

Doctrine of Humanity

Creation of Humans

1. God directly created the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve, in his image, as unified physical and spiritual beings comprised of body and spirit,¹ free from sin, and dependent upon God for their immediate and ongoing life.
2. The image of God refers to God's intention to manifest his presence in the world through humans, both individually and collectively. Though God is infinite and omnipresent,² he created human beings so that he might dwell with them and make himself known through them³ (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7, 21-22; Ps 139:7-16; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; Ezek 37:1-14; Matt 10:28; John 6:40, 44; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:34; 15; 2 Cor 7:1; Philip 3:21; James 2:26).
 - a. Since humans are created in the image of God, every human life is sacred and possesses inherent value in God's sight from conception until death.
 - i. Likewise, every person is worthy of respect, care and protection by their fellow humans, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, mental or physical capabilities, socio-economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, actions or attitudes.
 - ii. All forms of abuse, slander, dehumanization, or oppression toward fellow human beings are an offense against God who made them in his image. We honor God by honoring all who are made in his image, and by calling them to honor God by living according to his intention for them (Gen 9:6; Prov 3:5-8; 14:31; 17:5; 22:2; Acts 14:15; James 3:9-10).
 - b. While every human being has been created in the image of God, it is only in the incarnation of Jesus Christ that the fullness of God's intention for humanity is revealed. Jesus Christ is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). As the God-man, Jesus perfectly manifested the presence of God in his humanity, revealing both what God is like and what humans are intended to be (Col 1:15-20; 2:9; John 1:1-18; 10:37-38; Heb 1:1-3).
 - c. God created humans in his image in order to ultimately conform them to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. Those who are in Christ will experience the fullness of God's intention for creating them in his image as the Holy Spirit dwells in them, manifests his presence through them, and progressively transforms them into the image of Jesus⁴ (Rom 8:9-11, 29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:4, 10; Eph 2:22; 4:20-24).

¹ Sometimes Scripture refers to humans as having a body, spirit, and soul (i.e., 1 Thess 5:23) but the words for "spirit" and "soul" are often used interchangeably to refer to the same non-material aspect of human existence. For more, see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 472-486).

² Meaning that God "does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being..." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1249.

³ While Christians agree that humans are made in the image of God, its meaning has been understood differently. Thus, we consider the meaning of the image of God to be a secondary issue. Most views define the image of God as something humans do: rational capacity, relational nature or rule over creation. While we affirm that God created humans to reason, relate and rule, the Bible never explicitly identifies these abilities or actions as the image of God. Our position is that the image of God refers not to something that *humans* do, but to what *God* intends to do through humans: to dwell with them and manifest his presence through them. For an explanation of primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrinal matters, see *Prolegomena*, "Our Theological System and Tradition."

⁴ As Marc Cortez explains, "...in Jesus we see that being human fundamentally involves manifesting God's own glorious presence through the indwelling power of the Spirit. In the incarnation, we have the singular instance of the *imago Dei* [image of God] in all its fullness, yet other humans are called to participate in the reality of the

- d. Therefore, while we affirm that every human being is created in the image of God, we also assert that one must be in Christ, through faith and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, to fully experience and manifest God’s presence in the way that God intends, both now and in eternity.⁵
3. God created humans as rational, volitional, relational, and morally responsible, in order that they might share in the fellowship and love of the Trinity and reflect that love and fellowship in their relationships with each other (Gen 2:8-17; 3:22-24; John 13:34-35; 14-17; Matt 22:36-40; Acts 17:24-27; 1 John 4:7-12).
4. God entrusted humans with authority to fill and subdue the earth, and to have dominion over the other living creatures. As stewards under God’s authority, humans were to care for the earth and its inhabitants, causing them to flourish, discovering and developing their potential, and enjoying their goodness⁶ (Gen 1:26-31; 2:5-15; Ps 8).
5. Humanity’s greatest joy and purpose is to glorify the Triune God by enjoying his fellowship, submitting to his rule, and accomplishing his will on earth (Gen 1:26-27; Ps 16:5-6, 11; Deut 6:4; Mark 12:29-31; Acts 17:24-27; 1 John 1:1-4; 2:23-25; 3:24).

