

## The Dangers of Having Been Here Longer

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by Gary Henry

*"Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more." -- Ecclesiastes 4:13*

### **Just As There Are Special Challenges For Those Who Are Young In The Faith, There Are Also Some For The Older**

One of these is the pride that comes from comparing ourselves to those who are our juniors, spiritually speaking. *"May God help us to avoid thoughts such as these: But I have been here the longest. I have worked harder. Someone else is being favored"* (Teresa of Avila).

Pride is especially dangerous because of its subtlety. It can take many different forms, some of which are extremely hard to see when we are the ones who are guilty. If we think only of blatant egotism and arrogance, we may judge ourselves to be free of pride, but we need to think twice. It may be that some of the attitudes we classify as **"spiritual maturity"** are actually forms of pride, nicely disguised as the virtues of strength and wisdom.

For example, it's hard for experienced Christians to keep satisfaction with their experience from sliding off into the swamp of smugness. Perhaps we would never say so, and perhaps we're clever enough to keep others from knowing we think this way, but inwardly we may feel a warm, condescending glow of ever-so-subtle superiority when we think how little others have suffered. *"When they've been around as long as we have, they'll see things differently,"* we sigh, congratulating ourselves for being older.

If you think you're not troubled by this particular malady, ask yourself this question: how willing am I to be corrected by someone with far less experience than I? The patronizing, **"mature"** smile with which you listen to criticism from your juniors is probably a sign of pride, and you may need to listen to Solomon: *"Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more."* (Eccl. 4:13). Hasn't pride closed many an older ear?

Whether we're young or old in the faith, it's a good idea to minimize the amount of time we spend making comparisons, it really doesn't matter whether we are ahead of or behind someone else in life's experience. We won't have been in heaven for five seconds before we realize how absolutely silly such comparisons are. The only gap that matters is the gap between us and God!

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