

22A WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?

In Psalm 8:3-4 we find David, the shepherd-king, looking up at the vast night sky and being overwhelmed with what he sees: “When I consider the heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars which You ordained, what is man that You take thought of him...?”

What is man, after all? What does it mean to be human?

It’s important to state at the outset what we are *not*. We are not-

- Little gods or “gods in embryo” (Mormon idea)
- Creators of our universe (New Age idea)
- Merely animals
- “Naked apes” (Desmond Morris)
- A “bag of chemicals” (Anthony Cashmore)
- Puppets who “dance to our DNA” (Richard Dawkins)
- “Brains on a stick”
- “Computers made of meat” (Marvin Minsky)
- Insignificant blobs in the universe”
- ”Just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.” (Carl Sagan)

We are neither gods nor animals nor machines.

We are categorized biologically as “homo sapiens”:

- Homo sapiens –man as thinker
- Homo faber –man as maker
- Homo ludens –man as player

In modern society we might add:

- Homo politicus –man as voter
- Homo facebookus –man as social media user
- Homo amazonicus –man as shopper

Here’s what we know-

Humans are living and physical. Humans are like the animals:

- We communicate
- We are curious

- We have emotions

Humans are unlike animals:

- We communicate

...but animals don't discuss the meaning of life.

- We are curious

...but animals don't set up research institutes.

- We have emotions

...but animals don't write poems and songs about their feelings.

In *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes*, Mortimer Adler summarized seven extraordinary human characteristics that make us different from animals:

1. *Only man employs a propositional language, only man uses verbal symbols, only man makes sentences; i.e., only man is a discursive animal.*
2. *Only man makes tools, builds fires, erects shelters, fabricates clothings; i.e., only man is a technological animal.*
3. *Only man enacts laws or sets up his own rules of behavior and thereby constitutes his social life, organizing his association with his fellows in a variety of different ways; i.e., only man is a political, not just a gregarious, animal.*
4. *Only man has developed, in the course of generations, a cumulative cultural tradition, the transmission of which constitutes human history; i.e., only man is a historical animal.*
5. *Only man engages in magical and ritualistic practices; i.e., only man is a religious animal.*
6. *Only man has a moral conscience, a sense of right and wrong, and of values; i.e., only man is an ethical animal.*
7. *Only man decorates or adorns himself or his artifacts, and makes pictures or statues for the non-utilitarian purpose of enjoyment; i.e., only man is an aesthetic animal. [1]*

The One who made us gets to define us.

Scripture tells us dozens of facts about being human-

“Then the Lord God formed man **out of the dust of the ground** (from the soil of the earth), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen. 2:7)

What do we know about humans?

We are created beings. (Gen. 2:7)

We are made by God. (Gen. 2:7)

We are made of the materials of the earth. (Gen. 2:7)

We are made lower than the angels. (Psalm 8:5)

We were made last on the list. (after all the animals of sea, air, and land)

Gen. 1:25-26 :

“And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that moves upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make man ...”

We were made in God’s image. (Gen 1:27)

Gen. 1:27:

“...So God created mankind **in His own image...**”

- Conscious of ourselves
- Rational
- Decisive
- Moral (awareness)
- Creative

Physically, we’re more like animals. Spiritually, we’re more like God (except that we’re not infinite and we’re not good).

Implications-

We are made body, soul, and spirit.

1 Thess. 5:23:

“May the very God of peace sanctify you completely; and I pray to God that your whole **spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We were made with reason and emotions.

- Come, let us reason together... (Isa. 1:18)
- Think on these things...(Phil. 4:8)
- Handle anger, fear, sadness, joy, ...

We were made male and female.

Gen. 1:27:

“So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them;
male and female He created them.”

We were made for companionship and family.

Gen.2:18:

“Then the Lord God said, ‘it is **not good** for man to be alone.’”

Gen. 2:24:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall be one (flesh).”

