

The Doctrine of Humanity

Credo: Truths that Shape a Christian Life Sermon 3

February 2, 2020

Psalm 8; Romans 5:12-21

A sermon given by The Rev. Dr. Samuel D. Ferguson, The Falls Church Anglican

1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

5 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,

7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8, ESV)

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— **13** for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. **14** Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. **15** But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. **16** And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. **17** For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. **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. **20** Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, **21** so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:12-21, ESV)

We are in a sermon series called *Credo: Truths That Shape a Christian Life*. Last week we looked at the Doctrine of the Son, which drew us to that part of the Christian Creed that is all about Jesus. We emphasized that although a man, Jesus is also fully God. And therefore, Jesus reveals God to us in the theatre of human life.

In this sermon, we turn to the flipside of the coin. Because Jesus is fully God and fully man, Jesus not only reveals true divinity to us, Jesus also reveals true humanity to us. The Nicene Creed not only says that Jesus is “true God from true God,” but goes on to say that:

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, and was made man...

Jesus reveals God to us, yes. But Jesus also reveals humanity to us. In Jesus, we have a vision of true humanity. Having a vision of what humanity is really like is most helpful. Underlying many important issues of our day are assumptions about human nature.

- Questions about race, equality, and justice assume that to be human is to have inherent dignity, regardless of skin tone, IQ, or social status.
- Questions about the morality of public leaders or celebrities assume that to be human is to live under a code of conduct, an ethic.
- Questions about sexuality and gender assume something about the meaning of the human body and the pathway to human fulfillment.

Whether we realize it or not, a majority of the most important issues of our day stand or fall on certain assumptions about what it means to be a human being. It has never been more important, therefore, for Christians to consider carefully what it means to be a human being: who we are, what are we made up of, what we are made for? And there is no better way to do this than to look again at Jesus Christ—who is not only a revelation of God but stands before us as the revelation of true humanity.

What does Jesus Christ reveal to us about being human? What does Jesus Christ reveal to us about ourselves?

I. Image of God

The place to begin is with a single phrase that Paul uses to describe Jesus in Second Corinthians. Paul speaks of “The light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, **who is the image of God**” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus is the image of God. This is a loaded phrase, and Paul knows it. The “image of God” is the key idea underlying the biblical view of humanity. It takes us way back to the opening page of the Bible, when we read that humans are created by God in His own image:

“God created man in his own image, **in the image of God** he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

That humans are created in God’s image is the stunning starting point for the biblical Doctrine of Humanity. It means that to crown His creation on the sixth day, God did not create a cathedral or castle, or machine. God created a man. God, the glorious and beautiful one, made the human race as His capstone work, His embodied and living masterpiece.

How exactly were humans God’s image? Humans were made to reflect something of God’s glory and character in many ways: our sensitivity to morality (right and wrong) reflects God’s righteousness. Our ability to communicate with each other reflects God’s communicative nature; our fondness for beauty and art reflects God’s beauty and glory; our ability to cultivate the earth and build complex civilizations, reflects God the Creator.

Every human being is made in the image of God—irrespective of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic standing. Because of this, anytime you look at another person, you are meeting your equal. This is the stunning foundation of biblical humanity—and there is no other doctrine of humanity that gives such equal dignity to all human beings. However, a story that begins in Genesis One in glory plunges quickly into darkness. Adam and Eve will turn away from their creator, and in doing so, permanently tarnish the image.

If humans are meant to reflect God's image as in a clear mirror, after our fall into sin, we reflect God's glory more like muddy water. You can faintly make out a reflection when you look into a muddy pool—but the muddy water does more to tarnish the image than display it. And this explains all the contradictions about us. Though dignified and beautiful, we are also filled with selfishness, dark desires, and brokenness. Despite the strides we've made in education, justice, medicine, and technology, a sickness unto death festers in the heart of humankind.

As the French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal once quipped: "What sort of monster then is man? ... What a mass of contradictions....Judge of all things, [yet] a sink of uncertainty and error; the glory and the scum of the world. Who will unravel such a tangle?"¹

Jesus restores image

When the Bible tells us that Jesus is the image of God, it is telling us that Jesus is taking up the vocation that was originally given to Adam and Eve. And the stunning vision of salvation in the Bible, is nothing short of Jesus Christ restoring us back to the image of God.