Sin

1. When Adam and Eve believed the serpent and rebelled against God by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, this brought the curse of death and a fundamental severing of their intimate fellowship with the Triune God (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-23).
 - a. Having disobeyed God’s command, they became guilty and unrighteous, deserving the just punishment of death (Rom 1:18, 28-2:11).
 - b. Having acted dishonorably, they became shameful, brought dishonor upon God’s name, and were exiled from fellowship with him (Mal 1:6; Rom 1:21; Eph 2:11-13).
 - c. Having rejected God’s rule, they did not become autonomous but rather enslaved to Satan, sin, and death (Rom 6:17-22; Eph 2:1-3; Col 1:13; Heb 2:14-15; 1 John 5:19).
2. As the first man, Adam was the head and representative of all people, and thus, every human has been born into the sinful humanity of Adam. All humans share in the same curse and slavery to Satan, sin, and death, having inherited the guilt and shame of Adam’s sin, and are inclined to rebel from birth both by nature and choice (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:45-49).
3. Though still made in God’s image, sinful humans are unfit for God to share his presence with them and manifest his presence through them in the way that God intends (Gen 6:3; 9:6).⁷
4. The consequences of sin and the curse of death have profoundly impacted every aspect of human life:

image by being united with the Son through the power of the Spirit.” Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology* (2017), 115.

⁵ John Kilner describes this as the *dignity* that all humans share by virtue of being made in God’s image, and the *destiny* of being conformed to the image of Christ that only believers will experience. John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (2015).

⁶ See *Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 7.

⁷ Genesis 9:6 affirms that sinful humans are still made in the image of God. Many theologians have written that sin has “broken,” “distorted,” or even “obliterated” the image of God in humans, but Scripture never speaks of the image of God this way. It is better to say that, for sinful humans, the image of God is *unfulfilled* rather than *broken*, because they have become impure, unrighteous, and therefore unfit for God’s presence. For more on the dangers of viewing the image of God as broken, see Kilner, 147-176.

- a. Our bodies are prone to disease, injury, aging, deformity, mental illness, and ultimately death, which may be connected to the problem of sin in any or all of the following ways:
 - i. As the direct result of one's own sinful actions, or the actions of another (John 9:1-3; 1 Cor 11:27-32).
 - ii. As the result of one's membership and inclusion in the sinful humanity of Adam (Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-21).
 - iii. As the result of one's existence in a world that is also in bondage to decay because of sin (Rom 8:18-25).
 - b. By rejecting the knowledge that God had given them and grasping for knowledge that God had withheld from them, humanity's ability to know was severely affected. History has shown that much learning, investigation, and development is possible even in humanity's fallen condition. However, humans are also prone to misunderstand or misinterpret information, to actively suppress the truth of God that is evident in Scripture and the natural world, and to exchange truth for lies (Gen 3:1-6; Rom 1:18-25, 28; 2 Tim 3:13; Titus 1:15; Eph 4:17-18).
 - c. By despising what God had provided and desiring what God had forbidden, sin has corrupted humanity's volition and desires. We are prone to desire and choose that which is evil, harmful to us, and dishonoring to God. While humans are able to recognize, desire and choose many things that are outwardly good, because God has been rejected as the chief object of human desire, even these desires are disordered (Gen 3:6; Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9; Rom 1:24-27; 1 John 2:15-17; Eph 2:3; 4:19-22; Titus 3:3; James 1:13-15; 4:1-3).
 - d. By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in direct disobedience to God's command, humanity became evildoers, bearing the responsibility for their actions, and deserving God's just judgment (Gen 3:17-19; Ecc 12:14; Rom 1:29-2:11; Gal 5:19-21; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11-13).
5. Adam's sin led to a breakdown in humanity's relationship with God such that humans are unable to share in the fellowship and love of the Trinity as God intended (Eph 2:11-13).
 - a. This resulted in the breakdown of relationships between fellow humans. While relationships between people are still possible, they are fraught with envy, conflict, misunderstanding, oppression and exploitation, as people seek to use one another for their own selfish desires (Gen 3:16; Luke 11:11-13a; Rom 1:28-31; James 4:1-3).
 - b. This also resulted in the breakdown of the relationship between humanity and the created world over which God intended humans to rule. Humans still exert a measure of authority over the created world and have developed much of its potential, yet creation often opposes and frustrates humanity's attempts to control it. In the same way, humans have frequently exploited, manipulated and abused animals and the environment for their own selfish purposes, instead of caring for, protecting, and causing creation to flourish according to God's purposes⁸ (Gen 3:17-19; 9:2; Heb 2:6-8).

