

WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?

Know Thyself
Genesis 1-2

INTRODUCTION:

As a child I was fascinated with Greek Mythology. The gods of Olympus—Zeus, Apollos, Athena. One of the famous myths is about the demigod Prometheus who prevented Zeus from destroying humans and as punishment was chained to a mountain.

And, because Prometheus now had a lot of time to think about his situation, he begins asking questions: what are the gods? Is his punishment fair? What right did Zeus have to punish him?

And as he's asking these questions another demigod named Oceanus says, "Prometheus, know thou thyself." In other words, you will never understand anything until you know what you are, who you are, and where you are in the order of things.

That's the big idea of this sermon series. As Biblical Christians we believe in a revealed faith. God, in Scripture, has told us the order of things where and how we fit into it. And, the only way you'll ever make sense out of life is not by creating your own order... it's by receiving and living within the order that the Creator has made.

And the first place that every Christian should go to understand the order that God has created is Genesis 1-2. It's before the Fall of the human race in Genesis 3. Throughout history, theologians have referred to this as Creation Order. The order that God established in the beginning.

So, for the next 6 weeks we'll keep going back to these two chapters of the Bible to answer 6 questions:

Week One: What is a Human Being?

Week Two: What are our Bodies?

Week Three: What is Gender?

Week Four: What is a Man?

Week Five: What is a Woman?

Week Six: What is Marriage?

Christian, especially those of you who are new to Christianity, or simply returning to the faith of your childhood. My prayer is this will be a solidifying sermon series, an anchor so to speak for you as the waves of moral insanity threatened to knock you off course.

Non-Christian, I'm aware that most of what I'll have to say in this series will run against the flow of the cultural current, and perhaps your own understanding. While I intend to be bold, and at times even offensive to contemporary sensibilities, I will try my best to avoid needless offense, or offense for offense's sake. My prayer for you is that you'll recognize that without an objective Creator, standing outside of creation and dictating his will to creation, you have no hope for stability in your moral sensibilities. And I pray that you will see the Christian worldview as the most fulfilling, joyful, satisfying understanding of reality there can possibly be. I pray our church embodies that joy as you observe our worship. I pray our hospitality to you will communicate our desire for your joy. And, more than anything else, I pray that you will see, in Jesus, that the God who condemns sin is ready and eager to forgive and welcome sinners so that he might cleanse them.

I pray this series is utterly basic. Utterly simple. Utterly applicable. So, let's ask the question:

What is a Human Being? And Genesis 1-2 teach us 3 truths about what a human being is:

- Human beings are created persons.
- Human beings are a body and soul unity.
- Human beings image God

1. HUMANS ARE CREATED PERSONS

26 Then God said, "Let us **make** man in our image, after our likeness.

27 **So God created man** in his own image

You are a created being. You are a personal being. This is in contradiction to the wisdom of secularism which says you were not created, but rather you are here by chance for no reason whatsoever. It also contradicts eastern religions which say that you are not actually here, because you are not you.

Against both the secular West and the pantheist East, the Scriptures declare that we are products of God's plan and design, his mind, and his will. We are not here by accident. Our appearance on the earth isn't a chance appearance. We are created.

This is such a simple, basic truth—but as God's people, declaring his truth to the world, we can't rush past it.

The reason we have hands instead of fins, lungs instead of gills. The reason our mothers carry us in the womb instead of laying

eggs. The reason we have rational capacities instead of pure instinct. All of this is by design. It's by God's plan.

And because we are his creatures—we are completely dependent upon him. He is the authority over us, period. To be a creature means to be dependent instead of independent. This means that everyone is dependent upon God—whether they know it or not, whether they acknowledge it or not. If God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, then there is not one nanosecond in which we are not utterly dependent upon him.

Our message to ourselves, and to the world is that we all, by virtue of creation, belong to God. The earth is his. The cattle on a thousand hills are his. He is the maker. We, and the people around us are what he made.

Friend, because God is our maker, we owe him. We owe him everything. As the New City Catechism says:

We owe God... Personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience; that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves. What God forbids should never be done and what God commands should always be done.

This Creator/Creature divide is crucial to understanding how to live this life. It means that we are not God. You are not God. Your family isn't God. The government isn't God.

So, the Bible comes right out the gate saying, a human being is a creature.

