



# THE GOSPEL IN HUMANITY

*Understanding human nature  
in the light of the Gospel*

# THE GOSPEL IN HUMANITY

*'Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinise himself.'* – John Calvin<sup>1</sup>

This paper will argue for the Reformed Evangelical perspective that humanity's true nature and purpose can only be understood in the light of the Gospel.

A biblical and theological Survey will make the following key points:

- God created human beings to reflect His image
- Humanity's task of reflecting the image of God was disastrously marred by the sinful decision to reject God, bringing death and judgement.
- God's Son, the man Jesus Christ, perfectly reflected God and showed us what humanity is meant to be. Jesus died and rose on behalf of sinful people to rescue them from the penalty of sin, conform them to His own image, and bring eternal life.

Implications of the biblical doctrine of humanity for the some of the questions and situations we face in modern Australia will then be canvassed.

## THE GOSPEL AND HUMANITY: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SURVEY

### HUMANITY - MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

The clear testimony of the Bible is that the world, in all its vast complexity, was created by our sovereign and mighty God.<sup>2</sup> At the apex of the creation event, God freely spoke humanity into existence, breathing His gift of life into them, so that they would live in loving relationship with Him.<sup>3</sup> Hence humanity cannot claim to be self-made or merely the product of random biological processes. Neither can humans claim to be autonomous beings. We were made to be God's wholly

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, Institutes I:I:2.

<sup>2</sup> Job 38

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1&2

dependent creatures and true freedom is found in joyful dependence on and obedience to Him.<sup>4</sup>

God's assessment of his creation was that it was "very good".<sup>5</sup> Because God was satisfied and delighted with His workmanship, we should accept and enjoy God's created order with thanksgiving.<sup>6</sup> Humanity, however, was not made to be simply another part of creation. God intimately crafts each man and woman, heart, soul, mind and body, for the special dignity of bearing his image in the world.<sup>7</sup> Being made in the image of God is fundamental to a right understanding of our human identity.

In bearing the image of God, human beings were given a position of both honour and responsibility before Him. Humanity was crowned with glory and honour, and endowed with the knowledge, rational and creative powers to be royal rulers over God's creation. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were to rule as mirrors of God's radiant character and glory. Their mandate was to fill the earth and subdue it, bringing all creation under control and order.<sup>8</sup> In this role, humanity answered solely to the Creator. They were given the ability to rule in holiness and righteousness, with the liberty of their own will and yet within the finite boundaries of their humanity.<sup>9</sup> God commanded Adam that he could enjoy eating from any tree in the garden but he must not grasp for autonomy by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or he would surely die.<sup>10</sup>

In the Garden, Adam and Eve did not lead the lives of solitary individuals but were enmeshed in loving relationships with God and each other. God did not remain aloof from them but revealed Himself with the rich intimacy of speaking. They enjoyed ongoing personal relationship with God as they worked the Garden of Eden, hearing Him, talking to Him, and learning to love and worship Him.<sup>11</sup> The woman was made for the special purpose of being a helper for the man in the task of caring for the Garden.<sup>12</sup> Both men and women were created in God's

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:21, Galatians 5:1

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:26-31, Psalms 8 & 139, WCF IV.I

<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 4:3-5

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, Deuteronomy 6:5, Psalm 139:13-16.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:26-30, Psalm 8, WCF IV.I

<sup>9</sup> Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24, WCF IV.II, IX.I, IX.II

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 2:16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 2.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 2:18-25

image, sharing status, dignity and value as humans, and serving one another in complementary ways.<sup>13</sup>

Humanity, however, has fallen far from its glorious state in the Garden of Eden. What has gone wrong?

## HUMANITY – THE FALL INTO SIN

Satan deceived Adam and Eve into mistrusting God's goodness and faithfulness. Tragically, they grasped for self-rule and disobeyed God's command by eating from the tree of good and evil.<sup>14</sup> Rather than hearing and doing God's Word, they sought to be judges over it. They failed to honour God as God and to live up to His standard of righteousness.<sup>15</sup> Rather than freedom, however, they found themselves enslaved to the tyrannical and deadly rule of sin and Satan.<sup>16</sup>

The clear but confronting message of the Bible is that all human beings are under the power and mastery of sin.<sup>17</sup> Adam was the first to sin (the Fall) and all humanity stands in solidarity with him in his guilt and corruption.<sup>18</sup>

All people are born with a corrupt nature<sup>19</sup>, unable to consistently resist temptation and to love and serve God in righteousness as we were made to do.<sup>20</sup> We are unavoidably and inescapably enslaved to sin.

