



BETHEL CHURCH
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE



THE DOCTRINE *of* HUMANITY



APRIL 2026

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be human? This is one of the most profound and unavoidable questions that remarkably only humans ask. No other creature reflects on its own existence, questions its purpose, or searches for meaning. This alone signals something unique about humanity.

The Doctrine of Humanity seeks to answer this question not from philosophy, culture or science but from the authoritative foundation of Scripture. The Bible opens with a deliberate and dignified account of human origins – God personally forming man and woman, breathing life into them, and declaring them made in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). From the very beginning, humanity is presented not as an accident of nature, but as the intentional creation of a personal God.

This doctrine matters deeply because our understanding of human nature shapes everything else — how we view identity, morality, suffering, relationships, and eternal destiny. A distorted view of humanity inevitably leads to a distorted vision of human flourishing. The Bible presents a whole and coherent picture: humans are both physical and spiritual, finite yet bearing eternal significance, fallen yet redeemable.

In a world offering competing answers – reducing humanity to biology, social construction or self-defining societies – the biblical vision stands distinct. It affirms that every person carries inherent worth, is personally known by God, and exists for a purpose far greater than themselves. **So, studying this doctrine is an invitation to understand who we truly are, why we are here, and how we are meant to live – in light of the God who made us.**

WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

The question of human origins is among the most profound inquiries a person can pursue. Scripture does not leave this question unanswered. The Book of Genesis opens with two carefully structured and complementary accounts of humanity's creation – each illuminating a distinct dimension of what it means to be human.

The **first** account (**Genesis 1:26–27**) presents a broad and structured overview of creation, emphasizing God's intentional act in creating humanity. It highlights two key movements: **God's decision to create human beings and the fulfillment of that decision**. Notably, the text does not describe the materials or methods used in this act of creation. Instead, the focus is distinctly theological, centering on humanity's purpose and role—to be fruitful, to multiply, and to exercise responsible dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:28).

The **second** account (**Genesis 2:7**) shifts in tone and texture, adopting a far more intimate record:

“The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”

Here, the emphasis transitions from function to formation — the deliberate, hands-on creative act of God. The imagery is strikingly personal: the Creator not merely commanding existence into being, but sculpting and animating humanity with unmistakable intentionality. Together, these two accounts offer a beautiful and profound vision of what it means to be human—**created with purpose, made for relationship, and grounded in a deep, God-given identity**.

Humanity as the Imago Dei — ‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ of God

A defining distinction separates humanity from the rest of the created order. While all other creatures are fashioned “*according to their kind*,” humanity alone is described as bearing the image and likeness of God — a designation of unparalleled theological weight.

Genesis 1:26–28 has been the subject of extensive scholarly, theological, and philosophical reflection throughout history, and at the heart of this passage lies two theologically loaded Hebrew terms:

- ***Tselem’ (Image)***: The term “*image*” communicates the idea of humanity as the functional representative of God on earth. In the ancient Near East, kings would erect statues bearing their likeness across conquered territories as a bold declaration of sovereign presence and authority. Genesis 1:26–27 takes this royal concept and radically democratizes it: every human being — not just kings — bears the royal stamp of God.

This means you are not here by accident. You have been deliberately placed on this earth as God’s ambassador — commissioned to represent Him in every space you occupy. As image-bearers, humans carry a sacred mandate: to make the invisible God visible to the created order — through how we govern, how we serve, how we love, and how we treat one another.

Please note that the image of God has nothing to do with our physical shape or size of human beings. We are not what God

looks like — it is about the inherent worth and dignity that every person carries simply by virtue of being human.

‘Demut’ (Likeness): While “*image*” speaks to our role and dignity, the term “*likeness*” speaks to our nature and capacity — the idea that humans share certain qualities with God, though expressed in a finite way.

Consider what sets human beings apart from the rest of creation:

- **Free Will** — the ability to make real, meaningful choices
- **Creativity** — the ability to imagine, design, and bring new things into existence
- **Moral Awareness** — the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and to be held accountable for that distinction
- **Intellectual & Emotional Depth** — the ability to think critically, reflect profoundly, and feel with genuine complexity

These capacities are not incidental — they are constitutive of personhood. They are precisely what make us capable of entering into relationship with God and with one another.

