

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion"
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Body And Soul

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Genesis 2:4-9

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to the Genesis 2:4-9; that's on page 2 in your church Bibles. We're back into our series on Biblical Anthropology. For the last couple of months we've been trying to think BIBLICALLY about what it means to be a human being.

Who are we? What are we? What is so unique and special about us?

How we answer these questions will exert an enormous amount of influence on how we LIVE and how we MINISTER to other human beings in this world. What does God want from us? If we believe in him with our minds can we do whatever we want with our bodies? When a person is DEPRESSED will we pray with them, give them medicine or do both? When a person is poor will we give them a gospel tract or will we dig them a well, give them a coat and teach them to read? What will we do for people? What will we do first? What will we do most? What really matters?

Those are big questions and we cannot even begin to think about those things in a useful way until we figure out what we are and how we are constituted as human beings. Towards that end, hopefully you have your Bibles open by now to Genesis 2:4-9. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:4-9 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

As this story makes clear, there is something very special about human beings. Something uniquely connected to God. Something that is true of us that is not true of other created things. God SPOKE the heavens into being; God SPOKE the oceans into being; God SPOKE the trees and the forests into being; God SPOKE the fish and the animals into being; but when it came time to create human beings – he didn't speak. He touched, fashioned and BREATHED.

That's a whole different process because we are unique and special people. I love what Catholic theologian Abigail Favale says about this passage, she says:

“God forms the human (the adam) from the humus of the soil and breathes into his body, animating him with the divine breath of life. This imagery reveals an important truth about our nature: we are both earth and breath, matter and spirit. We are physical creatures; our bodies are integral to who we are. Yet we are not *merely* matter, because God's breath enlivens each of us with an immaterial soul. This is one of the foundational principles of a Christian anthropology: every human being is a unity of body and soul.”¹

I mentioned that Favale is a Catholic theologian – but this is not something that Protestants and Catholics disagree about. This is standard, essential, foundational Christian doctrine. Human beings are psychosomatic wholes. Let's talk about each side of that important phrase.

What Constitutes A Human Being?

¹ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis Of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 38.

First of all it is important for us to acknowledge that to be a human is to have a body.

1. To be a human is to have a body

That's the what the word "soma" in "psychosomatic" means. "Soma" in Greek means body. Human beings are embodied creatures. Our bodies matter. This story in Genesis PUSHES back against the pagan idea that our bodies are just MEAT CAGES for the soul. That was a very common view in much of the Ancient World and the biblical view represented in Judaism and then later in Christianity was considered ODD because of the value and dignity that it accorded to the human body. Jews and Christians washed the BODIES of their deceased and laid them carefully in graves and in tombs. Most of their pagan neighbours BURNED the bodies of their deceased loved ones because the body was just a cage for the soul. Burning the body helped to free the soul so that the soul could begin to live life at a higher level.

That was the cultural consensus that biblical religion was pushing back on. In fact, one of the earliest Christian heresies, called "Gnosticism", essentially attempted to combine what the Bible said about the soul with what the Greeks and Romans said about the soul. In some versions of Gnosticism they taught that as your SOUL was connected to God through faith in Jesus, you could do pretty much anything you wanted to do with your body. Your body didn't matter. Your body wasn't you.

But your body IS you – which is why the Apostle Paul said:

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” (1 Corinthians 6:13 ESV)

There were people trying to say that if you have faith in Jesus you could still sleep with prostitutes – because after all, sex is just something you do with your BODY – your meat cage – it doesn't have anything to do with who you are before God.

But actually it does; which is why Paul said:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Corinthians 6:15 ESV)

YOUR BODY IS YOU and therefore what you do with your body MATTERS! Again and again Paul reminded people that:

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ESV)

That was totally counter cultural back in the day. Christianity said that your BODY matters. Your body is you.

“your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV)

So you can't just believe in Jesus and DO WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH YOUR BODY – that's not a thing.

“you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:20 ESV)

To be a human being is to have a body. A body that comes from and is connected to the earth.

In the story we just read in Genesis 2 God is pictured as kneeling down, as it were, and fashioning out of the EARTH a BODY for the first man. In fact, as you may have heard before, the Hebrew word for “man” – *adam* – is only one consonant removed from the Hebrew word for dirt or earth – the word *adamah*. The original Adam was literally: “*Adam adamah*” – “MAN from the DIRT”; that's what the Bible is saying.

