



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

Your Story - Living Submissively: **The Evil Autonomy** **Embracing Contingency**

GOAL OF THE STUDY

Critical to a life of discipleship is a willingness to live in submission before God and in interdependence with other creatures. These ideas do not enjoy wide popularity in contemporary western culture. Children are taught to be self-sufficient and dependent on no one. Bold individualists are applauded and emulated, and those who make their own way in defiance of all conventions are accorded the status of hero, but this is not the way of Christ or Christian faith. Jesus lived, and Scripture teaches, a life of obedience to the will of God in which autonomy is to be rejected. This study, then, has a simple goal: to destroy the myth of self-sufficient autonomy.

Participants should have no trouble compiling an extensive list of those who represent the American ideals of independence and autonomy. The worlds of sports, politics, business, and warfare are filled with such examples. Much of the lure of these ideas stems from our own sinful and selfish human natures. Since the first sin, the fundamental sin is always the same: a desire to be our own god and the lord of our life. Everything about the notion of the rugged individual pursuing his own goals and achieving his own success resonates with our fallen sinful nature.

ANSWERS

- 1 The systematic foundation throughout this lesson is the treatment of the bound will articulated in Luther's *Bondage of the Will*. Christian faith confesses humanity as profoundly helpless and utterly dependent. That this is seldom recognized and appreciated argues for a better understanding of this truth. Paul's succinct declaration of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is well known and the gospel implications readily grasped. Yet, for one striving to redeem himself, or at least counting on God to notice and appreciate heartfelt efforts and sincere accomplishments, the proclamation of divine monergism and human impotence is a word of sharp rebuke. One who has nothing to boast of is reduced to abject dependence on others, the very antithesis of the self-made man so cherished in the wider culture. The one who acknowledges salvation by grace through God-given faith alone is simultaneously confessing inability and crushing need—a charity case, indeed.
- 2 Notice the many ways that Paul stresses the activity of God and the passivity of the creation. We are the product of God's workmanship. God acts; we are acted upon. We are created, not self-generated or self-actualized. What we are happens when we are "in Christ Jesus." Only in relation to the incarnate Lord are we capable of the good works that are not ours to choose, but have been prepared in advance for us. At every turn, we are the receivers, and God is the author and actor.
- 3 Another surprising conclusion—at least from the standpoint of those who are considered enlightened and wise in this world—is that the meaning and purpose in any life comes only when doing what one was designed to do. The Creator determines the purpose and thus the path to a meaningful life. When we are doing what God put us here to do, striving to fulfill the first great commission by living in conformity with God's revealed will for his creatures

ANSWERS cont.

(more on this in the next lesson), then we are living truly human and meaningful lives.

- 4 Verses 18–21 are rich and potent words of gospel for troubled sinners, particularly for those seeking earnestly to find meaning in life. Through the paschal resurrection, the precious blood of the perfect lamb was revealed by the Father to be the means of salvation. It was God's eternal plan accomplished for the sake of us who were called to faith. In the incarnate Son, God does it all. This is wild and wonderful gospel at its best.
- 5 Peter offers a twofold answer. First, in verse 17, it is clear that the result of God's saving work is that we live rightly, "in fear" (in other words, in holy and faithful fear before God, striving to abide by his will) while we live in this life. We are justified to be fully human in our daily lives. Then in verse 22, Peter sharpens the application and makes explicit that our right living in this life will be centered especially on "sincere love of the brethren." In other words, to live according to God's plan, God's people will spend their time in this world caring for fellow creatures, in particular for other believers. This is what it means to be fully human; we do what God has intended for us to do.
- 6 In the process of convincing his readers in Rome that Christians should allow some latitude toward one another's views about what foods to eat or not eat, and what days to observe or not observe, Paul provides a statement with far-reaching applications. Verse 7 is clear; we do not live as isolated individuals cut off from others; we are bound to others and live with and for others. An individual, then, must consider how actions will impact others. Ultimately, of course, as Paul declares, we belong to the Lord, and must live our lives in the context of his directing will.
- 7 In Romans 6, Paul expresses the Christian life in terms of dying with Christ and then rising to "walk in newness of life." Paul's emphasis (in Romans 6) on death as dying to the old sinful nature, suggests that, Paul is stressing (in Romans 14) that all of life, including the life lived after one "dies for the Lord" (puts to death the old through baptism), is lived for the Lord, or according to God's purpose. The point in the context of this study is that all of life is enclosed within the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, and so we are bound always and in all things by his will and his way of life. As Paul puts it, "we are the Lord's." We do not determine our own course; we are bound by the course given us by our Lord. This is the definition of the Christian life.
- 8 Proponents of healthy lifestyles readily adopt the imagery of the body as a temple. Neglected, though, are the next words: "of the Holy Spirit." Rather than encouraging self-improvement and healthy eating and exercise (which are certainly worthy pursuits) Paul makes a rather startling point: we are not in possession of ourselves. We do not belong to ourselves. Our bodies and our lives are not ours to use as we see fit. We are not our own masters. We are not the architects of our lives. Bought at a price, we are not our own. We belong to God. So life only "works," and existence only makes sense, and our days have meaning only when we see, understand, and live according to God's design and intention for us. This is a fundamental principle in faithful discipleship, and one that is hard to learn in our self-centered, self-indulgent, self-promoting, self-actualizing culture.
- 9 I Corinthians 6, and the Scripture considered thus far in this study indicate that Paul does not say that to glorify God in one's body one must be in church singing praise or folding hands in prayer. Those uses of the body certainly glorify God, but more important is the realization that how a Christian uses the body in all situations can be to the glory of God. The criterion is simply whether or not the body is being used according to God's intended purpose and in accord with God's revealed will (i.e., the law). When we do what God has given us to do as human creatures, we honor and glorify God with our bodies. This includes mowing the lawn, making lunch for your children, kissing your spouse, and writing an encouraging email to a friend as well as being a good employee and a good member of the church.
- 10 This, of course, is the whole point of the present lesson. Humans are creatures. Creatures are dependent on their Creator for everything, including defining what it means to be human, the purpose of life, and giving meaning to life. Although our egos, our society, and Satan himself regularly tell us otherwise, willingly embracing our own creatureliness is one of life's greatest joys. To live life as God's creature is to live life to the fullest.