Significantly, following the creation of humanity in His image, God does something He does for no other creature in quite the same manner — **He speaks directly to them and blesses them.** This divine address and blessing — widely referred as the Cultural Mandate — carries profound implications for human identity, vocation, and responsibility:

Command	Meaning	Implication
Be fruitful and multiply	Procreation and the expansion of human life	Human relationships and marriage are sacred and purposeful
Fill the earth	Spread the image of God throughout all creation	Every corner of the world is meant to reflect God's presence through His people
Subdue it	Bring order, cultivation, and development to creation	Human work, culture, and civilization are acts of faithful stewardship
Rule over	Exercise delegated authority over living creatures	Humanity's dominion is a responsibility, not a license for exploitation

Work as God's Calling

God placed humanity in the Garden with a specific assignment: *work it and take care of it.*

Work was not a punishment handed down after sin entered the world. It was woven into the original design of what it means to be human.

Here is what most people get wrong about work: They treat it as something to survive, to get through, to retire from. Our culture has handed us a mantra: we work to live. But Genesis tells a radically different story. **You are made in the image of a working God.**

A God who created, ordered, shaped, and called it good. And when He made you in His image, He passed that same creative, productive,

purposeful instinct on to you. Your drive to build something, fix something, make something better — that is not ambition. That is image-bearing.

God has spread raw materials in front of you. Your skills, your mind, your relationships, your city, your industry. And the ancient assignment still stands: *work it, tend it, rule it*. Not for your own glory, but as an act of service and worship to the God who designed you for exactly this.

Equality of all Humanity

From the very first pages of Scripture, God declares with unmistakable clarity that both male and female are created in His image — *“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”* (Genesis 1:27). This means that before God, womanhood and manhood stand on completely

Humanity as Royal Priests

In Genesis 1, God alone holds supreme power over chaos, bringing an ordered creation into existence purely through His spoken word. Within this creation, humanity is uniquely appointed as God's delegated rulers.

Genesis 1–2 portrays Adam and Eve as royal priests, with the Garden of Eden serving as a sacred temple where Heaven and Earth meet. This priestly role is evident in Genesis 2:15, where God places man in the garden *“to cultivate and keep it.”*

The two Hebrew words used — *‘abad’* (cultivate) and *‘samar’* (keep) — are the same terms used elsewhere in Scripture to describe priests caring for God's Temple in Jerusalem. This is no coincidence. Caring for sacred space meant actively sustaining the order God established in creation, keeping chaos at bay.

Humanity's role, therefore, was never merely gardening — it was far greater than tending to plants — it was working alongside God to uphold and expand His creation.

However, humanity failed in this calling. The rest of the biblical story traces God's mission to restore humanity to this royal priestly identity through figures like Abraham, Moses, and David — all pointing ultimately to Jesus Christ, the perfect and final Royal Priest who restores what was lost in Eden.

equal ground — neither is superior, neither is inferior. Both are equally sacred in His sight, equally valued in His purpose, and equally clothed with the same divine worth and dignity. Neither sex is a lesser reflection of God — together, they reveal a fuller picture of who He is.



This truth extends far beyond gender. Every race, every ethnicity, every tongue and tribe carries the '*Imago Dei*' without diminishment — the African and the Asian, the Castes and the Tribes, all bear the same divine stamp. Racism, therefore, is not merely a social evil; it is a theological contradiction.

Furthermore, the poor, the weak, the disabled, and the *marginalized* also carry the *image of God*. Poverty does not erase the image of God; weakness does not diminish it. In fact, Scripture consistently

reveals that God draws especially near to the vulnerable (Psalm 34:18; Matthew 5:3). To honour the image of God faithfully is to see every human being — regardless of sex, race, or social standing — as someone worthy of profound respect, justice, and love.

Christ as the True Interpreter of the Image of God

No passage brings the meaning of the image of God into clearer and more personal focus than **Mark 12:13–17**. When Jesus Christ is questioned about paying taxes, He points to a coin and asks whose image it bears. “Caesar’s,” they reply. His response is simple yet profound: *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”* The implication reaches far beyond



politics—if the coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, then you belong to God because you bear His.

This is not an abstract idea; it is a defining truth about your identity. **You are made in God’s image, known by Him, and called to reflect Him.** To live in this reality is to offer your whole life back to Him—through joyful devotion, sincere love, steadfast loyalty, and faithful service. These are not burdens to carry, but the natural overflow of a life that knows its true worth and its true home.

WHAT ARE WE MADE OF?

The Bible teaches that we are not just physical beings. When God formed man from the dust and *“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”* (**Genesis 2:7**), something extraordinary happened. That divine breath made us unique among all creation. We became living beings with **body, soul, and spirit** — three distinct yet deeply connected dimensions of one whole person.

