

Humanity: Image of God, V; Constitutional Nature, I

We are wrapping up our study on the image of God in human beings. We have looked at three perspectives, so let us move on to the fourth. Hoekema accurately says that the image includes human beings in their three relationships: to God, to our fellow human beings, and to creation. So this is just referring back to the very first one and saying that this is a relational aspect. I agree, but I think it is important enough to spell it out again. We have reached the same conclusions from Dr. Newman's study and from an examination of the life of Jesus, the perfect image of God in the Gospels. By God's enabling grace, we must grow in our reflection of the image in each of these areas. Hoekema claims, fifth, that humanity in the totality of its being was made in God's image. Berkhoff says it well, on page 205: "We need to look not for the image in the material substance of the body. It is found rather in the body as the fit instrument to the self-expression of the soul." So with that understanding, the body being the vehicle of the demonstration of the image, let us be careful and not disassociate the body from the image. Are we not going to image God in the resurrection on the new earth? Well, we are certainly going to have a whole list of bodily existence there, so I would endorse it expressed in that way.

What about the sum total of humanity? I would regard this as the largest expression of the relational perspective. There is definitely something to it. It is a very healthy thing to get out of your own tradition and your own church occasionally and go to other churches. I will never forget back east at Biblical Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, where I taught for 10 years, we had a good number of Korean students and they put on a chapel service for the whole seminary family. It was a remarkable experience. They not only shared with us their own lifestyle and how they disappeared on the weekend because the churches paid their way to seminary and they were expected to serve from Friday after school until Sunday. They led us in worship. It was a remarkable thing. It was definitely a different cultural form than we were used to, but there was an expression of unity in Christ that was a wonderful thing. I was deeply moved. It reminded me of Revelation 4 and 5 and the whole picture there of the glory of God being such that God is only adequately appreciated ultimately when He is praised by people from every language, every country, every group, and with every language. That was a beautiful view of fulfillment. In that way a little missionary journey can be a really edifying thing.

Male and female, again I would endorse it as the most intimate of human relationships. I am talking about marriage here, as an aspect of the relational view. I would be careful though not to deny the image to singles and would emphasize that singles need to have wholesome relationships with people of both sexes. It is a fundamental fact of the biblical record that in the beginning God made them male and female and in His image. That is only one aspect, but one real aspect of the image is relational, as they came from the Creator's hand. They were not two males or two females; it was male and female and complementarity is crucial. I would contend that marriage is a very special arena for the demonstration of the image. And in fact, the Christian family is a very special sphere for evangelism as God has entered into covenant with us. It is in a family context. We need male and female to show the total image because of the different ways God has made us. But again, I do not want to deny to Christ the image of God. The male and female image of God in its own procreativity reflects His creativity; again, I would not deny it in light of the way Genesis reads.

Let me push us on to a discussion of the constitutional nature of human beings. Constitutional nature has to do with how many parts we have. Are we one part, two parts, or three parts? Monism is logically first. This view holds, proponents are given (that human beings are indivisible) and the various parts of humanity of which Scripture speaks are different ways of referring to the totality of our being. According to monism—we are talking about anthropological monism—one must have a body to be human. Thus, a disembodied existence in an intermediate state is denied. There is no such thing as a

separable soul. We do not have an immaterial part; we are one. This is the view of modern philosophy and, in that modern theology follows closely modern philosophy, it is the view of modern theology as well. Even evangelical Christians have conformed to this view. The view is wrong, though, because the Bible does teach an intermediate state in which human beings live a disembodied spiritual existence. I cannot tell you everything about that state. I might be able to tell you about five or six things about it, but that is it. We do not know the furniture of heaven, for example, but there is enough for us to affirm it.

