

WHAT IS HUMANITY?



CREATED IN HIS IMAGE. LOVED BEYOND MEASURE.

Called for His Purpose. Redeemed for His Glory.

CREATED IN HIS IMAGE

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb.

PSALM 139:13-14



VALUED BEYOND MEASURE

For you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.

ISAIAH 43:4



DEEPLY LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

1 JOHN 3:1



PURPOSED FOR GOOD WORKS

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

EPHESIANS 2:10



REDEEMED RESTORED. RENEWED.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

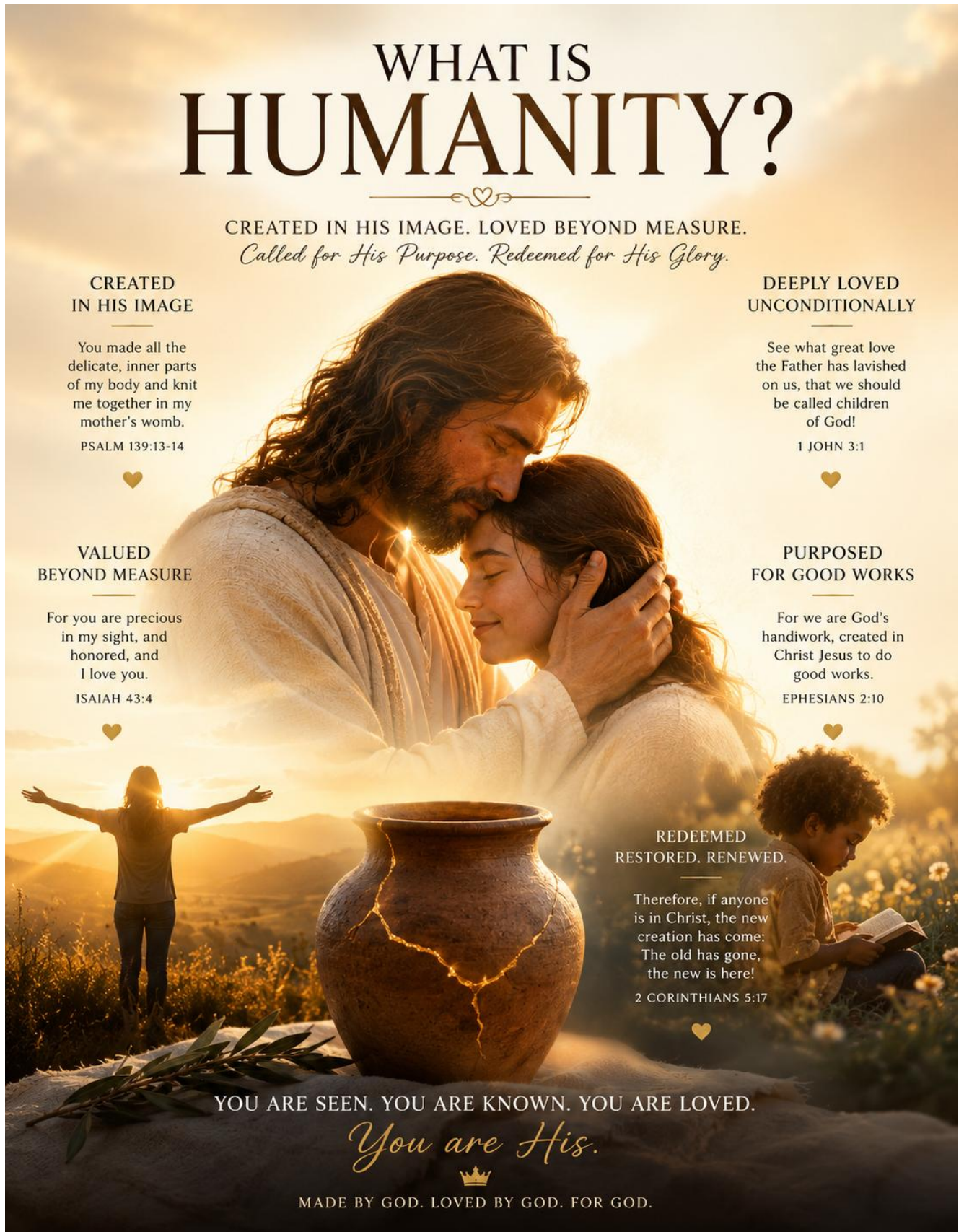


YOU ARE SEEN. YOU ARE KNOWN. YOU ARE LOVED.

You are His.



MADE BY GOD. LOVED BY GOD. FOR GOD.



What Is Humanity?

