

Lifelines

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Topic: *Living Old or New!*

Living Old, or Living New? By Ed Jordan

On February 5th, America lost a great song writer with the passing of Toby Keith. A friend played me Toby singing “Don’t let the old man in.” It was simple, yet profound. The backstory I heard was that he was playing golf with Clint Eastwood and asked Clint how he kept being productive in his 90’s. Clint told him: “Don’t let the old man in.” That phrase stuck with Toby, and he wrote the song based on that phrase.

The song describes the Old Man riding up on a horse, who tries to get you to focus on how old you are. One of the stanzas says: “Many moons I have lived, my body's weathered and worn. Ask yourself how would you be, if you didn't know the day you were born.”

The song has some profound ideas in it. Of course, denying that our physical body is not what it used to be, is denying reality. However, one’s productivity need not cease as we age; it just needs to be refocused and adjusted. As I age, I discover that I am being much more productive now, than I was twenty years ago. Why? Because I have honed my writing skills, and been given opportunities to produce columns and curriculum that affects thousands of people. At least, I try not to let my age take over my life.

But Toby Keith’s “Don’t Let the Old Man In” also reminds me of a profound Christian teaching, that takes the theme out of being a song about age, and turns it into a reminder of what Paul wrote about in Romans 6. Before a person becomes a Christian, they are living mostly by fallen humanity’s values and motivations. Life is usually, all about oneself. God is an afterthought, and sometimes downplayed to being unimportant.

That kind of life is characterized in the Bible as the Old Man. But Jesus came so that we could be a new creation in Him. Jesus died on our behalf, but then on that first Easter, He rose from the dead, defeating death once and for all for those people who turn to Jesus, ask for forgiveness, and receive Him into our life. When we do that, Jesus comes to live within our life, by means of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the power to break away from living only for self-indulgence, and instead live by the power of God, saying “No” to the destructiveness of sin, and “Yes” to living to please God and influence the world towards good.

This sets up a constant tension as to whether our old man, the anti-God self, will make today’s decisions for my life, or whether our new man, Christ living in us, will guide us in our decisions and motivations. Here’s what Paul recommended in Romans 6:16 in The Passion Translation: “Don’t you realize that grace frees you to choose your own master? But choose carefully, for you surrender yourself to become a servant—bound to the one you choose to obey. If you choose to love sin, it will become your master, and it will own you and reward you with death. But if you choose to love and obey God, he will lead you into perfect righteousness (i.e. right living).”

The story is told of a man who was a gambler, and made his money from people betting on which dog would win a dog-fight. The man had two dogs that regularly fought each other, but one time the white one would win, another time the reddish one would win. He always knew which dog

would win, and therefore won the bet every week. One day someone asked him, “How do you do it? Every week you seem to know which dog will win the fight, and you haven’t been wrong yet! How do you know which dog will win?” The man got a sly grin on his face, and whispered: “The one I feed that week, is the one that wins.”

So it is in our lives. We can feed our sinful self, or we can feed our spiritual self. The one you feed and empower, will win. Don’t let the old man in; and don’t let the old man win!

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