

The Doctrine of Humanity

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question #10:

Q. How did God create man?

A. God created man, male and female, in his own image and in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, to rule over the other creatures.

I. Origins of humanity: Where do we come from?

- Continuity
 - God made humans from the physical materials of earth (“dust of the ground,” Gen. 2:7) just as God made other creatures come forth from the earth (Gen. 1:11, 24).
 - Humans are one of the higher-order “living creatures” created on the sixth “day” of creation (Gen. 1:24; 2:7).
- Distinct and unique
 - God made humans just a little lower than the heavenly beings at the pinnacle of God’s creation (Ps. 8).
 - God gave humans dominion/rule as stewards over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26, 28; Ps. 8:6).

II. Essence of humanity: What are we?

(1) Image of God

- God’s ultimate image is Jesus Christ, and he is thus the ultimate standard for human life (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:45-49).
- Humans are created in or according to God’s image. All humans and only humans have this unique quality, and sin does not eradicate it (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:5-6; James 3:9).
- Being created in God’s image has two primary meanings:
 - Humans have a special connection to God as God’s priestly/kingly representatives in the world who are loved by God.
 - Humans are created with the potential to reflect God’s likeness in character and action because of a structure/nature with capacity to be like God in action.
 - We reflect God’s likeness not only in our unique powers (intellect and will) but also in our moral character and behavior such as wisdom, humility, justice, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control.
- Being created in God’s image has important consequences:
 - Unique powers of intellect: ability to grasp concepts, forms concepts into judgments, and reason by seeing relationships and drawing conclusions
 - Unique powers of will: an inclination and desire for goodness and the capacity to make free choices

- Intellect and will give humans unique capacities for communication with language, forming relationships of love, and an awareness of and desire for an eternal destiny.
- The ground of human dignity (Genesis 9:6; James 3): humans have immense sacred worth and value and should be treated with respect, love, honor, and care.

(2) Complex: physical (body) and non-physical (soul)

- Humans are unified beings formed from a composite of a non-physical soul and a physical body.
- By identifying human uniqueness and the image of God with non-physical powers and attributes, some have under-emphasized or neglected the importance of the physical body as an essential part of human personhood.
- The eternal Son of God became incarnate in a human nature with a human body, and he rose from the dead to live forever as the God-man with a glorified, immortal physical body.
 - Therefore, the physical body and world are not evil or an obstacle to knowing and serving God; rather, they are means of knowing God and fulfilling his purposes.
- Jesus' resurrection is the beginning and the foundation of the resurrection of all people to their eternal destiny (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; Col. 1:18-20; Rev. 20:12-13) and of the transformation of God's whole creation into immortal glory. Eternal life with God will be life in physical bodies in this physical creation renewed and glorified by the resurrection life of Christ (Isa. 25:6-9; Rev. 21-22).

III. Purpose of humanity: Why are we here?

- To reflect God's character and conform more and more to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29)
- To love God and people (Matt. 22:34-40)
- To do good works (Eph. 2:10)
- To serve God by participating in his work in developing, ruling, glorifying creation (Gen. 1:26, 28; Rev. 22:3-4)

IV. End/goal of humanity: Where are we going?

- Created and redeemed for God's glory, i.e., to reflect and display God's greatness (Eph. 1:6)
- Created and redeemed for eternity and immortality (Eccl. 3:11)
- Created and redeemed to enjoy God forever (Ps. 16:11)

Westminster Shorter Catechism #1

Q. What is man's primary purpose?

A. Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Going further

Beginner

J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Tyndale, 2001), pp. 71-76.

Herman Bavinck, *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion*, chapter 9.

Ros Clarke, *Human: Made and Remade in the Image of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2023).

John Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Lexham Press, 2021).

Kelly Kopic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Brazos Press, 2022).

Intermediate to Advanced

Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, chapter 12.

J. P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters* (Moody, 2014).

Edward Feser, *Immortal Souls: A Treatise on Human Nature* (Editiones Scholasticae, 2024).

John Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Eerdmans, 2015).