Death

1. Adam and Eve were created to depend upon God as the Giver and Sustainer of their lives. They were not inherently able to live forever, but through God's provision of a created world that was essential to human flourishing—and especially the tree of life—eternal life was possible. Yet, God's command and warning not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die reveals that in the beginning humans had the potential for either eternal life or death (Gen 2:8-9, 15-17).

⁸ See *Doctrine of Creation*, pts. 6-7 for more of the effects of sin on the created world.

2. Human death is the direct result and just punishment for human sin. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and thus the potential of death became a reality; their exile from the Garden of Eden removed their access to the tree of life, and thus removed the potential of eternal life in their sinful condition (Gen 3:17-24; Rom 5:12; 6:23; Heb 9:27).
3. As physical-spiritual beings, human death has both physical and spiritual dimensions:
 - a. Physical death refers to the death and dissolution of the body (Gen 3:19).
 - b. Spiritual death refers to the separation and breakdown in the relationship between humans and God that resulted from sin (Isa 59:2; Eph 2:1-3).
4. In Adam, all human beings are born spiritually dead and under the curse of impending physical death. Any human being who experiences physical death while still in a state of spiritual death, will experience eternal death (2 Thess 1:9; Rom 5:12; Rev 20:11-14).
5. Because sin has affected every aspect of human life, humans are totally incapable of being reconciled to God apart from his divine grace. Therefore, every human being stands in desperate need of Jesus as their Savior, Redeemer and Lord, because he alone can address their spiritually dead condition.

Gender, Sexuality, Marriage & Procreation

1. God directly created human beings in two different but complementary genders: male and female. Men (males) and women (females) are created equal in the sight of God: equally made in the image of God, equally sinful and responsible before God, equally in need of salvation, and equally redeemable and valuable in Christ (Gen 1:27; Gal 3:28).
2. Nevertheless, God created both genders to be distinct from each other in their psychological and physical composition and in their distinct roles as men and women, which God intends for their mutual flourishing and fellowship.⁹ The complementary gender roles are seen most clearly in marriage (see below) and in the leadership of the local church.¹⁰
3. God has designed marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman in which they become one flesh and commit to one another until death¹¹ (Gen 2:18-25; Matt 19:4-6; Rom 7:1-3; 1 Cor 7:39).
 - a. The one-flesh relationship of a husband and wife has been designed by God to reflect the inseparable union of Jesus Christ and his people, the Church (Eph 5:22-33).

⁹ Yet, because of sin, God's design for human gender has been distorted at the psychological, physical and societal levels. Many individuals experience a profound sense of tension between their physical gendered characteristics and their psychological sense of their gender identity (often called gender dysphoria). Others experience physical and/or chromosomal incongruities, with the result that their bodies bear characteristics of both genders (often called intersex). Furthermore, human societies have defined masculinity and femininity according to their own sensibilities, distorting both male and female gender roles in ways that are harmful to one another. Thus, all humans and all human societies are in need of repentance, healing and transformation through the gospel in the area of human gender. For more, see Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (2015).

¹⁰ See *Doctrine of the Church: Leaders, Members, Church Discipline*.

¹¹ We acknowledge that human cultures and governments define, authorize and regulate various types of marriages. However, we believe that marriage has been created by God himself and is not a product of human cultures. Thus, any relationship between two humans must accord with the biblical definition of marriage in order to accurately be called a marriage. In Scripture, marriage is consistently defined as a relationship between differently gendered (or sexually different) individuals. In other words, gender/sex differentiation is inherent to the biblical definition of marriage. Thus, only a union between one biological man and one biological woman can accurately be called a biblical marriage. For more, see Preston Sprinkle, *Grace//Truth 1.0: Five Conversations Every Thoughtful Christian Should Have About Faith, Sexuality & Gender* (2017), 63-85.