Understanding Our Identity, Purpose, and Transformation in Christ

This paper was written during my Doctor of Christian Leadership studies at Liberty University. Through this program, God has deepened my understanding of Scripture, spiritual formation, and Christian leadership while showing me how biblical truth shapes my identity, purpose, and ministry calling. One foundational question explored in my doctoral studies was: What is humanity? Though simple at first, this question deeply shapes how we view ourselves, others, suffering, and God's redemptive work.

In my own life, I have wrestled with identity, worth, purpose, rejection, brokenness, and healing. Painful experiences once influenced how I saw myself, but through God's Word, I discovered that my identity is not defined by my past, failures, wounds, or circumstances. My identity is found in the God who created me, loves me, redeems me, and calls me His own.

As I studied the doctrines of Creation, the Heart, and New Creation, I gained a deeper understanding of God's design for humanity. Scripture teaches that every person is created in the image of God, possessing inherent dignity, value, and purpose. At the same time, God's Word honestly addresses the reality of sin and the brokenness that affects every human heart. Yet the story does not end there. Through Jesus Christ, God offers redemption, restoration, and the opportunity to become a new creation.

This paper reflects both my academic study and the biblical truths that continue to shape my personal journey. While written as a doctoral assignment, its message extends beyond the classroom and speaks directly to one of the greatest needs in our world today: helping people discover who they truly are through the lens of God's truth rather than through the wounds of their past.

Studying these doctrines clarified the ministry God has called me to pursue. Through this journey, I came to realize that many hurting people remain trapped not only by their circumstances but by a distorted understanding of who they are in Christ. God has called me to help people move beyond shame, rejection, fear, and brokenness by teaching them their true identity as His beloved children. I believe lasting healing and transformation begin when individuals understand they are created in God's image, embrace the renewing work of Christ, and walk confidently in the purpose He has given them. This conviction shapes my writing, discipleship, and ministry.

It is my prayer that as you read this paper, you will be reminded of your immeasurable worth to God, discover the purpose for which He created you, and experience the transforming power of becoming the person He has called you to be through Jesus Christ.

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Approaching Leadership Studies: Priority 1—What is Humanity?

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CLED 700: Biblical & Theological Foundation of Leadership (B02)

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September 15, 2024

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Christie Johnson is a Doctrine student at Liberty University, focusing on Christian Leadership in Spiritual Formation. This paper is part of ongoing research into the importance of understanding humanity through scriptural insights, guided by David Powlison's three epistemological priorities. The aim is to elucidate the significance of aligning our understanding of humanity with biblical teachings to fulfill the Great Commission and embody effective Christian leadership.

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HUMANITY IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Introduction

Understanding humanity from a theological perspective is crucial for effective Christian leadership. The question, "What is humanity?" shapes our identity, purpose, and interactions. Genesis 1:26-27 (New International Version) reveals that humanity was created in the image of God (Imago Dei), establishing a profound basis for human dignity and purpose. This scriptural truth affirms that every person bears God's image, endowing them with inherent worth and defining their role within creation. Genesis 1:28 (NIV) further clarifies this role by commanding humanity to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over...every living thing that moves on the earth." This mandate underscores humanity's stewardship of creation, reflecting God's intention for humans to function as caretakers.

Recognizing humanity's divine origin and purpose is essential for leaders to align their vision with God's intentions and guide others in fulfilling their roles according to divine will. The doctrines of Creation, the Heart, and New Creation provide critical insights into human identity, transformation, and purpose. Understanding these doctrines equips leaders to reflect God's character, address human fallenness, and pursue His redemptive plan. This analysis explores these theological perspectives to elucidate how they inform and shape effective Christian leadership.

Theological Perspectives on Humanity: Three Foundational Doctrines

The Doctrine of Creation: Humanity as Image-Bearers

Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV) establishes that humans are created in the image of God (Imago Dei), redefining human identity and purpose. This doctrine highlights that every individual reflects God's image, which entails a responsibility to steward creation with care and justice. Psalm 8:4-6 (NIV) further emphasizes the dignity of humanity and the entrusted role of

stewardship. In practical terms, Christian leaders are called to embody God's character—wisdom, justice, and humility—while guiding others to fulfill their creation mandate.

Stanley Grenz notes that humanity's role as image-bearers is relational and eschatological, reflecting God's communal love now and anticipating its realization in His Kingdom (Grenz, 2000). Wayne Grudem emphasizes that this image-bearing includes deep interpersonal unity, mirroring the relational nature of the Trinity (Grudem, 2020). Thus, leaders must foster unity and model relational harmony, aligning their leadership practices with the divine unity present within the Godhead.

J. Richard Middleton argues that image-bearing involves extending God's rule on earth through communal practices, shaping leadership to build communities that reflect God's justice and love (Middleton, 2005). Karl Barth adds a Christocentric dimension, asserting that Christ is the true image of God, and that leadership must be rooted in His life and ministry, modeling humility and sacrificial love (Barth, 1932). By understanding humanity's divine image and purpose, leaders can better guide others to act justly and compassionately, fulfilling their role as caretakers of creation.

