



CENTER FOR STEWARDSHIP

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

## INTRODUCTION

“The self-made man”  
 “The pioneer spirit of rugged individualism”  
 “I pulled myself up by my own bootstraps.”  
 “I don’t want your charity!”

These are just some of the notions that reflect the enduring American myth of the autonomous individual. It is part of the American psyche and experience. We venerate the heroes of our history, real or imagined, who embodied these ideals: Patrick Henry, Daniel Boone, Teddy Roosevelt, Charles Lindbergh, and virtually any character played by John Wayne, Sylvester Stallone, or Clint Eastwood.

### **What are some other examples of the self-made man and the ruggedly self-reliant individual? Why is the idea of the self-sufficient autonomous person so attractive?**

Of course, popularity or attractiveness is no indication of accuracy or truth. The Lone Ranger archetype is another instance among many when a cherished ideal of the American way of life completely contradicts the Christian faith. Believers often make the mistake of assuming that what makes a good American (or Canadian, or Mexican, or German, or whatever) is what makes a good Christian and vice versa. But, the Christian way of living, if embraced and practiced faithfully, will inevitably put one at odds with the prevailing culture and its ideas of truth, beauty, and greatness. This was immediately evident to all who heard Jesus teach, and the first Christians who celebrated their heavenly citizenship learned that they were hopelessly out of step with the world around them. Our world idolizes the ideals of independence and autonomy. Our Christian faith scorns both.

Since humans are by definition creatures, they are always living as contingent and derived beings. In other words, they are not independent beings that can chart their own course, determine their own future, choose their own lifestyle, or establish their own standards. As creatures, they must learn that they are dependent on the Creator. Humans would not exist apart from the will of the Creator, and they live only because they have been allowed to live. Knowing and doing the Creator’s will, then, is critically important for the creatures who realize that if they are not living as they were designed and intended to live by the Creator, then they are living falsely and futilely.

Not only is a human creature bound to the Creator and the Creator’s will for the way that humans are to be and live, but each human creature is bound to every other part of the creation. It is impossible for anyone to truly live in splendid isolation. Even hermits owe their very existence to the selfless giving of a mother. We all live within a complex web of interdependence with innumerable other creatures. Without the giving of those other creatures, we would simply cease to be. God put us into the creation to be part of the creation. Only as submissive participants in God’s great work of creation are we living as truly free and complete human beings. To a typical westerner living in the twenty-first century, this may sound like nonsense, or worse, an attempt of a repressive institution to enslave in submissive ignorance and spineless compliance. It is vital, then, that we learn what God’s word has to teach us about what it means to be human. When we grasp God’s answer, we also grasp the key to understanding ourselves and to living rightly in this world—which is what discipleship is all about.

## Q &amp; A

- 1 Read Ephesians 2:8-10. We recognize the essential truth taught in these verses and know that they bring comfort to broken people. How is it that these same verses might also be a source of conviction, discomfort, and even rebuke?
- 2 Verse 10 is typically cited in the context of our responsibility to go out and do good works, but what does the verse actually say about the roles of Creator and creature?
- 3 If we are the products of God's creative activity, and if our Creator has already planned and designed the things that we are to be doing as his creatures, then what does this say about the way that any person is able to find fulfillment and purpose in life?
- 4 Read I Peter 1:17-23. Peter makes a case similar to that of St. Paul. How does Peter offer an explicit proclamation of the gospel?
- 5 What, according to Peter, is to be the outcome or result in our lives of God's redemptive work on behalf of the entire creation?
- 6 In Romans 14, Paul is addressing the issue of divergent views among Christians regarding eating certain foods and observing certain days. How does Paul's argument in verses 7-9 provide a foundation for thinking rightly about a person's responsibility toward other creatures?
- 7 Given Paul's penchant for intentional ambiguity, and in light of Romans 6:3-5, what might the apostle have in mind when he speaks of "dying" here in chapter 14? What difference does this make for the way we think about the Christian life?
- 8 In I Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul makes a similar argument with a phrase that has become quite popular when taken out of context. Read the text. How does the popular understanding of "your body is a temple" differ from Paul's point?
- 9 What does it mean, practically, to "glorify God in your body"?
- 10 Creatures are derived, dependent, and contingent. How would you explain to someone else how this reality about our creatureliness is a good . . . a very good thing?

## PRAYER

***Thank God for the work of Christ and the grace that brings you back into a right creaturely relationship with your Creator; confess the ways that you succumb to the lies about human autonomy and self-sufficiency; and then ask God to help you learn to love being his dependent creature.***