- b. As Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, within marriage the husband has been designated by God as the head of his wife, and has been given the responsibility to sacrificially love, nourish and honor his wife, just as Christ does for his Church (Eph 5:25-33; 1 Cor 11:3; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7).
 - c. Likewise, within marriage the wife has been designated by God as an indispensable companion for her husband, with the responsibility to love, respect, and submit to her husband as the Church submits to Christ (Gen 2:18-25; Eph 5:22-24; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-6; Col 3:18).
 - d. Because the roles of husband and wife are defined in relation to Christ as well as each other, they must both carry out their roles in submission and obedience to Christ:
 - i. A husband may not abuse his role as head of his wife by asking or demanding her to do something—or to join him in doing something—that would violate the clear teachings of Scripture. Nor may he follow her into sin, should she ask or demand him to do so. He must submit to Christ as Lord and should respectfully call his wife to do the same (Gen 3:17; Job 2:9-10; Luke 17:1-4; Eph 5:25-30; 1 Pet 3:7).
 - ii. Likewise, a wife may not ask or demand her husband to do something—or to join her in doing something—that would violate the clear teachings of Scripture. Nor is she required or permitted to submit to her husband if doing so would lead her into sin. She must submit to Christ as Lord and should respectfully call her husband to do the same (Gen 3:6; Luke 17:1-4; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1-6).
4. While God has designated distinct gender roles within marriage and for leaders within the local church, many of what are commonly referred to as *gender roles* outside of these contexts are culturally derived and must be carefully evaluated by Christian men and women in light of the ethic of love, honor, and sacrificial service of Jesus Christ.
- a. Though Jesus Christ is God incarnate as a male human, he is the exemplar for both men and women, and both men and women are called to imitate him in their relationships with one another. This does not mean that women should seek to adopt the gender role of men in their culture, but that women should seek to follow the ethic and example of Jesus in their relationships as women (John 13:34-35; Eph 5:1-2; 1 Cor 11:1).
 - b. Christian men and women should seek to live in a manner appropriate to their gender's typical role within their culture, to the extent that it does not violate Scripture, so that they might be able to give an understandable example of the love of Christ to their neighbors. Any cultural gender roles that lead to the demeaning, devaluing, or oppression of either gender must be rejected (1 Cor 9:19-23; 10:31-11:16).
 - c. Within the local church, Christian men and women are called to love and honor one another as family members, because of their shared identity as children of God (Mark 3:33-35; 1 Tim 5:1-2; 1 John 3:1-3, 11-18; 4:19-5:1).
5. Human sexuality, which includes sexual attraction, desires and actions, is a gift from God and is intended for the pleasure and union of one man and one woman within marriage, and for bearing children (Song of Songs; 1 Cor 7:1-5; Heb 13:4; Gen 1:28; 4:1).
- a. However, sin has affected every aspect of human sexuality such that all fallen humans experience attractions and desires—and choose to act upon them—in ways that are disordered and contrary to God's good intention (Rom 1:24-27; 13:13-14; Matt 5:27-28; Mark 7:21; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Pet 4:3-4).
 - b. Any sexual activity outside of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is sin and violates God's good design for human sexuality (Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 5-7; Eph 5:1-11; 1 Thess 4:3-8; Heb 13:4).

- i. Within monogamous, heterosexual marriage, each spouse bears the responsibility and privilege to steward their sexuality in submission to God and for the blessing of their spouse (1 Cor 6:18-7:5; 1 Thess 4:3-8).
- ii. Abusive, selfishly motivated sexual activity within marriage is also a sinful violation of God's design. This includes the use of power or authority to force one's spouse to engage in sexual activity, as well as either partner (regardless of gender) withholding sex from their spouse for the purpose of manipulation. In other words, *manipulating one's spouse for sex* and *using sex to manipulate one's spouse* both fail to honor sex between a husband and wife as a holy gift from God (1 Cor 7:3-5; Heb 13:4).
- c. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are called and enabled to seek repentance and holiness in their sexuality, and to steward their sexual attractions, desires and actions in keeping with God's design for human sexuality (Eph 5:1-11; 1 Thess 4:3-8; Heb 13:4).
- d. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, a celibate single life is not only possible, but is to be equally honored alongside marriage as pleasing to God and indispensable to the life and witness of his Church (Isa 54:1-5; 56:4-5; Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:25-38).
- 6. Just as marriage between one man and one woman is God's intended context for the enjoyment of sexual activity, so also marriage between one man and one woman is God's intended context for bearing and raising children (Gen 1:28; 4:1; Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Prov 1:8; 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Titus 2:3-5)
 - a. *The Connection Between Sex and Procreation*: God designed the sexual union of one man and one woman in marriage to be the means through which humans would fulfill his blessing and command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28; 4:1, 17, 25).
 - i. This does not mean that every sexual act between a husband and wife will lead to the conception of a child. God is sovereign over every instant in which a sexual act leads to conceiving a child, over every stage in the development of a child within their mother's womb, and over every moment of a child's life from birth to death (Job 31:15; Ps 127:3; 139:13-16; Eccl 11:5; Acts 17:24-28).
 - ii. God is also sovereign over and compassionate toward married couples who experience barrenness or infertility: the inability to conceive children through their sexual union or to carry a pregnancy to the point of live birth (miscarriage). Infertility is not a sign of God's punishment or displeasure, but it is a tragic example of the brokenness we experience in our bodies, because of human sin.¹² As God's people we grieve with those who suffer the pain of infertility (Rom 12:15; 1 Cor 12:26).
 - iii. The biblical story repeatedly testifies to God's ability to "open the womb" even of those who experienced prolonged seasons of infertility. Therefore, married couples who desire children, but experience infertility, should feel free to continually express their desire to God in prayer, trusting that he is able to give them a child, but also trusting in his goodness and care for them, even if he does not grant their desire. (Gen 17:15-19; 18:9-14; 21:1-3; 25:20-21, 26; 30:1-2, 22; 1 Sam 1:1-20; Luke 1:5-25).
 - 1. In recent generations, many types of fertility treatments and procedures have been developed to help couples who are struggling to conceive. Some of these procedures can be helpful, but others are fraught with serious ethical