We are OF the earth.

That's why spending time in nature almost feels like therapy. It is restorative.

And that's why spending time in nature almost feels like worship. It reminds us where we came from – it reminds us of our connection to God.

That's what human beings are! We are “people from the earth” – but we are also BREATH OF GOD.

And that's the second thing we need to say about human beings.

2. To be a human is to have a soul

Now, in the Bible, the words “soul” and “spirit” are used more or less interchangeably. You can see that for yourself just by comparing passages that talk about human beings as complex entities. Matthew 10:28 for example says:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy **both soul and body** in hell. (Matthew 10:28 ESV)

Ok – to speak of a WHOLE human being is to speak of BODY and SOUL. But then, compare that to 1 Corinthians 7:34 which says:

And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in **body and spirit**. (1 Corinthians 7:34 ESV)

Here we have BODY and SPIRIT – so again, some theologians prefer to speak of SOUL and some prefer to use the term SPIRIT – but almost all of them will acknowledge that the two terms are used interchangeably. So what is a soul? Or what is a “spirit”? New Testament scholar James Dunn says that:

“the spirit of man is that aspect of man through which God most immediately encounters him ... that dimension of the whole man wherein and whereby he is most immediately open and responsive to God ... that area of human awareness most sensitive to matters of the spiritual realm.”²

² James D.G. Dunn, “Spirit, Holy Spirit,” in *NIDNTT, 3 Vols.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:693-94.

This is what separates us from the animals. An animal can have emotions, an animal can love and feel happiness and fear – but an animal does not have a divine spirit. An animal does not have the BREATH OF GOD inside it – but we do.

Genesis 2:7 says that God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life – that’s what makes us the exalted and dignified creatures that we are. We are flesh and bone but we are also BREATH and SPIRIT. Now of course, not everyone in the modern world believes that. Daniel Dennett, one of the “four horsemen” of the New Atheism says:

“The prevailing wisdom, variously expressed and argued for, is *materialism*: there is only one sort of stuff, namely matter – the physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology – and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain.”³

Daniel Dennett is a MATERIALIST, that is to say, he believes that MATERIAL is the only thing that exists. There is no spirit. There is no soul. You are your body AND NOTHING ELSE. You don’t have a MIND, you just have a brain. You are a highly evolved MEAT COMPUTER, nothing more. There is nothing of GOD in you, because of course, according to Daniel Dennett, there is no God. There is only MATTER.

That’s materialism and it is the dominant philosophy of our day – but this story pushes back against that – as it did against the Gnosticism of the Greco-Roman world. This story says, as Favale so beautifully put it, that human beings are:

“earth and breath, **matter and spirit**”⁴

Human beings are not just highly evolved meat computers – WE ARE BREATH OF GOD! We are not just earthlings – we are godlings! Not in the sense that we are divine, but in the sense that we are OF the divine. We are intimately, personally and constitutionally CONNECTED to God in a way that no other creature in the cosmos is. Now, as we read on into Genesis 3 and beyond we discover that, on the other side of the fall, that connection has been impaired, but through the redemption that is ours in Christ, it can be REPAIRED. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:6 says:

³ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1991), 34 as cited in Hammett and McCoy.

⁴ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis Of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), 38.

“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!””
(Galatians 4:6 ESV)

Are you hearing that? According to the Bible, when you become a Christian, you RECEIVE the Holy Spirit which bonds to your spirit and opens again a channel of communication between you and God. The Gospel is about SO MUCH MORE than just how to get your sins forgiven, it is ultimately about how you can be completely and entirely RESTORED into the person you were originally created and intended to be – a person who is intimately, personally and constitutionally connected to the Creator – thanks be to God!

Alright, so to be a human being is to be BODY and SOUL. It is to be EARTH and BREATH - now, what are the implications of that?

In the few minutes that we have left, I want to walk you through FOUR. Are there more than that? Absolutely. But it has already been a fairly full service, so we’re going to limit ourselves to these FOUR and we’re going to move fast, so strap in.