Dichotomy says we are not just one part as monism contends, but we are made up of two parts. Charles Hodge and Louis Berkoff are proponents for dichotomy. This view holds that we are composed of two parts: a material part, the body, and an immaterial one, the soul or spirit. Paul designates this immaterial part with personal pronouns: “I desire to depart and to be with Christ” as found in Philippians 1. There are two parts, some claim; others say the spiritual part should be subdivided into two parts, thus making three parts altogether, which is trichotomy. Franz Daelich is a representative of this view. This view holds that a human being is composed of three parts, a physical body, a soul which “is the seat of the affections, desires, emotions and will of man,” and, third, a spirit “which knows and is capable of God-consciousness and communication with God.” These definitions come from the new Scofield Reference Bible, which is the most contemporary source that espouses this view. The most important proof texts for this view are 1 Thessalonians 5:25 and Hebrews 4:12. Without those proof texts, there would be no trichotomy. I will reveal my conclusions ahead of time and suggest that trichotomists have misunderstood those passages, which never were intended to teach that we have three separate parts, but rather describe different aspects of our interior life.

A fourth view is really a modern version of the second view. Holistic dualism is the best way to say it. My notes say conditional unity, which is Erikson’s expression. Psychosomatic unity is Hoekema’s expression. This view holds that the normal state of human beings is as materialized unitary beings. It is normal to have a body. This unity is altered at death where the immaterial part of mankind lives on while the material part decomposes. This disembodied intermediate state is incomplete or abnormal according to Erikson. I agree, and in the future resurrection of the dead the person will again be unified. Berkoff and the others are right, Hoekema and Erikson claim, we are made in two parts, but there is not enough emphasis traditionally given to the normal state of affairs being that the two parts are unified. I agree with the criticism. That is when we came from our Creator’s hand, Adam and Eve were body and soul together and as we live now, we live in the body and as we will live on the last day and thereafter, we will be resurrected holistic human beings. An intermediate state means that status in between our life now in the body and the resurrection of the dead. Seen from this perspective, although we affirm an intermediate or interim existence, it is abnormal because it is an existence as the spirits, mentioned in Hebrews 12, of just men made perfect or the souls of martyrs under the altar, as in Revelation 6. That is abnormal and it is temporary because the dead will be raised and God will reconstitute us with body and soul together.

So there are really three views because the fourth is just an adjustment of the second. It still says we have two parts; that is why I prefer the designation “holistic dualism” to these two different words that use “unity” as the noun and then use different adjectives: conditional unity or psychosomatic body-soul unity. No, we are two parts. Dichotomy is right, dualism is right—not ontological dualism that good and evil are eternal—but anthropological dualism that we are made up of two parts. Let us lay the emphasis where the Bible does, on the normal unity of the two parts.

There are passages in Scripture which plainly teach an intermediate state. In Luke 23:43, on the cross Jesus promises the dying thief: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” I remain

unconvinced by an exposition which understands the word “day” as the last day. I have seen some commentators say, “Well, a day with the Lord is a thousand years. This means in the future at some unspecified time.” They are stretching because they are committed to monism. The text teaches that the forgiven thief would join Jesus later that day in the presence of God. Since their bodies remained on the crosses and were taken down and buried, there must be an immaterial part of human nature which survives death. I. Howard Marshall in the *New International Greek Testament* comment on Luke, “Jesus assures him of immediate entry into paradise.” A straightforward reading would yield that conclusion. You would have to have some other reasons for denying this and trying to get around it. Here is one more I have seen recently, “I tell you the truth today, at some unspecified time in the future, you will be with me in paradise.” Again it looks like a device to get around what the text plainly says. In *Philippians 1:23*, Paul expressed his desire “to depart and be with Christ.” In context he is speaking of departing the body at death since verse 21 contrasts living and dying, verse 22 speaks of continued living in the body, and third, verse 24 also speaks of remaining in the body. Paul expected to go into the presence of Christ when he died. His body would be buried and would decay. His immaterial part would go to be with the Lord. From this passage I have devised a little scheme that goes like this. We can compare three states: the present state, the intermediate state, and the final state. Now how does Paul describe the intermediate state here? He says he prefers to depart and be with Christ and that is better, much better. I take him at his word. To die and be with Christ is better than living and knowing Christ. Well, if you remember your degrees of adjectives, we would call that good. It is good to know the Lord now. Oh, it is not perfect, we still sin. But it is sure better than its alternative, which is being alive now and not knowing the Lord—that is bad. You can use another set of adjectives if you want. Intermediate state for the righteous is better. *2 Corinthians 5* says, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” This makes the eternal state best. You can also draw three adjectives for the wicked—it is bad to not know Christ now. It is worse to be absent from the body and present in judgment, exemplified in *Luke 16*, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: “I am in torment in these flames.” It is before the resurrection, “Father Abraham, send somebody back to warn my brothers because they are unrepentant even as I was.” But for the wicked—I do not say this lightly—their eternal state is worst because then they are reconstituted in body and soul and equipped to suffer for all eternity in Hell.