¹² See Sin, 4, a, above.

issues that must be carefully considered in advance, utilizing scripture, prayer, and counsel from mature Christians.

2. The fostering and adoption of children who are in need of loving parents is a profoundly beautiful way for Christian married couples who desire children to grow their families and give a living example of God's grace in adopting them (Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:4-7; Eph 1:3-6).
- b. *The Validity of Marital Sex Apart from Procreation:* We thank God for designing the sexual union of a husband and wife as the means to bring about new human life. Yet, because we recognize God's sovereignty over when sexual union results in conception, we also acknowledge that sex between a husband and wife is not *only* intended for procreation, nor need it always be *open* to procreation.¹³
 - i. As mentioned above, we believe that human sexuality is "intended for the *pleasure* and *union* of one man and one woman within marriage." Thus, it is good and right for a husband and wife to engage in sexual acts together simply to serve and please each other and to delight in and strengthen their union as husband and wife (Song of Songs; Prov 5:15-19; 1 Cor 7:3-5).
 - ii. We also believe that it is permissible for Christian married couples to utilize non-abortive means of birth control, so that they may enjoy God's gift of sexual intimacy when they are not seeking to conceive children.¹⁴
 - c. *The Command to Multiply in the Old and New Testaments:* In the Old Testament, God repeatedly commanded people to "be fruitful and multiply" by having children (Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7; 35:11), and God promised to bless with children those who trusted him so that the Old Covenant community would grow (Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:20; 48:4; Deut 7:12-14; 28:1-4, 11; 30:9; Ps 127:3-5). In the New Testament, however, followers of

¹³ We define this as a secondary doctrinal matter, recognizing that godly Christians hold different convictions regarding the use of birth control (methods of engaging in sexual acts while preventing conception). On one hand, some Christians and churches hold a conviction that sexual acts between a husband and wife must be open to procreation. On the other hand, other Christians and churches (including Cornerstone) hold the conviction that husbands and wives can engage in sexual acts without these acts being open to procreation. In identifying this as a secondary matter, we mean to communicate that there is room for both convictions among the members of Cornerstone. Husbands and wives are free to hold and practice either conviction (provided they agree with each other), but they may not seek to impose their conviction on others or be judgmental of those who hold a different conviction. On this matter, we believe that "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5, c.f., vv. 1-12). For more on birth control, see point ii and footnote 14 below. For an explanation of primary, secondary, and tertiary doctrinal matters, see Prolegomena: Our Theological System and Tradition.

¹⁴ Non-abortive birth control refers to types of birth control that prevent fertilization (the union of sperm and egg). Some non-abortive methods are temporary (e.g., condoms, diaphragms, the "timing method"), while others are more permanent (e.g., vasectomy, tubal ligation). In contrast, abortive (or abortifacient) birth control prevents implantation (e.g., intrauterine devices, the "morning after pill"). With abortive birth control, a sperm and egg may unite, but the fertilized egg is prevented from implanting in the woman's uterus and continuing to grow. We believe abortive methods of birth control should not be used. While there is much that we do not know about the mysterious, miraculous way that God knits a human being together in a woman's womb (Eccl 11:5), we do know that it all begins with the union of sperm and egg. We acknowledge that there are many times when a fertilized egg may fail to implant in a woman's uterus without any contraception. This seems to be another tragic effect of sin within our bodies, which we entrust to God as we long for restoration. But when a fertilized egg fails to implant in the uterus because humans have actively done something to stop it from doing so, we believe this is a line that humans should not cross. We strongly encourage Christian married couples to investigate and seek counsel regarding any birth control methods they are considering before they use them.