The first implication is this:

Implications:

1. We need to minister to the whole person

Anthony Hoekema is wonderful here, he says:

“Though the Bible does see man as a whole, it also recognizes that the human being has two sides: physical and nonphysical. He has a physical body, but he is also a personality. He has a mind with which he thinks but also a brain which is part of his body, and without which he cannot think. When things go wrong with him, sometimes he needs surgery, but at other times he may need counseling.”⁵

⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 217.

This is so important for us to understand! Right now in our culture we are SO OBSESSED with mental health that we immediately DEFAULT to counselling whenever anyone in our circle of influence has a problem. We have become obsessed with our INNER SELVES often at the expense of our BODIES.

According to Abigail Shrier:

“The rising generation has received more therapy than any prior generation. Nearly 40 percent of the rising generation has received treatment from a mental health professional – compared with 26 percent of Gen Xers.”⁶

This obsession with mental health and therapy has even contributed to the current pastoral crisis in North America. Just this past week Faith Today published an article called “Waking Up To The Pastor Shortage” and one of the causes it cites is the increased percentage of seminary students wanting to be therapists instead of pastors. The author, Rick Hiemstra says:

“most seminary students (potential pastors) choose to study counselling rather than prepare for vocational church ministry. This change goes back to the 1980’s when Bible colleges and seminaries started introducing counselling programs. Generally these are now their largest programs today. We’re grateful for counselling graduates, but their increase has been matched by a corresponding drop in students enrolled in pastoral ministry programs.”⁷

Everybody wants to be a counsellor now because we’ve become convinced that all our problems are in here (pointing at the mind) when in fact, sometimes the problem is actually rooted in your body. According to the May 2023 edition of Medical News Today:

“Physical activity is 1.5 times more effective at reducing mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression, psychological stress, and anxiety than medication or cognitive behavior therapy, according to the study’s lead author, Dr. Ben Singh.”⁸

Are you hearing that? Sometimes if you are feeling anxious or depressed – you need to go for a walk! You need to get some exercise and some sunshine – because that problem in your body has created effects and FEELINGS in your mind! Which is what you would expect in a

⁶ Abigail Shrier, *Bad Therap: Why The Kids Aren’t Growing Up* (USA: Sentinel, 2024), 17.

⁷ <https://digital.faithtoday.ca/faithtoday/library/item/05062024/4188073/>

⁸ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/is-exercise-more-effective-than-medication-for-depression-and-anxiety>

psychosomatic creature. There are no hard lines between these two parts of who you are. Like the old “no smoking section” in the airplane back when we were kids. That didn’t really exist did it? Because that’s not how integrated systems work. In an integrated system, things move back and forth – so sometimes you need counselling and sometimes you need exercise, sunshine, friendship, worship, medicine and maybe even surgery.

You’ve got a body and you’ve got a soul and both matter.

Now don’t go home today and say that “Pastor doesn’t believe in counselling” – of course I do. But there is such a thing as “too much of a good thing”.

We are bodies and we are souls and that has to affect how we care for one another – and it has to affect how we reach out to one another. This understanding of our humanity needs to influence our approach to outreach and missions. We can’t just CARPET bomb villages with gospel tracts. Many poor people are too distracted with bodily concerns to think very deeply about spiritual realities. A person who is shivering from the cold needs a WARM WINTER COAT and then after their teeth stop chattering we’ll go ahead and share the Gospel with them. We can’t minister to people as if they are ONLY souls and we can’t minister to people as if they are ONLY BODIES.

We need to think about the whole person.

That’s true when we are serving others and that is true when we are worshipping the Lord.

That’s the second implication I want to share with you.

2. We need to worship the Lord as whole people

An awful lot of contemporary evangelical worship is essentially gnostic, meaning it is conducted as if the body doesn’t really matter – but it does. Think of all the things that the Bible says about our BODIES in the context of worship.

“Clap your hands, all peoples!” (Psalm 47:1 ESV)

“in your name I will lift up my hands.” (Psalm 63:4 ESV)

So it's not just Pentecostals who are supposed to be moving their hands in worship, we're all supposed to be doing it. And it's not just your hands, my Baptist brothers and sisters, it's your whole body:

“Oh come, let us worship and **bow down**; **let us kneel** before the LORD, our Maker!” (Psalm 95:6 ESV)

And how about this?

