

What does Christ Community affirm about... Personhood?

Overview and Introduction

All people are made in God's image and are given life by His Spirit. He chose to create human beings, and He has done so from the overflow of His love, wisdom and glory. The Father has also sent his Son, Jesus the Christ, in the flesh as the true and perfect human. The understanding of our personhood, then, builds from the implications of creation and incarnation. It speaks to issues of dignity, purpose, gender, sexuality, and value of life among many others.

This pamphlet will briefly explain our understanding of personhood as derived from the biblical witness and instruction.

Biblical Theology of Persons

God is a being in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. He is fully complete and perfect in himself, existing forever in the fullness of his relational love, holiness and truth.

God creates people with loving intention. As the final move of creation, the Scripture records how God first created humans and endued them with a purpose to be like Him, to rule and fill the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). God created male and female before sin and death enter the world, and both are said to be "in his image" (Gen 1:27). In sexual reproduction, we continue this divine image-bearing (Gen 5:1-3) and one of our purposes is to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). Toward this end, God creates each person with careful design and not only knows our most intimate being but also the full extent of our days on earth (Psalm 139:13-18).

All God's creation is with Christ and for Christ. "All things have been created through him and for him," Colossians 1:16 asserts. The Spirit, also, is present and active at creation (cf. Gen. 1:2, 2:7). Thus, when it comes to created humankind, it is the overflow of the creative love and power of the Triune God.

God's salvation is personal, too. It comes through a human and speaks, ultimately, to the restoration of His intent at creation. This saving plan has begun "before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4) and lasts forever. In sending the Son as Savior of the world, God chose to send Him as a human being: "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). As a human, Jesus reveals the Father (John 1:18); as a male, he links back to and fulfills the calling of Adam as the true Head and Redeemer of all humanity (Rom. 5:13-19, 1 Cor. 15:22, 45). Thus, Jesus is fully capable of representing all humanity as an atoning sacrifice and serving as the perfect model and hope of what we will become in his bodily resurrection and glorification (1 Cor. 15:42-49). "Thanks be to God, He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor 15:57).

The New Testament applies the truth of this teaching in various ways, thus supporting and confirming this view of humanity. For instance, when Matthew records Jesus' teaching about marriage, he bases it in creation, both the distinction between male and female and the glorious mystery of becoming "one flesh" (Mat. 19:4-6). When Paul writes to the church about the importance of their sanctification, he challenges them to take off, like a garment, the self that reflects our sinful nature and to, "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Becoming a new person in Christ, then, is the process of becoming our true and whole selves as intended in God's image. Similarly, James couches a teaching about our speech and words in the inherent dignity of human beings "made in God's likeness" (Jam 3:9).

Conclusions

Even this brief survey demonstrates the esteem and value God has for human life. Human life reflects and represents God's life on earth. We are created on purpose and for purpose – this includes our bodies, genetic realities, sexuality, and perceived weaknesses and strengths. None of this surprises or limits God, nor changes His plans. God is preparing us for eternal human life in a new heaven and earth in the His presence.

Applications

The application for Christian living, ethics and the blessing of society are significant and varied.

Dignity. All human life is valuable and worthy of respect, care and honor. This impacts how we treat one another – no matter the stage or situation of life. Preborn, infants, the elderly, the infirm, the poor, and even the most evil-acting criminals not only have been made in God's image but also still image-forth their Maker. We can lose privileges or freedoms as consequence to our sin, but we cannot lose the stamp of the divine and thus our claim to dignity. This truth impacts us personally and institutionally, affecting all our face-to-face interactions and giving direction to our role in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, prisons and beyond.

Purpose. God has given humanity a mandate to rule the earth, to seek its good, to represent and do the will of God in our context. We are free moral agents in this process. We may debate particular policies for how society best implements this mandate, but those who know God will agree on our call as caretakers and participants in renewal – for people, cultures and the earth itself. Speaking to the church, Paul writes: "We are God's handiwork, creation in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). This truth impacts our views on health care, the environment, the purpose and creation of business and industry, education and beyond.

Life. Related to our understanding of humanity's dignity and purpose, we treasure human life. All life exists from God as its source. Thus we protect it from harm, seek its good, and plan for its flourishing according to God's ways. This truth eliminates support for euthanasia or abortion,

and calls us to work towards healthy, safe and prosperous life for all people and all ages. It also causes us to think carefully about how we defend and support life in the complex issues of poverty, war, imprisonment and more.

Sexuality. We hold to the explicit biblical teaching that people are created male and female. Both are in God’s likeness, equal in value and standing before the Lord. While the world, and sadly the Church, have a history of demeaning, devaluing or ignoring women – the way of the Lord is to honor and respect, drawing forth strength, nobility and care. God desires to draw men, likewise, into wholeness and maturity in Christ instead of the masculine caricatures of arrogant power or insecure debasement.

While there are rare cases of physical ambiguity in sexuality at birth, they are the exception and complication from the Fall and not the original planned design of God.* Similarly, clinically acute gender dysphoria is a rare, but real, psychological disorder that requires compassionate care. Much has been written about gender as a social construct; however, the Scriptures never make a distinction between biological and sociological gender identities. While certainly true that the cultural and social roles of men and women have varied greatly over time and space, we do not believe the Scriptures allow for the practice of transgenderism or sexual transitioning.

Likewise, sexual relations between men and women are likewise designed in creation and a component of personhood. It is gift for a married man and woman (see our pamphlet on the varied beauty of marriage) for reproduction, companionship, pleasure, and spiritual intimacy. Both the Old and New Testaments call all other forms of sexual activity as idolatrous wrongdoing that conflicts with sound doctrine (Leviticus 18; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Thess. 1:10).

Conclusions

The conflict between worldly and biblical personhood raises important questions: How do we disagree with increasingly commonplace cultural views of personhood without resorting to condemnation, anger or legalism? How do we affirm the biblical vision while being kind, hospitable and winsome? How do we continue to hold out the saving gospel of Jesus and the fullness of life found in His way? Understanding biblical personhood and its implications in the practice of our faith is a key area of discipleship. May God give us grace as we seek to apply these truths to personal lives, relationships and in our call to be salt and light in the world.

Therefore, CCC affirms that all people are created in God’s image with love and purpose. This likeness to God is marred by the Fall yet subject to the hope of the resurrection and renewal of all things. Jesus Christ calls us into loving obedience with our whole selves.

* Matthew 19:12 appears to wade into these waters. In the context of marriage and the choice some will make about not entering into marriage, Jesus says, “For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others – and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.” A eunuch is one physically incapable or undesiring to enter into the sexual union of marriage. Jesus recognizes those who are eunuchs from birth.