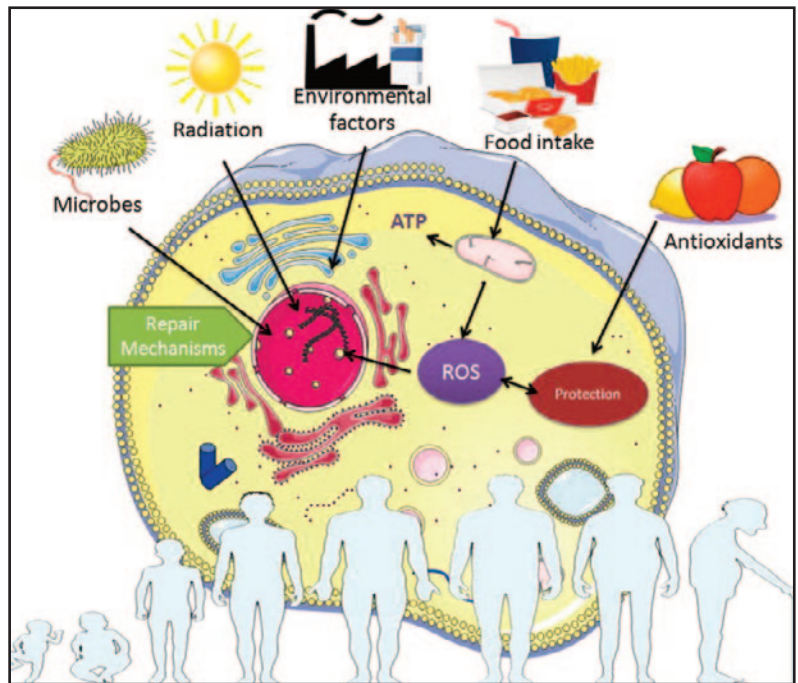
3. Various metabolic regulatory pathways are disrupted due to (1) and (2), which leads to chronic inflammation and other life-debilitating effects within cells.

4. Telomeres, the nucleoprotein structures that cap the ends of chromosomes and which protect the chromosome ends from degradation and fusion, become progressively shorter with each cell replication cycle. Thus, over time the cell loses its ability to function as programmed and dies. Telomeres are a type of molecular clock that counts cell divisions, and thus cell life.

5. Restriction of dietary intake is well-known to increase longevity, so a change in diet from high-carbohydrate to low-carbohydrate can extend the lifespan by many years. A lowered metabolism will thus extend cell longevity.

Nearly all current theories of aging have in common the fact that the fundamental cause of aging is the accumulation of molecular damage caused mainly by reactive oxygen species, though other toxic cell metabolic products are also implicated. Mutations that alter metabolic pathways and affect telomere length are also important. None of these theories begin with a consideration of the Genesis story of sin initiating aging, and with it the abuses reaped from lives stressed in body, mind, and spirit. that led to lifespans limited to less than 1,000 years before the Flood, and to greatly reduced longevity after the Flood when atmospheric oxygen pressure declined, solar radiation was altered due to a collapsed water canopy, rainfall rather than a mist to water plants and resulting soil leaching and erosion, and increased gravitational pull.

We were not meant to die. Being created in the image of the eternal Elohim, it was His



***The theories of aging are summarized in this figure, but are incomplete. We can be assured that aging was initiated with sin, and will continue as long as sin continues.***

original design for us to live forever.

### **Our Illustrious Vocations**

Given that we are destined to live but a few short years on this earth as physical beings — 70 years according to David, or if by strength a few more (Psalm 90:10) — we are clearly admonished to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as long as we live (I John 2:6), keeping His commandments in their spiritual intent (I John 5:3; Matthew 5:17-19). This fact we know well, and is never brought into question, for our whole lives are wrapped up in serving our Father in heaven with all of our strength (Matthew 22:36-40). In all things we strive to “... do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God...” (Micah 6:8), and “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

This vocation wraps up our entire vision of life as we serve one another with the gifts of the spirit given to us at baptism and the laying on of hands (I Corinthians 12). It also is a vocation that captures the attitudes we express to others, those fruits of the spirit which we know so well;

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatian 5:22-23).

Yet, in order to live in this world we must work in some way to serve our fellow man through some form of servile work. Indeed, our Creator commands us to do so.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:8-10; see also Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not

work in quietness and eat their own bread” (II Thessalonians 3:10-12).

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (I Timothy 5:8).

We all have taken particular courses in our lives to fulfill the serious responsibility of providing for our families. Many of us have spent thousands of dollars, and months or years, studying at trade schools, colleges, universities, or apprenticeships to learn a trade that will place us into a rewarding and well-paying position. We may be among the farmers, teachers, sales people, doctors, bakers, engineers, truck drivers, or any other vocation that makes the community and nation function. The labor we perform during six days of the week fulfills the responsibility our Creator gives us to provide for ourselves and our dependants.