“Praise him with tambourine **and dance**; praise him with strings and pipe!” (Psalm 150:4 ESV)

Lord have mercy! Your whole BODY is supposed to be engaged in the act of worship; not just your ears, not just your mind. All of you.

Biblical worship is tactile:

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” (Psalm 34:8 ESV)

We see that in the Old Testament and the New. In just a few minutes we're going to read these words together:

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26 ESV)

Worship needs to engage the whole person.

A few weeks ago I quoted Jonathan Haidt, who is an evolutionary psychologist – he doesn't believe in God but he does believe that human beings REQUIRE participation in sacred events in

order to be whole and healthy. He is very concerned about the amount of time young people are spending on their own and on their screens; he says:

“A healthier way to live would be to seek out more in-person communal events, especially those that feel as though there is an elevated or moral purpose and that involve some synchronous movement, such as religious services”⁹

That’s his prescription for kids who are struggling with anxiety and depression: they need to sing with us. Kneel with us. Bow with us. Clap with us and pray with us. They need to MOVE WITH US as we collectively move closer to God. Human beings need this. Human beings were made for this. We need to worship God body and soul.

Thirdly:

3. We need to anticipate an embodied future

In the same way that evangelical worship is often quasi-gnostic, so too is a lot of evangelical eschatology. “Eschatology” just means “what we think about the end”. A lot of evangelicals talk about the afterlife as if it is one giant Philadelphia Cream Cheese commercial. We’re going to float around on the clouds as disembodied souls – but that is not the ultimate hope of the Christian. The ultimate hope of the Christian, according to the Bible, is resurrection!

Now, part of the confusion comes simply from not thinking carefully through the entirety of the process associated with the end of all things, from a personal perspective, so let’s trace it out. When you die, if you are a believer, then your body will be buried in the ground and your soul will go to be with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8 – “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

Fair enough – but that is NOT your eternal destiny, that is what theologians refer to as the “intermediate state”. One theologian puts it this way, he says:

⁹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 206.

“Paul affirms that it is possible for believers to be with Christ even when they are no longer living in their present bodies and before they have received their resurrection bodies. ... The Bible does not give us any anthropological description of life in this intermediate state. We may speculate about it, we may try to imagine what it will be like, but we can form no clear picture of life between death and resurrection. The Bible teaches it but does not describe it.”¹⁰

Alright, so there is such a thing as a disembodied existence after death – when your soul is WITH JESUS and your body is in the grave - but that is only temporary. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 said:

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:52-54 ESV)

So that is your eternal destiny. That is your ultimate hope. To be with Jesus, AS A WHOLE PERSON – BODY and SOUL – just like you were originally created and intended to be – thanks be to God!

And then lastly, given all that we’ve said about what it means to be a human being, it is very important for each and every one of us to put our trust in the person and work of Jesus.

4. We need to put our trust in the person and work of Jesus

As we’ve been talking about, human beings we are BODIES and SOULS and therefore human beings need a BODY AND SOUL Savior and that’s exactly who Jesus is. He is not merely the mind of God, the Spirit of God or even the Word of God: he is the Word of God made flesh. He is truly God and truly man. He is BREATH and EARTH. He is Spirit and body. He took on a body so as to save human beings like us. Hebrews 2:14 says:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things (Hebrews 2:14 ESV)

¹⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created In God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 221.

That's the Gospel and we've been preaching this Gospel for 2000 years. The church father Gregory of Nazianzus said:

“For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.”¹¹

Do you understand that? If Jesus hadn't taken on flesh, then you as a human being, would not be saved. If Jesus hadn't given you his Spirit then you would not be saved.

But he did. He gave us his Body. He gave us his Spirit – that we might be fully and entirely saved.

That's Christianity in a nutshell, so if you haven't put your faith in Jesus – if you haven't taken refuge in his body and blood; if you haven't opened your heart to receive his indwelling Spirit – then do that today. He is the Savior that you need. He is the bread and breath of heaven. He is the Gospel – thanks be to God!

Let's pray together.

¹¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, “To Cledonius the Priest Against Appolinarius,” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, as cited in Hammett and McCoy, 278.