The Apostle Paul captures this beautifully:

*“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole **spirit, soul and body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* — 1 Thessalonians 5:23

1. The Body

The body is your physical, visible self — the part of you that lives, moves, and acts in the world. But the body is far more than just a biological machine. From the very beginning, when God formed man “from the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7), the physical body was never an afterthought — it was central to God's design. Unlike animals, humans alone were formed with both dust and divine breath,



making the body the very vessel through which the image of God is carried and expressed in the physical world.

One of the most important things to understand about the body is that it is your sense-bearing, world-conscious self. God designed the body as the instrument of the soul, equipping it with five remarkable faculties – *seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling*.

Everything you know about the physical world every relationship, every experience, every moment of beauty or pain — reaches you through the body. It is your point of contact with creation. Far from being a limitation, the senses are a gift — a God-designed means by which the soul engages with the world God made.

For those who are in Christ, the body takes on an even greater

The Truth about Lies

One of the oldest lies ever told about the human body is this: ***"What you do with your body doesn't matter — only your spirit is important."*** We tend to separate the spiritual from the physical — elevating one and dismissing the other. But Scripture will not allow us that comfortable division.

From the beginning, Humanity was fashioned in the image of God as a whole, embodied person — body and soul together (Genesis 1:27). The body was never incidental to that image. It was essential to it, which means how we live in our bodies carries a dignity we dare not dismiss.

Scripture is equally clear that every action and every choice made in the body will one day be accounted for before Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Bodily living is never spiritually neutral.

And the story does not end at death. The same God who formed the body and holds it accountable will one day raise and glorify it, conforming it to the likeness of Christ's own resurrection body (Philippians 3:21).

The greatest confirmation of the body's value, however, is not found in a doctrine — it is found in a person. God Himself entered human flesh (John 1:14), embracing our embodied existence fully. That single act declares, louder than any argument, that the body is worthy of honour, care, and reverence.

significance. It is not merely a biological vessel or a carrier of the soul — it is the very dwelling place of God Himself: *“Or do you not know that your **body** is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”* — 1 Corinthians 6:19

2. The Soul

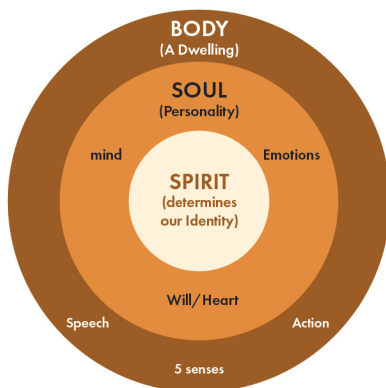
The soul is your inner world — the unseen part of you that thinks, feels, remembers, imagines, and desires. It is where the ‘real self’ lives. Think of the soul as a house with several rooms, each serving a different function:



- **The Mind** — This is where your thoughts and beliefs live. It is how you understand the world, process information, and form convictions. A renewed mind produces a transformed life. *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12:2).
- **The Emotions / Feelings** — These are your emotional responses — joy, grief, fear, love, anger. Emotions are not weaknesses; they are real and God-given. The Psalms are full of raw, honest emotion poured out before God. Rightly understood, emotions are gifts. But emotions make good servants and bad masters. The danger comes when feelings begin to rule us — when how we feel becomes the final authority over what we do. Bitterness left unchecked becomes governing resentment. Fear left unexamined becomes paralyzing anxiety. Desire left unrestrained becomes a consuming appetite.

- **The Desires / Will** — These are the deep longings and appetites that drive human behaviour — what we crave, pursue, and are instinctively drawn toward. Desires are not inherently evil, but sin profoundly disorders them. Left unchecked, they bend away from God, attaching themselves to lesser things and demanding what only God was meant to provide. This is why Scripture calls us not merely to restrain desire, but to have it reordered — redirected toward God as the soul's true and ultimate satisfaction (Psalm 73:25).

When the soul is healthy and ordered, life feels coherent and peaceful. When the soul is disordered — when thoughts, feelings, and desires are all pulling in different directions — we experience the inner conflict that Paul describes so honestly in Romans 7.



3. The Spirit

The spirit is the deepest and most central part of you that connects with God. If the soul is the inner world, the spirit is the very core of that world — the seat of your capacity to connect with God.



The spirit is your God-oriented faculty. It is the part of you that responds to God, worships, and is born again. *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24). When you are born again, it is your spirit that is renewed and made alive in Christ (John 3:6; Romans 8:10, Ephesians 2:5).

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH US?

If there is one story that explains the state of our world — the violence, the selfishness, the quiet sense that something is deeply off — it is the story told in the opening chapters of Genesis.