Sin resides deep within the hearts of each person and affects the entire being – the will, understanding, emotions, speech, relationships, behaviour and body.<sup>21</sup> At the heart of sin is the refusal to worship God and live according to His will. We foolishly question and strive against our Creator,<sup>22</sup> loving and desiring the things He has made instead of Him.<sup>23</sup> The fullest expression of sin is the unwillingness to have faith in the one whom God has sent, His Son Jesus Christ and in rejecting the

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:7-12, Ephesians 5:22-33

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:1-7, WCF VI.I

<sup>15</sup> Romans 3:19,20; WCF VI.VI

<sup>16</sup> John 8:44

<sup>17</sup> Romans 1:18-23, Romans 3:11-12, 1 Corinthians 6:9

<sup>18</sup> Romans 5:12-19, I Corinthians 15:22, WCF VI.III

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 51:5

<sup>20</sup> John 15:5, Romans 8:7-8, WCF IX.III

<sup>21</sup> Mark 7:21-23, WCF VI.II, VI.IV (doctrine of total depravity)

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 45:1-10

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 51:4, Romans 1:21, James 1:14-15, 2:10-11

gospel concerning Him.<sup>24</sup> This fundamental rebellion gives rise to an endless variety of sinful values, habits, orientations, acts, thoughts and words. Sin entangles and damages each person to the very depths of their being. Our alienation from our Creator renders us spiritually dead.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes sin fills us with self-loathing and distress. At other times we celebrate our wrongdoing. We easily deny the full extent our sin or our need to be delivered from it.<sup>26</sup> We are quick to blame others or our circumstances rather than acknowledge our own guilt before God. Sin distorts our understanding of the world and hardens our hearts towards God as we actively suppress the truth of God.<sup>27</sup> We go to great and often sophisticated lengths to deny God's authority in our lives and elevate our own.

Sin cannot be overcome by education or social and personal engineering. Human nature is not basically decent, being corrupted only by circumstances, ignorance or aberrant genes. Presented with an opportunity, each person's natural tendency is to choose to sin.<sup>28</sup> Even the best of acts are motivated by hearts that fail to love God and others to the full.<sup>29</sup> The responsibility for sin lies squarely at the door of each individual person.<sup>30</sup> God can never be charged with causing anyone to sin.<sup>31</sup>

Because of sin, all people have become God's enemies and sit under the condemnation of God, the righteous judge of all. We are unable to fix the damage we have caused and make ourselves right with God again. We deserve only God's wrath and punishment.<sup>32</sup> As part of His punishment, God gives people over to unfettered expression of their sin and its disastrous consequences.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, however, God's punishment for sin is death<sup>34</sup>- not only physical death but, after the final judgement, the death of eternal separation from God and its

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<sup>24</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:8

<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 2:1-2, WCF VI.II

<sup>26</sup> John 8:44, Romans 1:18-32

<sup>27</sup> Romans 1:18, Ephesians 4:18, WCF VI.IV

<sup>28</sup> Romans 7:18

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 6:5 and 8:21

<sup>30</sup> James 1:14-15

<sup>31</sup> Romans 9:19-21, WCF IX.I

<sup>32</sup> John 3:36, Romans 3:9-20

<sup>33</sup> Romans 1:24-32, WCF V.VI

<sup>34</sup> Romans 6:23, WCF VI.VI

torment.<sup>35</sup> Our lives, therefore, are haunted by the fear of death and its aftermath. In the face of death, we are forced to acknowledge that we are not, in fact, the rulers of self we desire to be.

The effects of sin are not only seen in the individual but inevitably overflow to the family, society and environment, causing disorder, competition, broken relationships, pain, sorrow and destruction in a myriad of complex ways and often on a massive scale.<sup>36</sup> When people seek to become their own masters and determine the nature of goodness themselves, others are inevitably devalued and used for selfish ends.