Paul writes to the Romans: "Those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

Here is the foundation of the Biblical Doctrine of Humanity. Created in God's image, but that image was deeply tarnished by sin. Jesus comes as the new humanity, as the perfect image that Adam was meant to be. When we see Jesus, we see the true image. When we reach out and take his hand by faith, Jesus starts to re-make us into that image of God—salvation is nothing short of becoming who you were always meant to be.

What else does Jesus reveal to us about being human? The second thing to see has to do with what humans are made up of.

II. Embodied Spirits

If you own a car and want to make good use of it, you need to know a few basic things about what your car is made up of. Along with a nice coat of paint, your car has an engine. You need to know

what that engine runs on—gas, diesel, electric. You need to know what your car is made up of. So too with humans: what are we made up of?

Jesus shows us that we are a dynamic unity of two elements: physical and spiritual. God is Spirit, we know. When God became human, however, God took on a physical body: John 1:14, “The word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” As a human, Jesus is spirit and body; or, an embodied spirit.

That we are made up of physical and spiritual realities is important to be aware of. For we have a tendency in our day to undervalue one element or the other.

Underplay the spiritual

We are increasingly concerned with our physical bodies. Our diets consist of organic kale, hormone-free chicken, and fat-free water; and things like CrossFit have become a new religion. Caring for your body is so good to do. But we need to be sure we recognize this other component—our spiritual side.

In His teaching about adultery and lust, Jesus gives a revealing image of human nature. Jesus says: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27–28). We all would assume that committing the physical act of adultery is way worse than being guilty of the spiritual act of inner lust. Jesus says this is not the case. Jesus says that what a man or woman does with their spirit—their inner person—is just as significant as what they do with their body.

Your Spiritual side is your inner person. It is the place where you connect with God; the place within you that can discern what is most valuable, good, and worthy. Take time to think about this part of you, and care for and cultivate it.

Devalue the body

There are also views of being human that undervalue the body. These are views that assume your true identity has nothing to do with biology but is rooted in psychology. But Jesus shows us that our

bodies are created by God and integral to who we are. Our bodies are part of God's design for our identity, and we are to be stewards of them.

When we look at Jesus the man, we see that humans are made up of physical and spiritual realities. We also see something about our hearts—which is the next area of humanity to consider.

III. Righteous Heart

If two important terms for understanding humanity are body and spirit, a third is heart. The Bible often describes human beings in reference to the heart.

In the Bible, the heart means more than the organ that pumps blood. The heart is the motivational and emotional center of the human being. Your heart is the seat of your emotions, your deep thoughts and desires, and your will.²

The heart tells us that human beings are creatures who have dispositions and types of character—the heart tells us there is a lot below the surface in human life. We are not brains on a stick; there is much too us that lies at the affective level.

I used to go and pray in the evenings at St. James Church, which is close by. There is a statue of Jesus in the sanctuary that I always liked sitting near. Jesus stands upright and appears to be holding open His shirt; which reveals His heart. His heart seems to be emanating glory, but is at the same time wrapped in thorns. Seeing Jesus' heart is necessary for knowing Him and knowing ourselves.

What type of Heart did Jesus have? In short, Jesus had a righteous heart. Or, a heart rightly oriented. Here's what that means.

1. Jesus' heart loved righteousness

Meaning, He did not obey God and keep God's laws out of a cold sense of duty, but out of a desire. Jesus' heart had affections for holiness and righteousness—He actually took pleasure in these things.

2. Jesus' heart loved others

Jesus also loved others. Second, we see that Jesus' heart moved Him to love others. He is constantly seeing past social prejudices to the core of people. At a well at midday in Samaria, a woman approaches who would have been seen as unclean for a Jewish man to speak to—Jesus sees her, talks to her, offers her hope and life. There is, of course, Jesus' teaching to His disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12,13)

3. Jesus' heart loved God

And finally, most notable of Jesus' heart, is that He loved God. This, Jesus expresses in His radical devotion to God. On the Mount of Olives, nearing His death, Jesus asks that the cup of suffering might be removed, but adds, not my will Father, but your will.

