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BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

Autonomy Why Can’t We Give it Up?

Just a Thought · Colossians 1:17

By John L. Wheeler

We may acknowledge our dependence upon God while still insisting upon our own way.

That contradiction deserves our attention, especially as Christians. We confess that God created the universe and sustains everything within it. We acknowledge His authority over galaxies, atoms, and every unseen particle. Yet we sometimes speak and act as though our own will occupies a place beyond His sovereign rule.

How can we believe both things?

Scripture declares of Christ:

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17, ESV).

All things includes us. Our existence, our next breath, and our ability to make a decision depend upon Him. If one molecule could exist and act wholly independently of God, something within creation would lie beyond His sustaining power and sovereign rule. We cannot claim that independence for ourselves simply because we possess the ability to choose.

Our choices are real. We deliberate, desire, obey, and disobey. We bear responsibility for what we do. But meaningful choice does not make us self-governing creatures whose existence and actions fall outside God’s authority. We choose according to the strongest inclinations of our hearts, yet even our hearts are not independent of their Creator.

“he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.” (Psalm 33:15, ESV).

Disobedience is not independence.

An unbeliever may openly reject God’s authority and claim the right to determine his own way. The Christian’s position is more perplexing. We confess that we belong to God, yet resist His claim upon particular areas of our lives.

We want His guidance, provided it leads where we intended to go. We ask Him to bless our plans while hesitating to place those plans at His disposal. We acknowledge our need for help but struggle to relinquish the final decision about what our lives should become.

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Scripture confronts that claim:

"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, ESV).

Paul addresses bodily conduct, grounding obedience in our belonging to God. Redemption reaches into ordinary living. The One who purchased us has a rightful claim upon how we live.

Why, then, do we struggle?

Sometimes we are afraid. We wonder what submission might cost, what God might remove, or where He might lead. Sometimes pride resists correction. Sometimes we love a particular desire more than we wish to admit. We may trust God with eternity while struggling to trust Him with tomorrow.

Our insistence upon autonomy exposes something about our confidence in His goodness.

Jesus shows us willing submission:

"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:42, ESV).

In Gethsemane, His obedience was neither casual nor painless. He brought His anguish before the Father and willingly submitted. His example does not make our decisions meaningless. It teaches us where our desires belong: before God, yielded to His will.

The familiar song title "My Way" captures an ambition our culture often celebrates. But is having our own way the testimony we most desire to leave? Would we rather be remembered for defending our independence or for learning to trust the Lord who has been faithful to us?

We do not make God sovereign by surrendering. He already is sovereign. Submission is our acknowledgment of His authority and our willing response to His goodness.

Nor does our frailty require us to invent an exception to His love. Romans 8:39 assures believers that nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. We, too, belong within that creation.

Our security rests in Him.

The question, then, is not whether we can establish a private kingdom beyond His reach. We cannot. The question is whether we will continue resisting His rightful rule or discover the peace of entrusting ourselves to Him.

We have every reason to bring Him our plans, our fears, and our desires.

We have no reason to demand independence from the One who sustains us.

Just a thought

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