Jesus are never commanded to multiply by *bearing children*,¹⁵ but they are commanded to multiply by *making disciples* (Matt 28:18-20). God's blessing upon his New Covenant people was evident as the number of disciples grew (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 16:5; Col 1:5-6). Therefore, though we affirm that the creation mandate to "be fruitful and multiply" is still valid, we believe that the main focus of multiplication in the New Covenant community¹⁶ is not the bearing of *biological* children but of *spiritual* children through sharing the gospel and discipling those who believe. Discipleship receives the emphasis but does not rule out bearing biological children. (John 3:3-8; 1 Cor 4:14-17; 2 Cor 12:14; Gal 3:7-9; 4:18-19; 1 Thess 2:7-12; 1 Tim 1:2; 5:14; Titus 1:4; Philem 1:10; 3 John 1:4).

- i. Biological children are still a blessing from the Lord (Ps 127:3-5), and Christian married couples who bear children are commanded to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Thus, within the New Covenant, the purpose of parenting is to seek to make disciples of the children God gives us.¹⁷
- ii. Moreover, within the New Covenant, all believers have the blessing and responsibility to engage in *spiritual parenting* by making disciples, whether they are married or single, barren or fertile, young or old (Matt 28:18-20; Isa 54:1-5; 56:3-5; Matt 19:10-12; Mark 10:29-30; 1 Cor 7:25-38).¹⁸
- iii. Within a Christian marriage, a husband and wife may freely choose to have and raise children (whether biologically or through fostering and adoption) or to forgo having children. But, whatever they choose, they are called to be "fruitful and multiply" by making disciples.

Children

¹⁵ The closest thing to a New Testament command to bear children is found in 1 Tim 5:14, where Paul tells younger widows to "marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander." However, this is not a command but a statement of Paul's *desire* (Greek: *boulomai*, meaning *wish/want*) for younger widows to remarry, rather than enrolling them among the older widows whose needs were to be supplied by their local church (see vv. 11-13).

¹⁶ For more on the Church as the New Covenant Community, see *Doctrine of the Church, The Church in the Biblical Story*, 3.

¹⁷ While discipleship is and should be the desire of all Christian parents, we acknowledge that it is God who opens peoples' eyes to understand and embrace the Gospel (2 Cor 4:1-6). The task of Christian parenting is not to *assume* that our children have faith in Jesus, or to *pressure* them to profess faith in Jesus, but to *call* them to put their faith in Jesus as we *teach* them about Jesus, and to help those who believe to *grow* in their faith by *following* Jesus (2 Tim 3:15-17).

¹⁸ The Old Testament prophet Isaiah promised that a day would come when "the children of the desolate one [barren woman] will be more than the children of her who is married," (Isa 54:1) and when God would give eunuchs (men incapable of bearing children) who trusted in him "a monument and a name better than sons and daughters" (Isa 56:4-5). We believe that both promises find their fulfillment in the call to spiritual multiplication through disciple-making. In Matthew 19:11-12, Jesus spoke of people who, like him, would willingly embrace a single, celibate lifestyle for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. This lifestyle was further exemplified by the Apostle Paul, who taught and modelled celibate singleness as even more effective than marriage for serving the Lord with "single-minded devotion" (1 Cor. 7:25-38). Paul forsook marriage and childbearing, not to avoid the command to be fruitful and multiply, but to fully devote himself to spiritual multiplication through disciple-making (1 Cor 4:14-15; 1 Thess 2:7-12).