And Genesis 1 also teaches us that we are personal beings who possess freedom. We aren't just created beings who depend upon God, we are personal beings that God has imbued with creaturely freedom.

And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In speaking directly to Adam and giving this commission to rule and subdue the earth the text of Genesis implies that humans aren't just creatures who are to be subject to the Creator. Humans are also free creatures. In other words, we have a mandate—a destiny. And we are to make decision about how to accomplish that destiny. We are individuals who possess a kind of independence. We can and should set goals and then make plans and take actions to reach those goals.

The goals are that the whole earth would be full of human beings. In a moment we'll see that we are made in God's image. This means that the mandate to fill the earth—to be fruitful and multiply is a command for human beings, who are made in God's image to produce even more image bearers so that the world will be full of the image of God.

So, we are both creatures who are utterly and totally dependent upon God, and yet we are personal beings who have a relative freedom and independence. We make choices and are held responsible for them.

Anthony Hoekema says,

"this is the central mystery of man: how can man be both a creature and a person at the same time... to be a creature means I cannot move a finger or utter a word apart from God; to be a person means that when my fingers are moved, I move them, and that when words are uttered by my lips, I utter them. To be creatures mean that God is the potter, and we are the clay; to be a person means that we are the one who fashion our lives by our own decisions."

Because God has given us creaturely freedom, we are responsible for what we do. We are responsible for the actions we take. Other things may influence how we behave for sure:

- Empty Stomach, lack of sleep, long day of work.
- The culture we grow up in, the place we are born, the family and the family values we learn.

We will not deny that some are providentially born into healthier circumstances... but we will never affirm that your environment is ultimately determinative. We will never tell anyone that they cannot, by God's grace rise above their circumstances.

Our culture needs a healthy dose of individual responsibility. We need to know our place before God and accept it. You and I need to encourage personal responsibility. Encourage personal vision action. Your life isn't stuck in a deterministic universe. Take ownership and responsibility for your life.

Friend, not only does the Bible teach that we owe God personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience. It also teaches that none of us have loved God in that way. None of us have kept all of his commands. Isaiah says "we all like sheep have gone

astray.” And... because we are free... we bear the responsibility of ignoring God and his commands.

We do believe in the doctrine of original sin—that we inherit Adam’s guilt. Adam, the first man acted as representative for the entire human race. And when he sinned, God thought of us all as having sinned in Adam. But that doctrine isn’t an excuse. Because we inherit Adam’s guilt doesn’t get us off the hook. No, we too are complicit in Adam’s sin. We agree with it and go along with it. Just as Adam turned away from God, we have turned away as well- and we will be held personally responsible for it.

Friends, the good news of the Gospel is Romans 5:18

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. **19** For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

Just as Adam was our head in the garden—Jesus Christ is our representative head at the cross. His personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience to God is freely given to all those who put their trust in him.

To be a Christian means that you no longer are represented by Adam. He is no longer your head. Instead, because you have put your faith in Jesus death and resurrection—he is now your head.

2. HUMANS ARE A BODY & SOUL UNITY

Genesis 1 and 2 show us that when God made humans he made them as creature who have both physical and

nonphysical aspects of their existence. We see this most clearly in Genesis 2:7

7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

We see that God “formed” the man from the dust. It’s the idea of an artist forming a piece of art, like a potter forming clay into a vessel.

Another way of stating this point is: **A human is a whole person.** Though we are constantly breaking ourselves down into body and soul, the Bible constantly teaches us that we are a unity.

If you’ve been in church long enough you’ve likely heard Christians arguing over how many parts there are in humans, whether we are body and soul, or body, soul, and spirit. And there are several passages that highlight different dimensions of the human creature.

So, we are to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

The Word of God is quick and powerful and cuts to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. Those passages aren’t giving you an anatomy course of the various components in a human.

If you read the entire Bible, especially Genesis 1-2, you’ll see the Bible places emphasis not on the component parts of humanity such as body and soul, but on the unity of the human person. You can’t break humans down into an ingredient list like a recipe. We are unified wholes. And yet the

Bible does highlight both physical and nonphysical experiences.

So, human beings are bodies. There is a distinct physical aspect to our existence. Our bodies allow us to examine and interact with the world God made. We have 5 senses. We can hear singing, smell roses, taste vanilla, touch cashmere, and see rainbows. Also, because we have bodies we are susceptible to physical injury or disease. We may break a bone and need to have it set. Or we develop an ear infection and need antibiotics.

