

# **We Believe: Foundations of the Christian Faith**

**Session 7: Humanity and the Image of God**

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# The Westminster Shorter Catechism

- Question 1: What is the chief end of man?
  - Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.
- Question 10: How did God create man?
  - God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

# Genesis 1:26-31

## Humankind made in God's image

- The nature and vocation of humanity
  - Image of God
  - Dominion
  - Unity in diversity - male and female
  - Fruitfulness
  - Stewardship

# Genesis 2:1-24

## Another account of creation and humanity

- God formed man from the dust of the ground
- Breathed into him the breath of life (*reach* - animated by God's Spirit)
- The man became a "living being"
- God put the man and put him in the Garden to "till it and to keep it"
- God sets boundaries on what the man can eat
- God does not desire the man to be alone but creates a partner/helper
- The one flesh union of man and woman is assumed as a creational pattern

# Psalm 8

## What are human beings?

- A little lower than God (divine beings, angels)
- Crowned with glory and honor
- Given dominion over the works of God

# The Worldview of the Ancient Near East

## Polytheism and Power

- A polytheistic worldview - many gods controlled the physical world
- The world was created as the result of a conflict between the gods
- Humans were created as slaves of the gods, to do the gods bidding and to keep them satisfied
- Kings and pharaohs were the “image” of a particular god; statuary signified the king’s role as the god’s earthly representative
- Human nature was immanent with the gods and nature

# The Worldview of the Bible

## All humans in the image of God

- Genesis was a revolution in worldview
- One God creates with a word (not out of conflict), bringing order instead of chaos. In Genesis 1, God is building a cosmic temple in which to dwell
- God creates humanity on the sixth day in his “image and likeness,” a designation given to all humans (not just a king) and given to both male and female
- The creation of humanity is a reflection of divine community (The Trinity) - singularity and community, similarity and difference
- Humans are invested with the vocation of having “dominion” over the earth - to be kings/queens and priests in God’s earthly temple

# The Creation of Humanity

## A unified whole

- Humans are embodied, created as a unified person for life and vocation in God's creation
- “Dust” and “breath” - material and spiritual dimensions dependent upon one another
- Male and female - sexual difference, complementarity, equality
- Vocation - not slaves, but royal regents
- Embodied life is not a curse, it is essential - “I am embodied, therefore, I am.”

# A Unified View of Personhood

## Body and Soul

- The creation story indicates that our bodies are an indivisible aspect of human personhood
- The endgame of humanity is resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15)
- What we do with the body matters, including our sexual conduct (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)
- God as Creator has ultimate claim on how we use our bodies because God made them

# Wesley on the Image of God

From the sermon “The New Birth”

- **Natural Image** - an embodied and spiritual being endowed with understanding, freedom of the will, and various affections
- **Political Image** - to be “governors of the lower world, having dominion over...all the earth”
- **Moral Image** - “righteousness and true holiness”
- For Wesley, the “one thing needful” is renewal in the image of God

# The Representative Capacity

## Dominion vs. Domination

- Humans serve as God's co-regents
- Adam is the representative of humanity's role in the world - a role broken by sin
- Jesus as the new Adam reestablishes the representative role by obeying God and bringing a new dominion of God's rule and reign ("the kingdom of God")

# The Relational Capacity

## An endowment to reproduce

- We enter into covenantal relationship with God in a way reflected in our covenantal relationship with one another, particularly in the covenant of marriage
- All living creatures reproduce, but only humans are enabled to give birth to more image bearers
- This reproduction takes place in both physical and relational “new birth” (John 3, Matthew 28)

# The Moral Capacity

## Discerning and embodying God's will

- God's Spirit within us allows us to discern right from wrong
- Even though our moral capacity was marred by sin, there remains a stunning testimony to the image of God in us in that there is universal understanding of moral categories across humanity

# **A Summary of the Biblical View of Humanity**

## **Created in the image of God**

- Human beings are made in the image of God to reflect God's own character in community, in righteousness and true holiness
- Humans are embodied and are a unified whole of body and spirit (dust and breath)
- Men and women both bear the image of God and in their unity and difference are able to bring forth more image-bearers
- Humans are made to be God's representatives, rulers, and priests for all of creation, acting as steward's on his behalf
- The ultimate hope for humanity on the other side of the Fall is restoration of the image of God in both spirit (sanctification) and body (resurrection)

# **Heresies about Humanity**

## **A Division of Body and Spirit**

- Pre-modern cultures - a natural and moral order integrated into an overall unity
- Modern age (post-Enlightenment) - reliable knowledge is possible of only the natural order, of empirically testable scientific facts
- A dualistic view of human life:
  - Body vs. Mind/Spirit
  - Body vs. Personhood
  - Secular vs. Sacred

# The Gnostic Impulse

## An ancient heresy

- Gnosticism emerged in the first and second centuries, influenced by Plato's dualistic view of humanity
- Belief that all matter, including the material world, is evil, and that only the spiritual realm is good
- God is not creator, but rather a "demiurge" created the material world
- Salvation is defined as being awakened to this higher knowledge (gnosis)
- Gnostics viewed the mind and inner self as captive to the body - a person's "true self" is thus transcendent, while the body is untrustworthy

# Cartesian Dualism

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

“I think, therefore, I am.”

**MIND** - A free, autonomous self

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**BODY** - a mechanism operating by natural laws

# Kantian Dualism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

“Mind is the law-giver to nature.”

**AUTONOMOUS SELF** - free to impose one's own interpretations on the body

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**PHYSICAL BODY** - raw material with intrinsic identity or purpose

# Person-Body Dualism

The dominant worldview

“Matter does not matter”

**PERSONHOOD** - emotions, rationality, personality, the “authentic self”

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**PHYSICAL BODY** - utilitarian, material object, machine

# The Christian View of Humanity

## Reestablishing the Wholeness of Humanity

- Be true to yourself? “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” - Jeremiah 17:9
- The Creation account - binaries and boundaries - the whole person for the whole purpose of God
- The body is a dwelling place for God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- The resurrection of Jesus is the confirmation of humanity’s ultimate hope

**Questions?**