

The Body Fitly Joined Together (4)

Heeding the Wisdom of the Older Members

In the first article in this series, we considered how the unity of the church is based on the Truth. In the second article, we delved into the sins of pride and envy, and how they so easily can tear apart the body of Christ. The third article talked about special needs members, how they teach us so many things, and how they play a vital role in the church body. In this final piece, we will examine the role of older members in the body. We will look at the relationship between older members, who are well passed their youth, perhaps with silver hair and a few grandchildren, and young people in the body.

Out of touch with what is going on; too old; out of step with my life. These are some of the judgments that are leveled on older members in the church. These attitudes lead to proud refusal to listen to authority and disobedience. This attitude is not surprising, even among Christian youth. It is not surprising, because, as an adult or young person, you likely remember or see these same thoughts arising out of your heart, as I know they arose in mine.

This attitude is based on a number of things. The first is our own sinful flesh. Our old man does not want the wise instruction of elders, nor does it desire their advice. As happened in the Garden of Eden, our flesh desires to follow only itself instead of heeding the command of God and those he has placed in authority over us. Proverbs 1:5, 7-9 speaks about a man's attitude toward authority: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels...The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck."

The world we live in also influences our attitude toward the older members. In certain respects, the world honors the grey head. According to laws in government, congressmen and high officials need to be a certain age to take office. The world recognizes that age brings experience. It is unusual to see CEOs of large companies steering such a big ship at a very young age. But, apparent from what we see in the world of broken homes and ruined teens, this same rule does not guide the home-life. Even in homes where parents care about their children and seek their good, young people despise that authority, which is not even saying anything about homes where parents could not care less about the welfare of their children. Instead, the thinking spread by teen magazines, television shows, movies, and books, is that the teenage

years ought not be limited or restricted by the instruction and watchful eye of parents. “Besides,” this media says, “your parents were young once, too, and you can bet they did the same things that they are telling you not to do.” Let us expose this rubbish of the world for what it really is: despise the authority of your parents, overthrow the good instruction of your elders, and follow the sins of your heart!

The actual time of youth also develops these kinds of proud and rebellious attitudes toward those in authority. As Proverbs 20:29 states, “the glory of young men is their strength.” No doubt young people are strong physically. David, for example, slew a lion, bear, and an uncircumcised Philistine in his youth. Young people are often mentally sharp. Teenagers and young adults are often optimistic and filled with confidence. This, too, can mean that we as young people reject the wise counsel of parents and other members of the church because we think we know better.

It may be that we do not recognize the experience which the older members of the body, especially our parents, have. The wrinkles lining their face should show us something of the struggles and afflictions they have faced; their grey hair should remind us of the battles they have fought; their strict warnings and admonitions must not frustrate us, make us angry, or discourage us, but must serve to build us up spiritually. If you are blessed to have your parents and grandparents yet on this side of the grave, listen to them. Submit to them. Honor them. Hear their instruction. Heed their warnings. Listen to their experiences.

This is not to say that their experiences replace biblical wisdom. It is only when experience has its foundation on the Bible that it is worthy to instruct others. It may be that wicked men or women have much experience in life. Perhaps they have grey hair and deep wrinkles from the afflictions and sorrows of their life. Perhaps they have learned their own lessons. Perhaps they even diligently talk to their children about living a morally good life. However, if the instruction is not based upon the wisdom of the Bible, it is utter foolishness. The value of the wisdom of our elders is not based simply upon their age or experiences in life, but how they have grown in biblical wisdom. Experience that comes with age, which is rooted in biblical wisdom, is invaluable for us. This wisdom shows its fruits: parents teach their children that the sins of youth can have terrible consequences, and that sin is truly bondage; the older members teach the youth of the church that sin is indeed frightening and must be avoided at all costs; they diligently teach the young people that true joy and freedom is found in following the commandments of God; they encourage the youth and remind them that their present and future sorrows are for their profit; they help the young people, amid all the little problems of life, from difficulty finding a job, to strife in relationships, to keep things in perspective of the cross.

Young people, do you and I seek advice and instruction from our parents and the older members of the body of Christ? One of the reasons that God, in his wisdom, has placed these members in the body of Christ is so that they might instruct us. Talking to our friends and seeking their advice certainly has its place, but do not ever underestimate the value of seeking the advice of those who are spiritually experienced. It may be that your parents, grandparents, pastor, or elders do not know the exact dynamics of your relationships, do not exactly know the nature of your problems at school or work, or do not completely understand the stormy seas you are swimming through, but one thing is for sure—their advice and instruction is based upon the timeless, changeless, and powerful Word of God. Although they seem out of touch, they are not because their teaching is from the Bible.

Young people must be encouraged in these things, but never should we ever brush aside our young people as a group of hopeless hooligans that need to grow up in order to be mature. I had the privilege of chaperoning at the past convention hosted by Hudsonville PRC. I and the other chaperones, and the staff at the camp, noticed the godly walk of the young people and their obedience to authority. A number of camps in the last few years have told steering committees that the young people were well-behaved, spiritually mature, and a joy to have around. May God continue to bless us with young people and young adults that obey their parents and all other authority. Parents, grandparents, and leadership in the church, be encouraged by this and continue to raise and instruct children that are receptive to such instruction and advice. What peace and joy the church body experiences when the young people and young adults walk in obedience to authority!

Let us, then, as young people and adults, pray for the body. Pray for her unity in the truth; ask God earnestly that you might have the strength to love your brothers and sisters in Christ in all humility; beseech God that he would give you a spiritual mind and heart to learn from all the family of God around you, regardless of age and human ability. God gives that people a sweet unity, a foretaste of the perfect unity that we shall have in heavenly glory. Psalter number 371, stanza one, expresses it well: “Behold, how pleasant and how good that we, one Lord confessing, together dwell in brotherhood, our unity expressing.”