1. Every human being is made in the image of God, including children. Thus, every child's life is sacred, valuable, and worthy of care and protection from the moment of conception.¹⁹ The local church bears the responsibility to value and protect every child's life within its congregation, to advocate for the value and protection of every child's life within their surrounding community, and to extend provision and protection to children who are being mistreated, whether on a permanent or temporary basis (Gen 1:26-29; Ps 139:13-16; Matt 18:1-6; 19:13-15; Luke 1:39-44; James 1:27).
2. Children are a blessing from God, yet every child has been born into the fallen, sinful humanity in Adam, and manifests their participation in Adam's rebellion against God through willful sinful actions from a young age (Ps 51:5; 58:3; 127:3-5; Gen 8:21; Rom 3:23; 5:12-14; Eph 2:1-3).
 - a. Thus, children need salvation from sin and death and reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ (Rom 3:9-18; 21-24).
 - b. Children should be taught about their sin and need for salvation and encouraged to trust in Jesus Christ and submit to him as King (Acts 2:38-39).
3. Childhood is a precious but temporary stage of development, marked by playfulness, imagination and discovery, as well as ignorance, foolishness and susceptibility to deception. Thus, children need both instruction and discipline for growth toward maturity (Prov 22:14; 23:13-14; Eph 4:14; 1 Cor 13:11; 14:20; Heb 5:11-14).
 - a. Parents bear the primary responsibility for the instruction and discipline of their own children, and children are responsible to honor and obey their own parents (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21; 2 Cor 12:14; Heb 12:7-11).
 - b. Within the local church, the congregation bears a secondary but indispensable responsibility to support, encourage, and join with parents in the discipline and instruction of their children (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:3-7; Eph 4:11-16; Titus 2:3-5).

The Elderly

1. Every human being is made in the image of God, including those who are elderly. In fact, the Bible ascribes greater honor and dignity to the elderly (Lev 19:32; Prov 16:31; 20:29).
2. The local church is called to honor and serve the elderly within their congregation and surrounding communities (1 Tim 5:1-3; 1 Pet 2:17; Gal 6:10).
 - a. Primary responsibility for the care and provision of the elderly lies with their own adult children. If a believing elderly person within a local church does not have adult children, or their adult children are unable to care for them, it is the responsibility of their local church to do so (1 Tim 5:3-10, 16; James 1:27).
 - b. Elderly believers have a unique, indispensable responsibility within the fellowship of the local church to serve as spiritual parents to younger men and women and as spiritual

¹⁹ Thus, we believe that the abortion of a human fetus at any stage of development is sin, because it is the murder of a human being made in God's image. The image of God—not the viability of the fetus outside the womb—is the determining factor in valuing and protecting the lives of the unborn (Ps 139:13-16; Ecc 11:5). The only exception to this would be in the case of a human fetus that cannot survive to the point of delivery and poses a grave threat to the mother's life if it continues to grow (for example: an ectopic or tubal pregnancy, in which a fertilized egg implants and grows outside of a woman's uterus, most often in the fallopian tube). We believe that conditions like ectopic pregnancies are evidence of the brokenness in our world and bodies because of sin, and we grieve over these realities, because the fertilized egg represents a human being, made in God's image. However, in only these types of situations a pregnancy should be terminated in order to protect and preserve the life of the mother, who is also made in the image of God.

grandparents to the children within the congregation, teaching and modeling a godly lifestyle through their words and actions (1 Tim 5:1-2; 2 Tim 1:5; Titus 2:1-5).

Disability

1. Every human being is made in the image of God, including those who experience disabilities, whether physical or mental.
2. The local church bears the responsibility to honor, dignify, and extend fellowship to all within their midst, including those with disabilities (1 Cor 12:12-26).
 - a. Often individuals with disabilities and their families have significant needs that can and should be met through acts of service by the local church.
 - b. Yet the greatest honor and dignity are conveyed as believing individuals with disabilities are fully embraced within the fellowship of the local church and entrusted with significant responsibility to serve with and for others within the congregation (Gal 6:10; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18; Titus 3:14; Rom 12:6-13; 1 Cor 12:4-7).

*Race and Ethnicity*²⁰

1. Every human being is made in the image of God, including every race, ethnicity or nationality (Gen 1:26-29).
 - a. God created the human race with the potential for great diversity in their physical characteristics (skin, hair and eye color, facial features, height, muscle mass, etc.).
 - b. Additionally, as humans obeyed God's command to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), this would have likely led to the gradual diversification (but not division) of human cultures and customs, even if Adam and Eve had not rebelled against God (Acts 17:24-28).
 - c. Therefore, we affirm that physical and cultural diversity is part of God's good intention for humans, as is evident by the vision of a renewed humanity in Christ, comprised of people from "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9-19; 7:9-17).
 - d. Even in a sinful world, the diversity of human cultures has led to great beauty, discovery, and technological advancement, giving evidence that, though humans are sinful, they are still made in the image of God and reflect something of God's intention in what they produce (Matt 7:9-11; Rom 2:14-16).
2. Humanity's sin led to a breakdown in their relationship with God and with one another (Gen 3:16; Rom 1:28-31; James 4:1-3). As a result, human physical and cultural diversity, which God intended for good, have been corrupted in devastating ways:
 - a. God instituted the confusion and division of human languages at Babel. This was both an act of judgment on humans for their rebellion against him and also an act of mercy that inhibited their ability to further cooperate in perpetrating evil (Gen 11:1-9).
 - b. Though human cultures have produced much that is beautiful and beneficial, because humans are sinful every human culture is also corrupt and operates in ways that are contrary to God's intention. Thus, every culture's values and practices must be evaluated