***The concept of retirement holds a mystically desirable place in the minds of many, but in reality can lead to frustration, heartache, and early death for those who do not replace the tasks just left with something else that is fulfilling.***

work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they

## Then We Get Older

The years pass with incredible speed, it seems, and we suddenly find ourselves facing a future when we may not be able to continue our usual servile work ... or we may simply desire to change our work to something we have dreamed about. The word “retirement” makes its way into our consciousness, and we notice other aging people opting out of the work force at the programmed age of 65 — or even earlier for some — as Social Security, corporate pensions, 401 Ks, and other retirement plans kick in.

***retirement***, noun: the action or fact of leaving one's job and ceasing to work.

Today's social structure encourages us to view life as a three-part plan involving retirement:

- (1) Preparation for one's vocation at schools or apprenticeships, usually from the teen years into the 20s
- (2) Work years, from one's 20s to retirement in one's 60s
- (3) Retirement years, from age 65 to death

However, this three-part scheme is never mentioned in scripture. Rather, we are brought to understand life as an integrated whole, a continuum wherein we mature as a youth, are called by our Creator into a new life, baptized and have hands laid on us to receive the Holy Spirit, and then live the remainder of our life in service to Him. Service work is certainly a part of this new life — and a very important one — but it is not the main focus of our living. Our main focus in life is to love and serve God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). As the Scripture says, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

So, the idyllic vision poured out to us by advertising and other media may not be so accurate after all. As one TV advertisement put it,

“Thwack! A long and straight drive lifts from the tee box, soaring upward and eventually landing in the right-middle of the fairway. A great shot is met by approving looks from two women in the foursome and a high-five from his playing buddy. Ah, this is what retirement ought to be!”

However, we read in Romans 12:2,

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

### Retirement in the Bible?

Amazingly, retirement is mentioned only once in the Bible. At age 50 the priests were to cease their priestly duties which began at age

30 (Numbers 4:1-3). However, they were able to assist those who were ministering in the tabernacle in other ways when over age 30, perhaps to help guide the younger ones (Numbers 8:26).

With such a dearth of instructions regarding



***The only place in Scripture that speaks of retirement is the priests ending their laborious tasks at age 50. Even then they assisted as advisors.***

retirement in Scripture, what might God have to tell us about our work as we grow older ... understanding that our work in the faith and responsibilities of Godly living are supreme and ongoing. The word of God is not silent in this regard.

“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (Psalm 92:13-14).

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (II Corinthians 4:16-17).

“In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike

will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

“Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white, and let your head lack no oil ... whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:7-8,10).

“Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God” (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Bear fruit in old age ... energy and outlook renewed every day ... in the evening of life do not withhold your efforts ... do whatever you do with your might, performing the work you enjoy ... this sounds like life’s work, be it in direct daily service to the Eternal, or servile work for one’s family. The two ought to indeed be an uninterrupted continuum throughout life. Even one’s servile work ought to be done to please the Eternal, not oneself, for “... whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to man” (Colos-



*As an example of a righteous patriarch who continued working into his older years, Abraham married Keturah and died at the ripe old age of 175.*

sians 3:23).

### **We Must Always Be Striving Forward!**

Whether young or old, the Apostle Paul made it clear that we must move forward in life with the clear and unfettered goal of attaining the resurrection of the dead through service to our Creator, and to our fellow man ... for to serve our neighbor is to serve God (Matthew 25:31-46).

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

Not only that, but several of the patriarchs set excellent examples of working on into old age. Let us take a look at a few of them.

**Moses.** Moses was 120 years old when he died – killed before Israel crossed the Jordan River — and even at that age, “His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished” (Deuteronomy 34:7). He could have carried on his work many more years had God allowed him.

**Joshua.** When Joshua spoke the words recorded in Joshua 14:10-11, he was 85 years old and was “... as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war ....”

**Abraham.** The father of the faithful was 137 when Sarah died — he being 10 years older than her (Genesis 17:17; 21:5; 23:1) — and after that, despite his old age he married Keturah, brought forth more

children, and died at age 175 (Genesis 25:7). Abraham can hardly be accused of retiring from life's work in the least!

**Simeon.** This devout Jerusalemite who communed with God met the baby Jesus in the temple, and blessed and prophesied over Him. Simeon was old, and was told that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah (Luke 2:25-35).

**Anna.** At age 84 (some sources say 105), Anna continually prayed and fasted in the temple. She met Jesus, Joseph, and Mary in the temple and announced to those listening that He was the Redeemer of Israel (Luke 2:36-38).

**Job.** This amazing servant of God lost all that he had — his children, cattle, and wealth — only to be given much more after learning his lessons. God blessed him with double of what he had lost: 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, 1,000 female donkeys, seven sons, and three daughters (Job 1:3; 42:12-13). In order to maintain these blessings of great increase in his old age he had to not only work hard himself, but manage many livestock managers. Job likely lived to be 210 years old, 140 years beyond the restoration of his substance at age 70 (Job 42:16; see E.W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964, page 666).

