

“How Can Dementia Turn a Mature Christian So Ugly?”

I am worried by the behaviour of Christians I know who suffer from dementia. I have frequently seen them displaying racism, sexually suggestive behaviour, and generally rude and difficult behaviour unthinkable to their pre-dementia selves. How does this tie up with the idea of a Christian being transformed within? I am bothered by the thought that sanctification is only skin deep, as it were—a learned veneer.

That’s an excellent question!

I too have seen incredibly godly, mature Christians heartbreakingly transformed by Alzheimer’s and dementia into ugly caricatures of their former selves. I believe the answer lies in the nature of the two kinds of “flesh” the Bible talks about. Our “new creation” is housed in a body of physical flesh that has been impacted by the fall and marred by sin. The fall makes our brains subject to decay and disease which leads to the tragic behavior you describe. The other flesh—not our physical bodies, but that part of us which operates in our own strength, apart from God (see Romans 7:18, 8:8, 13:14; Galatians 3:3, 5:17)—is never transformed, which is why we have to crucify it and die to self. The transformation of sanctification happens to our souls and in our spirits, but our flesh is unredeemable and still occupies a place in our physical bodies. Racism, sexually suggestive behavior, and rude and difficult behavior are all fruits of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Praise God, the flesh will fall away when we die or are taken up to heaven!

Hope you find this helpful.

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