In *2 Corinthians 5*, Paul contrasts being at home in the body and being away from the Lord. In one sense he is not away from the Lord, the Lord is with him, but he is away from the Lord’s special presence in Heaven. He contrasts that with being away from the body and being at home with the Lord. Presupposed here is that human nature is composed of material and immaterial aspects. When one is at home in the body, living in the body, he is not in the presence of Christ in heaven. When a believer departs the body, he goes to be with the Lord. Plainly, the body he departs does not go into Christ’s presence. There is an immaterial part that survives the death of the body and enters into the Lord’s presence. In conclusion, the passages we have briefly surveyed sufficiently refute the monistic view described earlier. It simply is not true that our nature is in such unity that a disembodied existence is impossible. It is possible and becomes actual in the intermediate state, and I cite the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It is the one place, for sure in my estimation, that the Bible speaks of the intermediate state of the wicked. The Bible is ultimately more concerned about the people of God than it is the unsaved, and here is one place that it talks about that. Yet I feel the force of Erikson’s calling this intermediate existence incomplete or abnormal. Our final state is not a disembodied existence. A high percentage of my students are corrected when they hear me say this. Here is what happens—even preachers do it—they say, “Absent from the body and present with the Lord” and extrapolate that for all eternity. This is a failure in systematic theology. They say the *Apostle’s Creed* in many churches: “I believe in the resurrection of the dead.” Even if they do not say it they believe in it, but they have not made a connection between this Heaven, extrapolated forever, disembodied spiritual existence and their confession with other Christians in the belief of the resurrection of the body. A significant percentage of my students have that spiritualized

view of the final state. It is spiritual, but it is spiritual/physical. It is a new Heaven and a new Earth. In Revelation 21, the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven to Earth. The meaning is that Heaven comes down to earth. There is a complete realization of the plan of God and He is with His people.

Our final state will not be as disembodied spirits; it will be in glorified bodies on the new Earth. In that sense, the intermediate disembodied spiritual existence, which Paul calls better, is still not the best. It is temporary and incomplete.

It is a question about words, “mortal” and “immortal.” I believe in the intermediate state because of the passages mentioned earlier—and other ones. I affirm that there is an interim status of human beings such that when we die, it is not the end of us. Our souls do not sleep, but rather we are absent from the body and present with the Lord. We exist. That is, there is an immaterial part to us that is sufficient to still speak of us as us, apart from our bodies. We are mortal in that our bodies die. You could talk about our immortal souls if you want. They are certainly disembodied souls that continue to exist. I do not like the terminology very much since 1 Corinthians 15 talks about mortal putting on immortality in light of the resurrection of the dead, in that context, of the righteous. So really I would rather talk about the existence of disembodied spirits or souls after death and before resurrection, and then the immortality of the total person. So there is a survival of the soul but the immortality of the total person in the resurrection of the dead.