More examples could be given of people of faith serving God and other people into their old age. Life did not slow down for them. True to the Scripture, they came to the grave at a full age, "As a sheaf of grain ripens in its season" (Job 5:26). It is certain that even though death can be viewed as an enemy, these people lived full lives without fearing death; they were released from this "... fear of death [for those who] were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:15).

### **What Shall We Do As We Age?**

So much is said in God's word concerning the glory of older men and women. Let's look at a few of these passages.

"Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding" (Job 12:12).

"I said, 'Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom'" (Job 32:7).

"Even to your old age, I am He and even to gray hairs I will carry you!" (Isaiah 46:4)

"The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31).

"The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head" (Proverbs 20:29).

"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:32).

The older generation deserves the respect of younger people (I Timothy 5:1; Leviticus 19:32), and needs to pass on the truths of the Almighty to the next generation (Psalm 71:18). This is sometimes difficult to do if one's children are dispersed across the country, with scant opportunity to get together physically. Internet sessions and telephone calls may help keep in contact, but are far inferior to actually being in their presence.

With the accumulated wisdom of age, an older person can markedly move others towards the ways of righteousness, by both example and words. He may also discover, as I have, that he can continue to serve in the work he has been involved with for years. Having gained the respect of co-workers and the community, an aging person may be in demand in his or her discipline due to accumulated knowledge and experience that is invaluable for a company. Even after 40 years of working as an agricultural research director, I still find that serving in this capacity is helping farmers transition to more

ecologically sound farming practices.

To maintain one's ability to serve, both as a purveyor of God's truth in teaching or in exercising other spiritual gifts, or as a workman in some vocation, it is imperative to maintain good health. That means "preventative medicine," as John so aptly stated in III John 2: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." Maintaining optimum health in this age of sedentary, indoor lifestyles, foodless foods, and toxic air and water can be a challenge. Carefully observing the laws of health becomes even more critical for older people, since the tendency is for one to slow down and grow lax in observing the laws of health. In brief, one needs to observe the following:

**(1) Eat right.**

Avoid processed and adulterated foods that are stale, sitting on grocery shelves for weeks. Eat organically-grown, fresh, and unadulterated fruits and vegetables, and clean animals, fish, and birds grown right.

**(2) Exercise regularly.** Walking, running, and strength exercises should be completed every day.

**(3) Sleep well.** I find that eight hours a night is about right.

**(4) Get plenty of sunshine.** Half an hour a day in the sun can do wonders.

**(5) Breathe plenty of fresh air.** Oxygen is essential for good health, so avoid polluted environments.

**(6) Think the positive thoughts of the spirit** (Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:8). Leave no room for negativity.

**(7) Avoid accidents by being alert at all**

**times.**

While following these laws of health does not guarantee that you will always be energetic and disease-free, you will improve your chances immensely in being able to serve God and others as a witness to the world of a better world coming, even into old age.

### Things Will Change

Life is a continuum for God's people. It ought not be divided into the three phases of preparation for work, work, and retirement from work. Rather, as life proceeds we are constantly becoming more educated about our servile work and, above all, or spiritual work to serve the Living God.

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen" (II Peter 3:18).



***Maintaining good health into one's older years is a goal that all of us should strive for. The key is to obey the laws of health.***

"... till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the manner of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

*stature = helikia, "maturity, in years or size."*

We may not remain in the same servile occupation as we get older — indeed, people oftentimes change jobs, or even their entire career direction as they age — but the concept of "retirement," defined as "the action or fact of leaving one's job and ceasing to work," ought never be a part of our living. We are given only so much time to live in the flesh. How we fill those

days is a critical issue, and whatever we do we must place our great Creator God first and foremost. Moses grew up in the Pharaoh's household in Egypt, helped administrate in the kingdom, then fled and became a shepherd, and finally returned to Egypt to become the instrument by which Israel was led out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

We must never retire from doing good (Galatians 6:9-10) even in old age, and continue to be a light to the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Even many of those outside the ecclesia understand that, such as Benjamin Franklin, who stated,

“Those who love deeply never grow old; they may die of old age, but they die young.”

We have a Creator who greatly desires that we complete His calling to the very end of our lives — for “He who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13) — and He will do everything possible to support our walk each day as we strive on against the works of the Adversary. This does not mean we will not suffer along the way, for remember that our Savior was “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows

(Isaiah 53:3-4) ... and we walk as He walked (I John 2:6). He suffered for us, leaving us an example of suffering that we should follow His steps (I Peter 2:21). As Paul said in Romans 8:17, we are joint heirs with Christ “... if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

I love the way that Paul puts things into perspective in II Corinthians 4:8-11.

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

As we age our mortal flesh may grant us more aches and pains, but we have the assurance that at the end our journey here on this earth we will be given a treasure stored up in the heavenly realm that will exceed our wildest expectations. Each day brings us closer to that incredible reality. That, my friends, is how I believe we should view aging.