Human beings did not, however, lose their status as the image bearers of God in the Fall. The Bible states that no person should be killed or cursed as each still bears the image of God and the value it entails.<sup>37</sup> The image is marred and disfigured by sin because we are unable to reflect the righteousness of God and serve Him in full obedience and honour. We do, however, continue to feebly rule creation with a measure of intelligent and creative power.

Despite humanity's rebellion and the havoc that ensues, however, God does not withdraw from His creation but remains entirely in control. He shows common grace to all, restraining sinners from doing all the evil that is possible and enabling people to perform right deeds even if their motives and aims fall short of His righteousness.<sup>38</sup> He upholds, directs and sustains every person and creature, from the least to the greatest.<sup>39</sup> God graciously shows compassion on all people, enabling friendships and families to form, sustaining the environment, providing beauty and artistic insight, and establishing governments.<sup>40</sup>

Behind every event in history, no matter how disastrous, God's sovereign hand is at work accomplishing His purposes. It is in His Son Jesus Christ, however, that God's plan of salvation for sinful people is fully and gloriously realised.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Revelation 20:14, WCF XXX.I, XXX.II

<sup>36</sup> Genesis chapters 3-11

<sup>37</sup> Genesis 9:6, James 3:9

<sup>38</sup> Luke 6:33, Luke 11:13

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 10:29-31, Acts 17:25-28, WCF V.I

<sup>40</sup> Zechariah 10:1, Matthew 5:45

<sup>41</sup> Ephesians 1:10

## HUMANITY – RENEWED IN THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

Although sin and death entered the world through Adam, God's incredible mercy and the gift of eternal life have triumphantly entered through His Son, the man Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup> Rather than abandoning us to our punishment, God speaks graciously to us in Jesus, His definitive Word to humanity.<sup>43</sup> Jesus is fully God, being the second person of the Trinity and the one through and for whom the creation is created and held together.<sup>44</sup> All the wisdom, knowledge and fullness of God and His Spirit dwell within Him.<sup>45</sup>

According to God's plan, however, He took on the nature of man and stepped into history to dwell amongst us. The natures of both God and man are inseparably joined together in Jesus.<sup>46</sup> He was born as a baby, experienced tiredness and sadness, endured temptation and suffering and ultimately was subject to death<sup>47</sup> - yet He was entirely without sin in thought, word or deed.<sup>48</sup> Unlike Adam, He was able to resist and rule over Satan.<sup>49</sup> He is the one human being who has ever lived who has perfectly manifested the image of God in full righteousness and willing obedience to His Heavenly Father, exercising godly and compassionate dominion over creation.<sup>50</sup> Jesus used His freedom to love and serve God and His neighbour in humility, selflessness and grace. In Christ we see the way humanity was made to reflect the glory of God.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, in His extraordinary mercy, God's plan is to make Him the first amongst many brothers and sisters who are renewed in the image of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

For rebellious people to be conformed to the image of Christ, however, sin must be comprehensively and decisively dealt with. The glorious news of the Gospel is that God has taken this task of salvation upon Himself, offering sinners salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup> Standing in our place as our perfect representative, Jesus died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of His

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<sup>42</sup> Romans 5:12-21

<sup>43</sup> John 1:1-5

<sup>44</sup> Colossians 1:15-17, WCF VIII.II

<sup>45</sup> Colossians 1:19, 2:3, WCF VIII.III

<sup>46</sup> WCF VIII.II

<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 2:14-18

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>49</sup> Luke 4:1-13

<sup>50</sup> John 1:18, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 2:6-9

<sup>51</sup> Ephesians 4:24

<sup>52</sup> Romans 8:29

<sup>53</sup> John 3:16, Romans 10:9, WCF VII.III

people, absorbing God's wrath and allowing God's forgiveness to overflow to us.<sup>54</sup> As Jesus calls out 'It is Finished' with his last breath, the temple veil was torn in two, signalling that Christ's death was sufficient to reconcile us to God and that the penalty for our sin was fully paid.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Jesus was declared to be the eternal victor over sin and death in His resurrection.<sup>56</sup>

God enables those He has predestined in His mercy to accept Christ's sacrifice for them by faith and rest upon Him for their salvation.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, He declares them to be His beloved adopted children in Christ, glorious new creations in whom He dwells in His Spirit.<sup>58</sup> Since, as God's children, we receive right standing with God through faith as a gift, we know we have nothing to boast about.<sup>59</sup> Without Jesus, we would be lost, and so we are to relate to God and to our neighbours with a deep sense of humility and thankfulness.

