



all things bright and beautiful
— fully alive in God’s good world —

PART PART TWO– THE GOODNESS OF BEING HUMAN

By Pastor David Fields
Genesis 1 & 2; John 21

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”
Psalm 103:13-14

I. **A Little Bit of Epistemology (On How We Think About What We Know)**

“What does it mean to be human?... It’s a question we have been asking for thousands of years. Priests and poets, philosophers and politicians, scientists and artists have all sought to answer this ultimate puzzle, but all fell short, never able to fully capture the vastness of the human experience.”¹

Reductionism: An approach that presents something complicated – like what it means to be human – into overly simplistic terms, or just in one simple category.

Rejecting Reductionism: A full and complete description of a human being on the biological level, does not preclude (rule out or invalidate), a full and complete description of a human on a chemical level.

That full and complete description of a human on a chemical level does not preclude a complete description on a physical level.

Neither of those preclude a full and complete description of a human being on a psychological level, or sociological level.

None of those preclude a full and complete description of a human on a theological level.

The world God made enables us to study in all these different ways, without devaluing the contribution of any of them. God’s good work in making the world means the possibility of using our God-given brains for the sciences, the arts and theology. These are good, God-given ways to understand the good world God made and us within it.

This is My Father’s World

No area of study precludes the one that comes straight from what God our Creator has revealed about being human.

NOTES

¹ Farrar, Jon. (n.d.). What does it mean to be human?. BBC Earth. <https://www.bbcearth.com/news/what-does-it-mean-to-be-human>

II. The Goodness of Being Human

²⁶“Then God said, “Let us make mankind [adam – meaning, human, or humankind] in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind [adam] in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

On Being the Image of God

The image of God is **not** about capacity or function.

1) To be made in the ‘image of God’ means we are God’s representatives

Temples in the ancient world would install an ‘image’ or ‘idol’ [(Hebrew: tselem (צלם) (tseh-lem)] to represent the god being honoured. Genesis 1 is presented as a temple narrative,² with humans being ‘installed’ as the image of the one true God.

Assyrian kings would put a ‘statue’ of themselves in far off districts of their land to ‘remind’ and ‘represent’ that they rule to their subjects.

2) To be made in the image of God is a role, a job description

“...so that they may rule.” – Genesis 1:26

3) To be made in the image of God is a unique identity

Humans, all humans, have a unique dignity among God’s creation. We are not angels. We are not animals. We are the only creatures who are said to be ‘made in the image of God.’ It’s a unique, indelible dignity God grants every person.

4) To be made in the image of God means we are relational beings

We are designed for a special kind of relationship with God; and the fact that the image God, is both ‘male and female’ in right relationship, that’s part of this ‘relational wholeness’ of our humanness.

⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵ Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one [Heb: no “adam”] to work the ground [adamah],

⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground [adamah].

⁷ Then the Lord God formed a man [adam] from the dust of the ground [adamah] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:4-7

The Hebrew has a play on words here. Adam from the *adamah* (אֲדָמָה)(ah-dah-MAH) .

We could capture this wordplay in English with something like ‘earthlings of the earth;’ or, as Robert Alter tries to capture it: “the Lord God fashioned the human, humus from the soil...”³

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”

Psalms 103:13-14

We are elevated as being God’s representatives, of having a royal role in God’s world, having a unique identity and as beings designed for a special relational wholeness. We are also ‘dust’ - embodied, material, physical creatures; and both, together, are our glory.

NOTES

² See John Walton, NIV Application Commentary on Genesis 1.

³ Alter, Robert. (Feb 2022). Robert Alter Interview: OT Translation. The Public Square. <https://sanity.warhornmedia.com/t/robert-alter-ot-translation/626/6>

It's easy to see why it can be hard to hold these two together at the same time; to either deny our 'earthiness' – to think we're like 'angels,' or to deny our 'image-of-God-ness,' as though we're just animals. The Biblical view holds together this picture of the glory of humans as those who are 'in the image of likeness of God,' and 'you ol' bag o' dirt.'

