

What We Believe – 3. Humanity

We believe in: *“The Creation of Man in the image of God, his sin and fall, the consequence passing to all humanity, extending to every part of human nature and resulting in the universal guilt of mankind before God.”*

A) Introduction

The Reformer John Calvin wrote, *“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”* Without a correct knowledge of ourselves we cannot understand the Gospel, nor the world around us. A clear understanding of the biblical teaching on humanity is especially pertinent in the current cultural climate, where so much of the moral revolution that is ensuing stems from a rival view of human nature.

B) We are Creatures

Genesis 1:27 states three times that God created humanity. As creatures, we have not come into existence by chance or cosmic accident. Rather, we have been intentionally and purposefully placed upon this earth. Consequently our identity (who we are) and our purpose (why we’re here) are truths that come from God, not us. We do not discover these things by looking within ourselves – why would we know better than the One who made us? Rather these things are revealed to us.

The existence of a Creator also implies the existence of a created order – which God describes as *“very good”* (**Genesis 1:31**). There is a set pattern of limitation imposed upon the creation by the Creator Himself. A right response is to seek to live in harmony with that created order, instead of in rejection of it. We are “creaturely”, not natural.

C) We are Image-bearing creatures

“God created man in his own image...” (Genesis 1:27). Of all the creatures, mankind alone is made in the image of God. Our purpose for existing is therefore vitally bound up in relationship with God. Unlike the other living beings on planet earth, humans are spiritual creatures – made for relationship with God, who is Himself Spirit. In this regard we are like angels. However, not even angels are made in God’s image.

In the ancient world, kings would be referred to as images of the gods. They were seen as ruling over a nation on the gods’ behalf. It’s likely that the phrase in **Genesis 1** has a similar notion, since God places the references to making man in His image immediately before statements of granting them dominion over the earth (**Genesis 1:26, 1:28**, ref. **Psalm 8**).

What makes humans unique from animals and angels is that we are stewards of the earth, vice-regents representing God. We are here to spread the glory of God throughout the world, by filling the earth with godly humanity. Since all humans are thus made in God’s image, every human possesses a God-given dignity that cannot be taken away.

D) We are Gendered image-bearing creatures

“...male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) Man alone is incapable of fulfilling the role for which humanity is made; man alone cannot fulfil the responsibility of an image-bearer. Man needs woman, as woman needs man, in order to live as God has designed us. The early chapters of the Bible emphasise both the equality and distinctiveness of man and woman. Woman is the complement of man, not a clone. What man requires is one who corresponds to him (**Genesis 2:18**).

Man is made from the ground, brought to the ground and given the task of working the ground. By contrast, woman is made from the man, brought to the man and given the task of helping the man. In general

terms, man is to work by subduing the earth and woman is to work by establishing godly community. Together they will satisfy their calling to be image-bearers.

Gender distinctiveness is an aspect of the limitations of the created order. It is a good thing, although we must be careful not to equate societal stereotypes with biblical requirements. One vital aspect of these limitations is that man's body is designed for sexual relationship with woman within the covenant of marriage. This act of physical intimacy strengthens the bonds of marriage – the centre of community – and leads to procreation – the growth of community. Where this created order is violated, harm to community will inevitably ensue.

The Bible's teaching on gender distinctiveness does not imply that only as a married couple can one fulfil the calling of an image-bearer. Today the earth is to be filled with godly humanity through the making of disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

E) We are Embodied gendered image-bearing creatures

The man (*ha adam*) is made from the dust of the ground (*ha adamah*). We are physical creatures strongly connected to the physical world around us. Just as man becomes a "*living creature*" through the creative act of God (**Genesis 2:7**), so the land-based animals of **Genesis 1:24** are called "*living creatures*" and come from the ground.

Our embodied nature is essential to us. It is not a part of us that houses another part (the "soul" or "spirit"). The Bible does not present humanity as split into two distinct entities where the "soul" or "spirit" is the "real me". The body is "me" considered from the perspective of the physical world. The spirit/soul is "me" considered from the perspective of the spiritual world. We are always both together – thus physical death, at which we cease to have any relationship with the physical world but continue to relate with the spiritual world, is a strange concept that violates our nature. For a Christian it is a good thing to be "*away from the body and at home with the Lord*" (2

Corinthians 5:8), but this is an existence that is beyond our understanding or imagining, and it does not imply any moral defect in the body.

Neither the body nor the spirit is more “me” than the other. We must beware of dualistic belief systems that play one off against the other. In many contemporary issues of moral controversy, it is taken for granted that the “sense of self” is of greater significance than the physical body. This position is taken to its logical extremity in the transgender movement, where personal feelings are considered more reliable indicators of truth than basic biology.

F) We are Fallen embodied gendered image-bearing creatures

Man and woman rebelled against God (**Genesis 3**), rejecting His rule and His revelation. Since Adam was created to be a representative head of the human race, his sin resulted in the “Fall” of all humanity (**Romans 5:12**).

The corruption of sin has affected every aspect of our being. Our thinking is rendered “*futile*” (**Romans 1:21**) in that we cease to be capable of correct knowledge of God or of ourselves. Our desires entice us towards sin (**James 1:14-15**), and these sinful desires lead to corruption throughout the world (**2 Peter 1:4**). Worse still we are enslaved in this condition (**John 8:34**), incapable of refraining from sin.

What mankind needs is regeneration – to be born again and created anew (**John 3, 2 Corinthians 5:17**). This can only happen through the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:45-49**). He truly lived as no human has, to the praise and glory of the Father. He resisted the temptations of Satan (**Matthew 4:1-11**) and died a sinner’s death in our place (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).

Though mankind is fallen, we can be redeemed and filled with God’s Holy Spirit.