God gave Adam and Eve one simple instruction: *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”* (Genesis 2:16-17). The garden was full of freedom but one boundary existed — and obedience to that boundary was the key to remaining under God's blessing. It was less a restriction and more an invitation to trust.

The Fall, when it came, was not the result of ignorance. It was the result of a deliberate choice. The serpent offered them the chance to *“be like God”* — and here lies one of the great ironies of the entire story. They already were like God. That was precisely what it meant to bear His image. But rather than embracing that identity as a gift received from a generous Creator, they reached for it as something to be seized independently through disobedience — choosing to be God's rival rather than His friend.

Sin, at its core, is a life curved inward. Rather than a life orbiting around God — finding life, meaning, and identity in Him — we want everything to revolve around us. This was the fundamental choice of Adam and Eve: *independence over dependence, their will over God's will.* And the consequences did not stay contained within the garden walls. And so, they were cast out of Eden.

Outside of Eden, in the wasteland of exile, Cain murdered his brother Abel.

The effects of sin spread from personal to relational, from relational to social. The created order that God had declared good began to spiral toward chaos — reaching what is perhaps its most devastating low point in Genesis 6, where Scripture simply states that *“the earth was filled with violence”*.

The Apostle Paul, writing in **Romans 1**, cuts to the theological heart of the matter. Idolatry, he argues, is not simply one sin among many — it is the sin that opens the door to every other sin. When God is displaced from the centre of a human life and something lesser takes His place — whether that is power, pleasure, approval, or self — every other disorder follows naturally and inevitably. **The architecture of a human life was designed with God at its core. Remove Him, and the whole structure begins to collapse.**

All of humanity that we see today has fallen to varying degrees, twisted, distorted and corrupted expressions of what the original design was meant to be. The anger, the selfishness, the emptiness, the compulsive striving — none of these are features of authentic humanity. They are symptoms of a nature bent out of shape. Even the best of human achievement, the most admirable of human virtues, carries within it the subtle fingerprints of this distorted self.

*To truly understand what it means to be human, we must look in **two directions**:*

Back to the original creation — where Adam and Eve were crafted in the image of God, genuinely free, morally whole, and designed for unhindered communion with their Creator. That was the blueprint. That was what a "human" was always supposed to look like — not striving

and grasping, but resting and relating, secure in the identity of being God's image-bearers.

- **To Christ Himself** — the Second Adam, who did not merely point us back to Eden, but showed us something even greater. In Jesus, we see perfect humanity fully restored and fully alive. He was the truest human who ever lived — the living definition of what the image of God looks like when it is unbroken, undistorted, and uncorrupted.

CAN WE BE REDEEMED?

Is there a way back? Can what was broken be restored? Can what was lost be found? The answer the Bible gives is a resounding yes! — rather a costly and beautiful yes!

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's own answer to that question — given not in words alone, but in flesh, blood, and an empty tomb.

The garden was lost through one act of disobedience. It has been reclaimed through one act of perfect obedience, perfect sacrifice, and triumphant resurrection.

The fundamental problem introduced by the Fall, as we have seen, was a displacement — God was moved away from the centre of human life and “*the self*” took His place. Redemption, therefore, is not simply a moral clean-up operation. **It is a re-centring.**

- *From self to God* — life is no longer driven by the relentless pursuit of

self-preservation and self-promotion, but by trust in a God who is genuinely for us.

- *From control to trust* — the exhausting grip of needing to manage every outcome begins to loosen, replaced by the restful confidence that God holds what we cannot.
- *From performance to grace* — the crushing weight of having to earn one's worth, approval, and security is lifted, replaced by the liberating reality that we are already fully known and fully loved.

This is not a minor adjustment — it is a revolution at the core of a person's identity.

The breathtaking news of the New Testament is this: the image that was broken in Adam is being restored in Christ. Salvation is not just about going to heaven — it is about becoming fully human again. The Fall did not erase the imago Dei — it made its restoration the very heartbeat of redemption.

Several key texts establish this trajectory with clarity:

- **Romans 8:29** frames the divine purpose in explicitly image-related terms: *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to **the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”* Conformity to the image of Christ is not incidental to salvation — it its ultimate aim.

- **2 Corinthians 3:18** describes the process as progressive and Spirit-empowered: *“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being **transformed into his image** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* The restoration of the image is not a single event but an ongoing transformation — a journey from glory to glory.

Ephesians 4:23–24 and **Colossians 3:10** reinforce this trajectory, describing the renewed self as being *“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”* and *“renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*

Every time you open your Bible, every time you worship, every time you choose love over pride or forgiveness over bitterness — **you are being transformed.**

Why keep on sinning?