III. Jesus: True God, True Human

*"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God....
Through him all things were made."*

John 1:1 & 3a

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

John 1:14a (NASB)

"...[A]ccording to Christianity, a beaten, mutilated and executed first-century Palestinian Jew, left hanging from a tree outside the city amongst all its refuse, is God incarnate. And of course, before the execution, the Logos [Word] passed through the birth canal, to be born amidst the sweat, blood and excrement of mammalian birth. He walked amongst us, defecating, eating food, sweating just like the rest of us. And that's just Christian orthodoxy."⁴

When God takes on human flesh in Jesus, He gives His big 'Yes!' to the goodness and beauty of the physical world and the fullness of our humanity.

- 1) Your humanity – body/souled thing – has always been a fit 'site' for interacting with God.
- 2) Your humanity – body/souled thing – and how you live with it in the physical world and in relation to others, this is the very site where God's work of sanctification happens.

Speaking of Jesus: *"Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered."* (Hebrews 5:8). Jesus was fully human, yet without sin. He still had to *learn* to enact that obedience, particularly when bodily existence was difficult, painful; and His own body was that 'place' where that happened.

- 3) Your humanity – this body/souled thing – is the site where God cares for you and is bound up in your salvation, since you will be raised, and your body transformed/gloried to a resurrection body.

"When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread."

John 21:9

Jesus graciously feeds His friends, nurtures their bodies even as He encourages their souls, and sends them on mission; and now He keeps inviting us to, well, to a Table – a place to remember how He loves us, saves us, and cares for us too.

Jesus takes these very real, earthy elements that sustain life: the bread, the wine. He says, "...eat this..." and "...drink this..." He tells us, whenever you eat and drink – this very earthy, bodily function, of these very earthy, physical elements – that's a central way of how we remind ourselves of what's ultimately true about God's gracious love for us.

NOTES

⁴Cunningham, Conor. (24 Jun 2011). Richard Dawkins the Neanderthal and Darwin's pious idea. ABC: Religion & Ethics. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/richard-dawkins-the-neanderthal-and-darwins-pious-idea/10101340>



Open Up

In the message we talked about the tendencies to either push toward ‘animal’ or ‘angel’ – totally material, or totally spiritual, with the material being a sort of ‘add-on’ but that doesn’t really matter; not really ‘me.’

If you were to say you tend one way or the other, which is it?

Has it changed over time? If so, what made the difference?

Dig In

1. Read **Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 2:4-7**. What stands out to you about the language used of humans in each passage? How do you see the uniqueness and glory of being human described here?
2. In the message, we noticed that ‘image of God’ had four elements to it: representative, royal task/roll, unique identity, and relational quality. Which do you resonate with most? Which the least? How do you think God might want to challenge you in the ‘least’ area – to deepen how you think about and practice this area in your everyday life?
3. Jesus’ incarnation – God the Son taking on a real body – has massive implications for how we understand God’s value on the material world, and for how we understand our own humanity. How do you feel about each of the following statements?
 - a. Your humanity – body/souled thing – has always been a fit ‘site’ for interacting with God.
 - b. Your humanity – body/souled thing – and how you live with it in the physical world and in relation to others, this is the very site where God’s work of sanctification happens.
 - c. Your humanity – this body/souled thing – is the site where God cares for you and is bound up in your salvation, since you will be raised, and your body transformed/gloried to a resurrection body.

Are there other ways that you are encouraged or challenged by the Bible’s view on being human? Share that with the group.

Pray

Take time to thank God for the glory of being a human and ask for His help to come ‘fully alive’ to what that means for your everyday life. Share your prayer requests and pray for those very real, even ‘earthly’ needs of those in your group (Remember, Jesus taught us to pray things like: “Give us this day our daily bread” as well as, “Lead us not into temptation.”).