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Before the Evil Day Comes

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The glory of young men is their strength, And the splendor of old men is their gray head. Proverbs 20:29

Solomon addresses the young when he says, *“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’”* (Ecc 12:1).

But this is also a statement addressed to the old—because, strange as it is, there does come a time when you have lived long enough that you might come to the point where you say inwardly and then outwardly, *“I have no pleasure in them.”*

Getting old is not for wimps—just getting out of bed the wrong way can adversely affect us. Quite honestly, no one really has much of a choice in the matter of aging. When I was in my 20s, I had an older brother in Christ say to me, “Don’t get old, Jamey!” Of course, the alternative to not getting old is getting dead, so I’ve simply remembered what he said without taking it too seriously. But as I have aged (and aging is a lot about perspective) I better appreciate what this good brother was trying to tell me. By the way, he lived to be 100.

As men age, we sometimes call them grumpy or curmudgeonly. I prefer the latter word because it makes people hesitate—it’s a word to make one pause to recall what it means. I feel ensconced in “curmudgeonly-ness” as my time on earth has gone on.

But what have I learned as I have gotten older, one day at a time?

I’ve learned time is not on my side, no matter how long I may live. Last week I preached the funeral of a good sister in Christ who was 101 when she passed. And that’s the thing—yes, she lived longer than most would expect to, but she passed.

“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” Hebrews 9:27

“The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty if we are strong— yet their pride is but labor and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. . . . So teach us to number our days, that we may present a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:10, 12 BSB)

Academically, we know about the brevity of life. As James eloquently and familiarly writes:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (4:13-14)

In this passage from James, his conclusion is quite unambiguous: “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (4:17) Too often we might feel and act like we have plenty of time to get things right with others and God himself, but the truth is, we don’t know what a day is going to bring (Matt 6:34)

We are all—young and old—getting older. This is an absolute of living. We know this, but do we live in understanding? As Solomon again reminds us, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecc 12:1).

Because the time will very likely come to us that, if we live long enough, we will not enjoy life as much because with time we gain wisdom through experience, and with wisdom there is "much vexation" (Ecc 1:18). Vexation is annoyance. And we all most likely know annoyance.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . . So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (2 Cor 4:16–5:1, 6-9) *Harding Street*

Why "Liberal" and "Conservative" Churches of Christ?

- by Robert Harkrider

During the past three decades many have asked this question. Some sincere brethren who have been caught up in one stream or another never fully understood, and many who were too young before have now grown to adulthood wondering why. It is therefore a good question worthy of repeated investigation. Labels of "liberal" and "institutional" versus "anti" and "conservative" have been used by some as a prejudicial tool to halt further investigation. Labels used as prejudicial clubs are to be condemned; yet the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are proper when used as adjectives to describe a difference in attitude toward Bible authority, and consequently, a difference in practices. As the years go by, the attitude underlying the division becomes more apparent. We are not separated because one group believes in benevolence and the other does not, nor because of jealousy and envy. We have divided over a basic attitude toward the Bible. A liberal attitude justifies any activity that seems to be a "good work" under the concept, "We do a lot of things for which we have no Bible authority." A conservative attitude makes a plea to have Bible authority (either generic or specific) for all we do - therefore refraining from involving the church in activities alien to that of the church in the New Testament. Briefly, the walls of innovations which have divided us are built in three areas:

WHO? Who is to do the work of the church? The church? Or a human institution? The church has a God-given work to do, and the Lord made the church sufficient to do its own work. Within the framework of elders and deacons, a local church is the only organization necessary to fulfill its mission of evangelism, edification, and benevolence (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15). However, a wedge was driven when some began to reason that the church may build and maintain a separate institution - a different WHO to do the work of the church. This separate institution is human in origin and control. It is not a church nor governed by the church - yet it receives financial maintenance from the church. Human institutions so arranged (such as benevolent homes, hospitals, colleges or missionary societies) may be doing a good work. But when they become leeches on the church, they deny its independence and all-sufficiency and make a "fund-raising house" of God's church.

HOW? How is the work of the church to be overseen? On a local basis with separate, autonomous congregations? Or may several local churches work as a unit through a sponsoring eldership? The organization of the New Testament church was local in nature, with elders limited to oversight of the work of the flock among them (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). We are divided by those who promote "brotherhood works" through a plan of inter-congregational effort with centralized oversight - an unscriptural HOW.

WHAT? What is the mission of the church? Spiritual, or also social? It is in this area that the loose attitude toward the Scriptures is becoming more apparent. Though wholesome activities are needed for all, the Lord died for a higher and holier mission than food, fun, and frolic. Let the church be free to spend its energy and resources in spiritual purposes (1 Pet. 2:5; Rom. 14:17) and let the home be busy in providing social needs (1 Cor. 11:22,34). *Collegevue Beacon, Columbia, TN*