²⁰ These two terms are often used interchangeably but may be distinguished, as Strachan writes, "In general terms, *race* is seen as a social construct based on skin color, while *ethnicity* refers to one's cultural background." He continues, "[M]any today prefer to speak of ethnicity over race, for while there are different people groups of the earth, with different cultural practices, the human race is unitary. There are not essential biological differences between people of varying skin pigmentation, though some still divide humanity along these lines." Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity* (2019) 216, 219.

- according to Scripture (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-30; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:18-25; Eph 4:17-19; 1 Thess 5:21-22; 1 Pet 1:18; 4:1-5; 1 John 2:15-17).
- c. Additionally, humans have sinfully responded to human diversity by viewing those who differ from them with pride, fear and hostility (Eph 2:14b). They assign value to their differences, elevating certain traits or cultures as superior and denigrating others as inferior. Those seen as superior have sought to exploit and dominate those viewed as less valuable. In their most malignant forms, these sinful value judgments have resulted in systemic evils like segregation, and atrocities like slavery and genocide.
 - i. We renounce and repent of sinful value judgments that assign greater or lesser worth to human beings based upon physical characteristics, language or culture.
 - ii. We remember and grieve over such atrocities that have occurred in history.
 - iii. We condemn and oppose such atrocities where they are perpetrated today.
 3. We affirm and defend the equal worth and dignity of all human beings, because all are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-29).
 4. We affirm that all humans of all ethnicities are equally in need of salvation from sin and death, and reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, all humans of all ethnicities should be called to repent and trust in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30-31; Rom 1:16-18; 3:9-24).
 5. We affirm that Jesus Christ died and rose again in order to redeem people from every ethnicity and to create a new, united humanity in himself (Rev 5:9; John 12:32; Acts 10:34-35; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-21; Col 3:11).
 - a. Jesus' death and resurrection are the means by which the hostility between different ethnicities can be resolved, whether that hostility is rooted in the supposed superiority of one group over another, or motivated by bitterness and vengeance for how one's group has been mistreated by another (Eph 2:14-17; Col 3:11-17).
 - b. The new humanity in Christ does not obliterate human diversity. Rather, it restores God's good intention for human diversity by enabling humans to be united in love, honor and service of God and one another (Rom 12:1-21; 15:5-9).
 - c. Jesus Christ has entrusted to his Church the mission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18-20; cf. Acts 1:8), and to demonstrate through their shared life not only an appreciation for ethnic *diversity* but also the reality of ethnic *reconciliation* in Christ²¹ (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-21; 3:6; Col 3:11).

Recommended Resources:

Theology of Humanity:

- Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 2017.
- Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Part 3: The Doctrine of Man, 1994.
- John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, 2015.
- C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, 1983.
- Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind*, 2019.

Gender and Sexuality:

- Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith*, 2014.
- Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women*, 2020.

²¹ For more on the distinction between *diversity* and *reconciliation*, see Jarvis Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology*, 2010.

- Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, 2016.
- John Piper, *What's the Difference?*, 2008.
- John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, 2005.
- Preston Sprinkle, *Grace/Truth 1.0: Five Conversations Every Thoughtful Christian Should Have About Faith, Sexuality & Gender*, 2017.
- Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 2015.
- Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*, 2018.

Marriage and Singleness:

- Sam Allberry, *7 Myths About Singleness*, 2019.
- Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness*, 2010.
- Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, 1987. (section on ch. 7, pp. 267-357)
- Timothy & Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 2011.
- John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 2009.

Children and Parenting:

- William Farley, *Gospel-Powered Parenting*, 2009.
- Paul David Tripp, *Parenting*, 2016.

Disability

- Stephanie Hubach, *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability*, rev. ed., 2020.
- Joni Eareckson Tada, Steve Bundy and Pat Verbal, *Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry: A Cultural Adaptation*, 2014.

Race:

- J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, 2003.
- John Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love*, 2018.
- Jarvis Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology*, 2010.