God's Spirit also frees His children for obedience, that is, the continual process of putting off the old self of sin and putting on the new self, which has been renewed in the image of Christ in true righteousness and holiness.<sup>60</sup> Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are the ever developing characteristics the Spirit-led life.<sup>61</sup> The Spirit does not work in us only as individuals, but as closely together as God's church and Christ's body. Together, we strive to be a community who is constantly nourished by the Gospel of Jesus and sharing it with fellow sinners.<sup>62</sup>

Under the sovereignty of God, however, many people prefer to continue to in their imprisonment to sin and self-deception, refusing to accept the gospel of Jesus. In fact they reject Jesus and those who belong to Him with hostility, shown most horrifyingly in the crucifixion.<sup>63</sup> The reality is that, in this current age, God's rule is often hidden under much apparent ambiguity and injustice. Sinful people often

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<sup>54</sup> Isaiah 53:4-6, 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>55</sup> WCF VIII.III, VIII.IV, VIII.V

<sup>56</sup> Acts 17:31, 1 Corinthians 15:54-56

<sup>57</sup> Ephesians 1:11-14, Philippians 2:13, WCF VIII.VIII, XIV.II

<sup>58</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17, 6v16-18, Galatians 4:6-7, Ephesians 5:1, WCF XII

<sup>59</sup> Ephesians 2:8, 9

<sup>60</sup> Ephesians 4:23-24, WCF XIII.I

<sup>61</sup> Romans 8:5, Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>62</sup> 1 Peter 2v1-10, WCF XXVI.I

<sup>63</sup> John 1v1-11

prosper while God's people often suffer in weakness.<sup>64</sup> Christians themselves continue to sin against others, often grievously. Tragedy strikes people with seeming randomness. However, God continues to draw sinners to Himself through the declaration of His Gospel, as He draws history closer to His day of judgement.<sup>65</sup>

On the Last Day, God's righteousness will be made obvious to all humanity. Jesus will judge and destroy every trace of rebellion against Him and place everything under the rule of God.<sup>66</sup> All the dead will be bodily resurrected. Those who have disobeyed the gospel of Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction<sup>67</sup>. All God's children, however, will be resurrected in Christ. Our glorious, uncorrupted bodies, minds and hearts will fully reflect Christ and we will live eternally in the company of God.<sup>68</sup> The new heavens and new earth, liberated from the stain of sin, will be enjoyed by God's beloved children forever.<sup>69</sup>

## **THE GOSPEL AND HUMANITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR BELIEVERS IN THE WORLD**

The greatest need of humanity is to hear and be transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Contemporary society is crowded with varying accounts of humanity. The gospel, however, cuts across all these accounts, clearly revealing God's decisive Word on the life of human beings. It is the Gospel that must comprehensively shape our understanding of ourselves and others as we speak with believers and unbelievers alike. There are three particular reasons for this:

Firstly, humanity cannot rule, shape or rescue itself – only God can do that. Everything we need to know about ourselves comes from God, not from within ourselves. In the Gospel, God addresses the whole of humanity. It tells us that God shapes and creates us, that we are entirely dependent on Him for our being, and that He has the authority to judge us at the end of history. Moreover, despite our rebellion, God shows that He is committed to humanity and His creation in the

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<sup>64</sup> Psalm 73

<sup>65</sup> Ephesians 1v7-10.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Corinthians 15v24-28

<sup>67</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1v8

<sup>68</sup> 1 Corinthians, 15v42-49, Revelation 21v22-27

<sup>69</sup> 2 Peter 3v13, WCF XXX.I-III

death and resurrection of His Son on our behalf. It is God who provides the way back to right relationship with Him through Jesus. Therefore, every person is called to turn from his or her own way and listen to Him.

Secondly, it is through faith in the Gospel that God frees us to be truly human, as He made us to be. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, the power of sin is broken, sinful human beings are born again to eternal life, and we are liberated to know and serve God in truth as we were created to do.