Most of us know the feeling. We make a sincere decision to change, and yet — sometimes within hours — we find ourselves back in the same old patterns. Why do we keep returning to what we know is destroying us?

Martin Luther described the human condition with a striking phrase — ***incurvatus in se*** — *“curved in on itself.”* Sin has not simply given us bad habits; it has bent our very nature inward. Like a tree growing twisted around itself rather than reaching toward the light, fallen humanity perpetually orbits the self — serving its own desires above all else. This is not just something we do — it is something we are.

This inward bend is what the Bible calls the flesh — not the physical body, but **disordered desires** within us. But disordered desires rarely work alone. They are triggered by **deceptive ideas** — lies whispered by the enemy about who we are, what we need, and what will truly make us happy. And all these are reinforced by **culture** — a world that not only tolerates these cravings but actively celebrates and normalises them.

You cannot straighten what is bent by simply trying harder. Something deeper must happen — a reorientation of the whole person from the inside out. We do not fight these desires in our own strength. We fight them by staying close to the One who has already won.

The Holy Spirit is actively at work within you, restoring what sin has distorted — and in that same power, you are not left powerless against sin, but empowered to overcome it (Romans 6:6, 12; Galatians 5:16).

Here is a concise way to see the whole story of human nature through **four stages**:

Creation – Free and Good: God created humanity — beginning with Adam and Eve — genuinely good and truly free. They had the ability to obey God and walk closely with Him, though the possibility of choosing to disobey remained open (Genesis 1:31; Ecclesiastes 7:29).

Fall – Bound and Broken: When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience (Genesis 3), human nature did not simply get damaged — it became enslaved. Left to itself, humanity lost the ability to live rightly before God (Romans 3:10–12; John 8:34). We were not just wounded; we were captive.

Redemption – Freed and Renewed: Through Jesus Christ — His death, burial, and resurrection — those who believe are spiritually reborn. This is not merely a fresh start; it is a new nature. By God's grace, believers are genuinely empowered to resist sin and walk in freedom (Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:16).

Glorification – Perfected and Whole: The story does not end at redemption — it ends in glory. In eternity, believers will be made completely and permanently holy. Not just freed from sin, but incapable of falling back into it — fully restored, forever (1 John 3:2; Revelation 21:27).

SO, HOW DO WE LIVE TODAY?

To understand what we were truly made to be, we must look back at the original creation — where humanity was crafted whole, free, and in unbroken communion with God — and forward to Christ Himself, the Second Adam, who is the truest and most complete expression of what the image of God looks like when it is fully restored and fully alive.

It is in this light that the **Great Commandment** (Matthew 22:37-39) comes into its fullest meaning. When Jesus said — *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself”* — He was not simply issuing a moral instruction. He was describing the exact shape of a restored human being.

To love God with everything is to dethrone the self and reorient the whole person upward and outward. To love others sacrificially is to turn outward, breaking the gravitational pull of self-interest and recovering the relational design we were always meant to live in. **The two commandments together are not a burden placed on broken people — they are a portrait of a healed one.** And a healed person cannot stay silent. This is why the Great Commandment flows so naturally into the **Great Commission** — go into all the world and preach the good news. The gospel we carry is not merely a message about the afterlife. **It is the announcement of restoration.**

We go not as people who have fully arrived, but as people in process — honestly, dependently, and hopefully — showing the world what it looks like when grace is actively at work. To love is to send. To be restored is to become, in the hands of God, a restorer of others. That is what it means to bear the image of God in a broken world.

CONCLUSION

The doctrine of man, rightly understood, does not end in despair over what we have lost. It would be easy to stop at the Fall — to survey the wreckage of what sin has done to humanity and conclude that the story is mostly tragedy. The image is marred. Our nature is curved inward. Our relationships are fractured. And the diagnosis is devastating.

But the doctrine of man was never meant to be read in isolation from the God who made us. And the God who made us is not a God who abandons what He has started. He is the God who, in the fullness of time, stepped into human flesh — not to condemn it, but to redeem it from the inside out.

In Him, the image of God is no longer marred, no longer bent, but gloriously and permanently whole. And what He is, we are being made into — not by our own striving, but by the patient, faithful, unstoppable work of His Spirit within us.

The masterpiece is not abandoned. It is being restored. And one day, that restoration will be complete — *“for He who sits on the throne has declared, ‘I am making all things new.’”* (Revelation 21:5)

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Teens Church

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