The Doctrine of the Heart: Inner Transformation for Reflecting God's Image

While the Doctrine of Creation establishes humanity's divine image and purpose, the Doctrine of the Heart addresses the need for internal transformation to reflect God's image authentically. The fall has corrupted the heart, making it deceitful and prone to sin (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV). Therefore, effective Christian leadership involves guiding others toward internal renewal and spiritual growth.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) emphasizes the heart as the seat of desires and will, necessitating profound internal transformation. Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV) promises a new heart and spirit, central to

this renewal. Donald S. Whitney highlights worship as crucial for aligning the heart with God's worthiness, fostering spiritual growth (Whitney, 2014). Augustine's *Confessions* emphasize that true rest is found in God, guiding leaders to direct others toward this alignment and transformation (Augustine, 397-400 AD). Dallas Willard stresses the need for heart renovation, acknowledging that this transformation requires divine intervention (Willard, 2002).

James K.A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom* underscores that the heart influences both personal behavior and cultural systems, linking personal transformation to broader community impact (Smith, 2009). Leaders, therefore, must shape hearts to affect cultural and communal dimensions, reflecting the relational harmony and unity of the Trinity. For example, a leader who fosters inner renewal in their team will see an increase in collaborative efforts and a deeper commitment to shared values and mission. By guiding others toward inner renewal, leaders enable individuals to live out their identity as image-bearers in practical and transformative ways.

The Doctrine of New Creation: Salvation, Redemption, and Restoration

The Doctrine of New Creation builds on the understanding of the heart by redefining human identity and purpose through Christ's redemptive work. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) highlights that in Christ, believers are a new creation, signifying a complete reordering of identity and purpose. This transformation involves salvation, redemption, and ongoing renewal, essential for effective Christian leadership.

N.T. Wright affirms that Christ's resurrection represents the beginning of this new creation, with both individuals and creation being renewed (Wright, 2011). Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV) further elaborates on this ongoing renewal, emphasizing that believers are continuously becoming more like Christ. Redemption through Christ extends beyond forgiveness to restore

humanity's original purpose (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14, NIV). John Stott emphasizes the cross as central to this redemption, satisfying divine justice while demonstrating God's love and grace (Stott, 1986). Wayne Grudem supports this by highlighting the necessity of Christ's redemptive work for humanity's reconciliation with God (Grudem, 2020).

As Treier and Elwell (2017) articulate, "To be created in God's image is not like a commodity that humans possess but rather a dynamic of ongoing dependence and openness to God's life and breath at work within us" (p. 416). This concept underscores that "The image remains integral to human identity even when distorted by sin. Likeness to God develops through trust, dependence on, and obedience to God" (Treier & Elwell, 2017, p. 415). Christian faith teaches that sin cannot be overcome through human ingenuity or effort; "Through his atoning sacrifice, Christ has set humankind free by taking sin's retribution on himself" (Treier & Elwell, 2017, p. 810). This profound truth is supported by Scriptures such as John 1:29 (NIV), which states, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" and Romans 8:1 (NIV), "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," affirming Christ's atoning work and its impact on humanity.

Effective Christian leadership is rooted in the transformative power of Christ's redemptive work. Leaders are called to guide others in embracing their new identity in Christ, promoting personal and communal restoration. This involves not only addressing sin and fallenness but also fostering hope and guiding individuals toward their God-given purpose. For example, leaders might implement mentorship programs that focus on spiritual growth and personal development, helping individuals understand and live out their new identity in Christ.

Conclusion

In summary, understanding the doctrines of Creation, the Heart, and New Creation provides a comprehensive framework for Christian leadership. By recognizing humanity as created in the image of God, leaders are called to uphold the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, fostering an environment of respect and valuing each person's contributions. Acknowledging human fallenness equips leaders with empathy and grace, as they understand the universal need for redemption and transformation. Emphasizing the potential for personal and communal restoration through Christ, leaders inspire hope and guide others towards realizing their God-given purpose.

Christian leadership is rooted in the profound truth that humanity exists to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (1 Cor. 10:31, NIV). Leaders must embody humility, reflect the image of God, and lead from the heart, aligning their vision and goals with God's purpose for humanity. By fostering a healthy and supportive community, addressing sin, and offering the hope of redemption, leaders can effectively navigate the complexities of human relationships and societal challenges. Embracing these theological foundations shapes not only how we lead but also how we live, relate to others, and understand our place in the world.

As Christian leaders reflect on the doctrines of Creation, the Heart, and New Creation, how can these theological insights integrate into leadership practices to authentically reflect God's image, foster transformative growth in others, and pursue the redemptive purpose for which they were created?

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