Thirdly, God's call to His liberated children is to love God and others, imitating Jesus who exemplified godly love. Truly loving others means desiring what is good for them.<sup>70</sup> The Gospel declares that being known and loved by God through His Son, as well as knowing and loving Him, is the essence of the good for every person. Therefore, together as God's people, we are committed to loving others by pointing them to Jesus with our words and lives.

We live, however, in communities where the majority of people are wedded to sin and reject the Gospel. In this context, we prayerfully strive to build church communities that model God's plan for true community, loving and serving one another through God's Word and His Spirit. We do not cocoon ourselves from our communities, nor conform to their standards, nor do we become combative as if we can force this world to be what it will only be upon Christ's return. Instead we humbly seek the 'Gospel-shaped' good for our communities at all levels of participation, hoping that some might even be saved through our proclamation of the Gospel and demonstration of Christ's love.

The biblical doctrine of humanity is a great starting point for conversation with unbelievers. Every person is concerned about humanity - its problems, its welfare, where it is going – even if only at the level of one's own personal welfare! But there is great confusion about the answers. New challenges to the understanding of humanity are constantly arising as society morphs and develops. At the heart of even the most complex situations, however, the same, basic biblical principles about humanity are at stake. Outlined below are some significant implications of the Gospel for the questions and assumptions about humanity we face in our current Australian context.

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<sup>70</sup> Luke 10:27

- **What God Thinks of Us Matters Most**

Sinful human beings tend to look everywhere other than God for their identity and security. They may look to their relationships, community roles, financial status, achievements, failures or sexuality. Whereas all these things are important aspects of our created life, they do not sit at the heart of our identity. In fact, they may blind us to our true identity. The Gospel declares to every person that it is God's knowledge of us that is most important. We were made to reflect and know Him, we have turned away from Him and face God's judgement, and we need to grasp hold of the loving sacrifice of Jesus to be reconciled to God and truly find ourselves again in Him.

- **All Human Beings are Inherently Valuable**

The value of each person is not determined by his or her usefulness, abilities or economic status. It is not conferred on us by other people. Although the image of God in us has been grossly distorted by sin, it nevertheless remains and declares us inherently valuable. By sending His Son to die for human beings, God shows how precious we are in His sight.<sup>71</sup> Weakness and disability, far from making us less valuable, reminds us that we are all God's dependent creatures. It is, therefore, our job to accept rather than define the value God gives to all people. We should love all people regardless of age, race, gender, personality, sexual orientation, capabilities, political persuasion or criminal record. We should particularly protect the weak and powerless.

- **Human Life is Precious**

Life is the gift of God and it is to be treasured. When we consider that God creates and maintains life, that He has affirmed the value of human life in the incarnation of Jesus, and that He paves the way to eternal life in Jesus, we can see that the life God gives us ought to be treasured. Moreover, death is the great enemy in the Bible. Therefore, we do not take life away from ourselves or others, even if life is burdened by enormous suffering for all concerned. Neither do we idolise life and hang onto it at all costs. Rather, we worship the God who both gives life and takes it away.

- **True Human Freedom is Found in the Gospel**

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<sup>71</sup> John 3:16

Freedom in our society in our society is largely understood as having the right to make choices from any number of alternatives in every aspect of life. This is seen most clearly in the arenas of sex and individual consumption. This kind of freedom, however, rapidly descends into selfish exploitation of other people and the environment. More to the point, this kind of freedom is not freedom at all but slavery to sinful desires. This kind of freedom never brings the satisfaction and control it so alluringly promises. In fact, it brings death and judgement.

The Gospel reveals the utter foolishness of denying our dependence on our maker and pushing against our limitations as God's creatures. The purpose of freedom in the Bible is to creatively discern how to love others in our own situation.<sup>72</sup> Jesus used His freedom to lay down His life for others. Jesus' death and resurrection frees those who trust in Him from the slavery and penalty of sin, and sets us free to delight in God and loving others.