There is also a distinct nonphysical aspect to our existence. So, it's one thing to smell the physical particles of vanilla in the air—but we also experience feelings about vanilla. Those physical properties can call to memory the cake on our wedding day, or the smell of Christmas cookies from our childhood. Smells can evoke emotions like joy, nostalgia, or even sadness.

This means that while our physical bodies can be injured and need a doctor, our souls can be injured and need forgiveness, confession, counselling, and prayer.

So let me give you some applications:

First, there are physical ailments that require physical remedies. If you get cancer, take medicine. If you break a bone, have it set. Do not come to the church with a broken bone and say, "I know the answer is prayer." We will pray that you go to the hospital.

Second, there are spiritual ailments that require spiritual remedies. Silent bitterness or anger that blows up requires

confession of sin, both to the person who you sinned against and to the God who they image.

And third, many things in life require a combination of both. Some of you struggle with depression or panic attacks, and sadly many Christians act as if the only thing you need is prayer. They are denying that you have a body, and sometimes your body chemistry can be off and medicine can help correct it. The secular psychologist may give you some pills, but they cannot address potential sins that are contributing to your depression—and for that you need the Scriptures, prayer, the communion of the Saints, the Lord's Supper, and some pastoral counseling.

When Elijah was running for his life from Jezebel he told God he wished that he would die. How did God heal him? He told him to sleep. He made him eat a meal and then he gave him spiritual truth. God ministered to his physical or bodily needs, and he also ministered to his spiritual life.

We are psychosomatic beings. Psyche- Greek for the soul and Soma- Greek for the body.

Parents, some of you are attending well to the physical needs of your family, but are you neglecting the needs of prayer, confession, and forgiveness? Are you leading them to the Word of God? Are you making worship on the Lord's Day a priority? Dad's it would be great for you to grab coffee with another spiritual man in the church and ask for some help. Mom's, invite another mom over one evening and share your struggles.

Others of you are providing well for the spiritual needs. You are praying with you family. You're getting them to church—but God is calling you to not neglect the physical needs of the

family either—and I don't mean just working hard to earn a paycheck. I mean physical touch. Hugs and kisses. When is the last time you look your spouse or child in the eyes, told them you love them and embraced them? God gave your children ears so they could hear your love. God gave you arms so your spouse can know your embrace.

Growing up, no matter how busy dad was, no matter how quickly he needed to get out the door to a meeting he would stop at the door and say, "There's always time for hugs and kisses."

So, you must keep in mind that we are a body soul unity. In a sense, everything is physical because we are physical, and everything is spiritual because we are spiritual.

This is why our church supports both missions and mercy ministries. We know that the chief mission of the church is to confront people with the gospel so they can be saved from their sins—but this doesn't mean we don't care about the physical well-being of our neighbors as well.

Our church gives heavily to Charlotte Rescue Mission, and Christian Adoption Agency, and Baptist Children's homes. None of those are primarily evangelistic ministries—yet we support them. Why? Because God made our bodies. He cares about our spiritual and physical life. The Son of God took on flesh and was raised in the flesh. And one day, at his return all of our bodies will be healed. So, we demonstrate faith in God that the bodies he created are good by serving the physical needs of our neighbors.

It's why, if you get sick at LWBC we don't just pray for you—we send you a bunch of food.

3. HUMANS IMAGE GOD

Genesis 1:27... memorize it.

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

"Man does not simply bear or have the image of God; he is the image of God." Herman Bavinck, Dogmatics

There's much debate over what exactly the image of God is.

- Rational?
- Emotional?
- Moral?
- Relational?

Grudem – man is like God and represents God.

We Image God By Existing

Because we image the Creator—we don't have to do anything to have significance or meaning or value. By simply existing we have value.

Every single person you meet bears God's image. And this means every single person you meet possesses inherent dignity and worth.

It means we must never treat another human being as an object to be used. Even the slightest word, spoken in hate is a horrific evil.

C.S. Lewis once said:

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit— immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.”

Or, as Rachel Jankovic put it:

A unique human life has unique human value. It does not need to do anything to have value. The value is found in what God did by creating it.