True humanity is a heart aflame for righteousness—a heart that loves what is true, good, and beautiful; a heart that loves others and loves God.

Talking about the heart raises the issue of our desires. And we are desiring creatures. I want to pause for a moment and point out the difference between desires of the flesh and affections of the righteous heart. And a personal story may help.

When I was a freshman in college I was still wrestling with where I stood in my faith. I wasn't exactly church-going, but I'd been raised to know the truth. I was pledging a fraternity (this is not a knock on all frats) and early in the process was invited to a rager of a party. Late that night, standing in the middle of the party, I was surrounded by so many things a young man's flesh might crave for. But, at the same time, I felt a deep dissonance in my heart. Something was off. I simply could not get comfortable in that arena. I left and walked home, confused. I sat down and opened my Bible and began to read a Psalm—Psalm 1. It was like a breath of clean mountain air wafted into my soul.

I desired something in my flesh, but I also desired something in my heart. My heart wanted God—God's holiness, God's goodness. My heart wanted to live before God, with God, as God would have me be. This was the tension—and we all feel it—between desires of the flesh and the affections of the righteous heart. You must cultivate the latter. Jesus shows us that to be human is to have a righteous heart.

IV. Social Being

A final aspect of humanity we see when we see Jesus is that man does not exist alone. Jesus is always in a societal or social context—existence unfolds in relationships to one's world, friends, and God.

1. His World

Jesus didn't live in a vacuum, and human life doesn't unfold in a laboratory. Humans are embedded in an environment and this environment shapes who we are. Jesus came into a world with a spiritual environment—He had to fend with the devil. Jesus came into a political and social environment—He had to face the cultural movements of His day and the landscape of political leaders. Jesus reminds us that human life is not autonomous individuality; we are embedded in a world, in a context, and this context exerts great influence on who we are.

2. Along with this societal context, Jesus had an intimate social context

Jesus had friends. From the family He was born into to the disciples Jesus called—He was surrounded by people. Humanness requires the closeness of others. We are not ourselves by ourselves.

3. Jesus was in relationship with His Father

The most important social aspect of Jesus' humanity, however, was His relationship with God His Father. This is evident constantly. When Jesus is baptized, the Father speaks of His love for His son. Jesus slips away often by himself, so through prayer, He can be with God. And at Jesus' crucifixion, the very end of humanity, if you will, it is His loss of connection with His Father that is the final blow: "my God my God, why have you forsaken me."

We often picture life as a solitary journey. We picture the good life as an unencumbered path toward our personal success, where we need the freedom and autonomy to make our own choices and chart our own course. Life isn't like this, however. The life Jesus sets before us is more like being part of a village—embedded into a larger story, shaped by those around you. Your purpose is not so much self-

aggrandizement but adding to the goodness of the community you're a part of. And that community, as Jesus shows us, is at its best when it is connected to God the Father.

We are created in the image of God—but that image is deeply broken by our sin. Jesus has come as the true image of God—as the true humanity. If you will live with Him, steadily and committedly, He will walk you on a path of being renewed in the image of your Creator.

I'd like to close with one general comment about the biblical view of humanity versus the cultural view of humanity. The question for us—for you and me—when it comes to who and what we are, comes down to this.

Does the human person live in an ordered universe and have an appointed identity, or does he or she make his or her own identity in a world without God?

As the true human, Jesus shows us that to be human is to be with God. It is to live according to His purposes and by His power. And when we look at Jesus's life, lived with God, we find that the "The crucial questions in life are not 'what questions'—what do I do? They are "who" questions—who do I follow, who do I serve, who do I love?"³

Endnotes

1. Pascal, *Pensée* 246 (Lafuma).
2. In Scripture, the heart is not some physical organ pumping blood; it's much more. The heart is the seat of a person's emotions, will, desire; the heart speaks of the whole person from the vantage point of volition—desiring, knowing, doing. The Bible says the heart is the seat of sin (Gen 6:5), the seat of faith (Ps 28:7) and the seat of spiritual renewal (Ezek. 36:26).
3. David Brooks. "Personalism: The Philosophy We Need." *The New York Times*, 14 June 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/opinion/personalism-philosophy-collectivism-fragmentation.html>. Accessed 1 Feb., 2020.