- **True Hope is Found in the Gospel**

The Gospel is thoroughly realistic about the fallout of sin in the world. The outcome of sin that every person is capable of great evil; people do great damage to one another; sickness and death plague us; and life frustrates us. Although there is often much to be gained from social movements, education, science and economic equality, none provide the ultimate answer to our problems. Insurance policies and frantic busyness will not guarantee our security from evil and suffering. Our dreams and aspirations for ourselves will not fully satisfy us. The horizon of our hope must be fixed on the Gospel. Jesus will return to lead His redeemed people to a new creation where evil and suffering is excluded, thirst is satisfied and God is enjoyed in all His glory.<sup>73</sup> Since only God can fix the problem of sin, our greatest gift to our communities is to share the hope of the gospel.

- **Human Beings are Built for Relationships**

Human beings were not made be isolated self-rulers but, rather, to live in loving interdependence, reflecting the intimate relationality of God Himself. In His church, God is building the body of Christ in which each member serves and encourages one another to grow up into Christ, and to mature in godliness, love, knowledge and faith. We serve one another in many different ways, according to

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<sup>72</sup> Galatians 5:1-13

<sup>73</sup> Revelation 21:1-6

the gifts and roles of responsibility God has given us. Together, too, we endure hardship, and comfort one another with the comfort of the Gospel.<sup>74</sup> We, therefore, make decisions that consider not only ourselves but those God has given us to care for.

Churches are not, of course, formed by people already made perfect. We are all in the process of turning from sin together. In this age, sin and Satan continue to trouble God's church with the result that we still sin both together and against one another. Sin is a serious matter in God's household and must be wisely and lovingly dealt with as we strive to witness to God's holiness and mercy in the world.

- **Both Mind and Body are Important**

God crafted the human being as a perfectly integrated psychosomatic unity. The various facets of a human being - mind, soul, spirit, heart and body - are all important and interdependent.<sup>75</sup> A person's 'real self' does not reside only in the spirit or mind but also in the body. Our bodies are essential to us, enabling so much of what it is to be human. They are not liabilities, to be lamented or manipulated to suit our desires. They are a good gift from God, even considering the damage caused by sin. Jesus healed people in both spirit and body. Moreover, Jesus took on human flesh, He gave His body for us, His body was resurrected, and we await the glorious resurrection of our bodies in Him. Our bodies belong to Him and we should be careful to honour Him with them.

Neither can a person's being be reduced to merely physical and chemical properties. A human embryo is not just a bunch of cells. A woman with advanced dementia is not just a disordered body and brain.

The Gospel clearly addresses all people, including the most hidden and vulnerable, as whole people. Therefore we should endeavour to appreciate and care for people according to every facet of their being.

- **Humanity and Nature are not Natural Enemies**

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<sup>74</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, Ephesians 4:11-16

<sup>75</sup> Mark 12:29

Humanity is not the natural enemy of non-human creation or vice versa but they were made to flourish interdependently. The dominion of human beings was designed to be for the good of the environment and the environment for the enjoyment and sustenance of human beings.<sup>76</sup> Sin has, of course, deeply damaged this relationship. But approaches to environmental problems should not lament the existence of humans, nor should they give equal value to human and non-human creation. It is through the man Jesus Christ that the relationship between humanity and nature is restored. As God's people, we care for God's creation rather than exploit it for our own selfish purposes. And the groaning creation will finally be liberated from bondage when the bodies of God's children are redeemed in the new creation.<sup>77</sup>

- **Gender Difference is a Blessing**

Our society increasingly sees gender difference as an oppressive social construct that is crying out to be deconstructed in the areas of marital norms, sexual preferences, childrearing and relational roles. At the same time, we still embrace a range of rather stereotyped, even degrading notions of femininity and masculinity. The Gospel, however, embraces the complementary differences between male and female, firmly planted in God's creation order, as a delightful blessing for the purpose of love and service. The joys, expression and responsibilities of gender have been badly tarnished by sin, but gender can be enjoyed in the wisdom of the Gospel. In fact, gender difference in marriage is given enormous dignity in its role of reflecting the ultimate marriage of Christ and His church.<sup>78</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The great news for humanity is that God has sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, into our world as a man, to bring us back to Him. It is through and for Jesus that we are created and sustained. It is against Jesus that we rebel. It is in Jesus' death and resurrection that the power of sin is broken. It is in Jesus that we can find our true selves again. Our true nature and purpose as created human beings is joyously understood in the light of the Gospel.

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<sup>76</sup> Genesis 2:9-17

<sup>77</sup> Romans 8:21-23

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 5:21-27

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