I would like to mention something to you for the sake of completeness. If you ask me the question, “What views do evangelical Christians have pertaining to what happens to human beings after death?” They do not all agree with what I just said. Under the influence of monism, there are three views. This information is taken from John Cooper’s book, *Body, Soul and Everlasting Life*. Evangelical Christians have taught the Immediate Resurrection view. F. F. Bruce was one who held this. The belief is that when a believer dies, that person passes from time into God’s timeless eternity, and is immediately at the end of the world. This is reflected by C. S. Lewis in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. The characters go from the bus in Great Britain to Narnia, are there for a long time, and come back exactly where they were on the bus. That is that concept. The immediate resurrection view is not biblical. When Jesus died on Good Friday He did not immediately go to the end of the world. He was raised on Easter Sunday. That was not the end of the world. The end of the world even for Jesus occurs after His Second Coming, which has not happened yet for anybody, not even for God. So we have some unclear notions there. Furthermore, the Bible affirms an intermediate state. Unless I have those passages wrong, it affirms being absent from the body and present with the Lord. That is not at the resurrection or last day; that is before the resurrection. Revelation 6 speaks of souls under the altar, crying out to God for vengeance, “How long, oh Lord? And they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had was complete.” That is not final; that is intermediate. So you say, “Where do these views come from?” They come from the pressure of monism on Christian theology. Another view is the extinction recreation view, which states that when we die, we die. We are so constituted as one that there is no such thing as a separable soul. So we die and the resurrection of the dead is really a recreation of human beings. This is not right. Jesus was not annihilated. He did not cease to exist. He said, “Today I will be with you in paradise.” If you advocate that the Son of God ceased to exist in His death, even if just His human nature ceased to exist, the way some annihilationistic writers do, you have violated orthodox Christology. The early church has—in the epitome of the doctrinal statements—the Chalcedonian creed, which emphasized that Christ’s natures are not separable, that He became a human being permanently without division. If the extinction recreation view were right then Jesus became extinct when He died—His human nature at least did not exist anymore—then I suppose His resurrection was another incarnation of the Son of God. No, it was a putting together of body and soul as it will be for us. He has a divine nature that we do not. The biblical view as to what happens to

human beings after death is an intermediate state resurrection view. It alone fits the model of what Jesus, the prototype, experienced; He went immediately into the Father's presence when He said, "Father into Your hands I commit my spirit." His body remained on the cross. His human soul or spirit, His immaterial part inseparably joined to His divine nature, went immediately into God's presence, and He was holistically raised from the dead on Easter Sunday morning.

If believers and unbelievers experience the intermediate state as better or worse, respectively, than their existence on earth prior to death, then it is assumed a judgment has taken place. John 3 tells us that there is a judgment that has already taken place in the present. The one who has not believed has been condemned already; the one who has believed is not condemned. So the judgment properly pertains to the Last Day, but the verdicts of the last day are announced beforehand in the Gospel. It is one of the wonders of Jesus' coming. The judge of all the earth has come before the Last Day in His incarnation and He accurately announces the verdicts of the Last Day based upon people's relations to Him and those verdicts are right. So if somebody believes in Him they have passed from death to life. Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." For the one who continues in unbelief, John says the wrath of God remains on him. He has been condemned already if he dies that way; Jesus talks about people dying in their sins. So there is a sense that already there is a judgment hanging over the world, the negative side, and already the announcement of the final verdict of justification is announced in the Gospel for believers. Jesus accurately reveals—He is the judge after all—those verdicts ahead of time. There is another sense in which they will await the final judgment. My guess is, even now, some unsaved people know the truth in their hearts. Romans 1:32 says, "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do these things deserve death." That is part of the moral dimension of the image of God or, as Paul calls it in Romans 2, "[...] the requirement of the law written on the heart." There is a greater realization at death, I do not deny it, although I do not know if I can point to one particular verse to confirm it, but judgment especially pertains to the Last Day.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank You that Your Word teaches us primarily about You; it is chiefly about God and not about us, but secondarily, in light of all that the Bible says about You, You do teach us about ourselves. Thank You that You made us in the first place. Thank You for telling us the truth about the Fall. Thank You for sending Your Son to be our Savior and that part of His ministry is to give us the New Testament, to teach us, Lord, about You and about ourselves. Lord, help us to grow in the image of God, to be renewed, Lord, and better image You in our family lives. Every one of us needs to ask forgiveness and pray for enabling grace and peace that we might be better parents and children and spouses, Lord. Give us grace, we pray, to better put our theology into practice, Lord, to not just let these things flit about our brains, but may they influence the way we live. Use Robert Newman's good work to encourage us to live for You. Give us progress in the Christian life for Your glory, continue to teach us as to how You made us, Lord, that we might be better ministers of the good news to men and women who need to hear that good news. Use us, we pray, to lead others to Christ, and we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.