Here’s why this is so important. Our world is constantly saying, “Go find yourself.” It’s your job to “create who you want to be.” Look around. This message is everywhere. You write your own narrative. You are what you do. Your choices define you. So, go and accomplish your identity.

Now, I shouldn’t have to tell you there are some major pitfalls in this theology of the self.

First, if it’s your job to find yourself—what if you never do? What if you search your entire life and never find the person you want to be?

Second, once you find yourself, what if it isn’t nearly as satisfying as you thought it would be?

Third, what if writing your own narrative leads you to make choices that are prohibited by law?

Fourth, what if you are someone who wasn’t born with a fully functioning brain? Or someone who wasn’t born with legs? Or someone who was born with Downs Syndrome? What if you physically can’t write your own narrative?

You see, if you try to write your own narrative you’re like Wiley Coyote chasing the Road Runner off a cliff. You’re feet are moving, but there’s no ground beneath them.

Friends this theology of the self that the world has written doesn’t lead to life and hope. It doesn’t bring comfort. It doesn’t work. Instead of rooting our true worth and value in the image of God the world has chained our identity and our worth as persons to this impossible task of “finding our selves.”

As if there is some version of yourself out there—as if you could possibly be separated from essential part of who you are—so get to work and go find it.

Let me tell you what that is—it’s bondage to self. And. Make no mistake... it’s bondage. It’s slavery. When you begin saying, “Who am I?” and “What is my narrative?” What you’re really asking is, “Who is my god?” and you are answering, “I am. I am my god.” And listen—some of you are really talented, but you make terrible gods. You make disappointing deities. If you make yourself god then you can never afford to fail—but if the Lord of heaven and earth is your God, then you can afford to fail—because according to the multitude of his tender mercies—he will blot out your failures in Christ.

Sure, you need to find your calling in the world. You need to work hard to be a productive member of the community God has placed you in. But you do not, and you cannot “find

yourself.” You are yourself. You are who and what God made you to be—you are made in his image, and you image him.

And because of this—you have immense and intrinsic worth. Your identity isn’t achieved, it’s received as a gracious gift from God.

If all a human being ever did was breath, they would be bringing glory to the God they image.

This also means that Jesus Christ did not come into the world to help you write your story. He didn’t come in the flesh and live an obedient life so that he could coach you on decision making. He didn’t die so that you might live—that is only a half truth.

Jesus died so that you might die to yourself. So that your narrative might die. So that your self-made castle of sand identity would dissolve beneath the wave of his holiness and love. And nothing in you that isn’t crucified in him can ever be raised.

This is why the Westminster Confession begins: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

To glorify God doesn’t mean that your chief end is to eternally sing the Doxology over and over and over. No, it means to recognize that you were made to love God—and you express that love in obedient service in all the fields into which he calls you. As a student, a worker, a spouse, a parent, a child.

As a Christian everything you do is spiritual—because you are a spiritual being. And everything you do is to be done under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And this means that there is nothing less glorious about taking out the trash or washing the dishes than there is about being a CEO or climbing a mountain. If Jesus is Lord over everything then everything matters, and Jesus is Lord over everything.

There isn’t an atom spinning in the universe over which Jesus has not said, “Mine.” Therefore, you are his creatures, made in his image, and you called to glorify him. He has placed you where you are, when you are, how you are, who you are and giving you what you have so that you might live for his glory under his care.

Prayer

Or God and Father, we ask that you cause our hearts to rest in you. Help us to honor you as your creatures and to glorify your name on the earth. Be with us now as we give tithes and offerings, and shape us everyday in to generous people who display your love to the world. In Christ’s name, Amen.

BULLPEN:

This is why we oppose euthanasia—the intentional ending of life by unnatural means. The argument goes that once someone has lost the ability to contribute to society, or they have lost the ability to enjoy that contribution, they have the right to die with dignity—the error of this doctrine is in thinking that we are only valuable as we contribute or consume. But God says that we have value simply by virtue of existing.

This is also why we oppose abortion—the intentional killing of human life in the womb. Friends, I've heard some people say, "Abortion is wrong because we may have killed someone who could have cured a disease." No... abortion is wrong even when we kill someone who would have driven a trash truck for the city. It's not evil because we would have benefited from that life. It's evil because it's the stamping out of a divine image bearer whose very existence was bringing glory to God on the earth.