We were made for community.

Gen. 10:32:

“These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their family records, according to their nations.”

We were made to exercise real choices.

- “...**Choose** this day whom you will serve.” (Josh. 24:15)
- “...Therefore **choose** life.” (Deut. 30:19)

We were made to work (and to rest).

Ps. 104:23:

“Man goes forth **to his work** and to his labor until the evening.”

Ex. 20:9:

“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work...”

Lev. 23:3:

“But the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest...”

We were made to glorify God (our true purpose).

Isa. 43:7:

“Even every one who is called by My name: For I have created him **for My glory...**”

Westminster catechism:

“The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”

We are completely known by God.

Matt. 10:30:

“Even the hairs of your head are numbered.”

Ps. 139:1:

“Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me...”

(You know everything about me.)

We are amazingly designed.

Ps. 139:14:

“I praise you because **I am fearfully and wonderfully made**;
your works are wonderful, and I know that very well.”

We were made for life on earth (the “privileged planet”).

Ps. 115:16:

“The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth He has given to mankind.”

We are made to “have dominion.”

Gen. 1:28:

“And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and **have dominion** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’”

Psalm 8:6:

“You made him **to have dominion over the works of Your hands**; You have placed all things under his feet...”

We were made to create culture.

Gen. 1:28 (some translations):

“Be fruitful and multiply and **fill the earth...**”

We grow and develop over time.

I Cor. 13:11:

“When I was a child I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, and I understood as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things.”

- Infant
- Toddler
- Child
- Teen
- Young adult
- Middle age
- Senior

We were made with a memory.

Eccl. 12:1:

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth...”

We were made with a conscience.

Rom. 2:15:

“...Their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”

- Programmable and erasable

We have multiple skills/intelligences (Howard Gardner):

- Visual/spatial/artistic
- Linguistic/verbal
- Logical/mathematical
- Bodily/kinesthetic
- Musical
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal

We were made for “seasons” of life.

Eccles.3:1-8:

“To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven...”

We were made for life beyond this life.

Daniel 12:2 (NLT):

“Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.”

- CS Lewis : “You have never met a mere mortal...”

We tend to focus on externals.

1 Sam. 16:7:

“ Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.”

We are all unique....but no one is an exception.

- DNA (shared by identical twins)
- Fingerprints
- Retinal scans
- Personalities
- Life experiences

We have much in common throughout the world.

We have “one blood” as humans.

Acts 17:26 (some translations):

“God has made **of one blood** all peoples of the earth.”

We have a basic moral sense.

At the minimum...It's wrong to...

- Steal from me
- Harm my family
- Kill me

We have common needs: (Maslow's hierarchy)

- Physical needs
- Safety
- Love and belonging
- Esteem
- “Self-actualization”

We have common longings.

- Significance
- Identity
- Relationship
- Shalom/peace/flourishing
- Transcendent reality

We have common languages.

We have cultural commonality.

Over 200 traits found in common across cultures (Donald Brown), including:

- Counting
- Cooking

- Emotions
- Facial expressions
- Greetings
- Music
- Social structure...

Our actions can have amazing significance.

We are limited.

We are finite, vulnerable, mortal, and dependent.

Heb. 9:27:

“It is appointed unto men **once to die**, and after this the judgment.”

- We live on earth once (no pre-existence)
- We die once (no reincarnation)

We are sinful ...but not worthless, but still human, but still bearing God's image.

Rom. 3:23:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

We are described as-

- Blind
- Lost
- Alienated
- In Darkness
- Enemies of God
- Condemned
- Dead

We are not living as God's children.

John 8:42:

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I have come here from God...’”

We are idol-makers.

1 John 5:21:

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

“The human heart is an idol-factory.” (John Calvin)

We suppress the truth about God.

Rom. 1:18:

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men **who suppress the truth** by their wickedness.”

We live in a fallen world.

- Natural disasters
- Diseases
- Birth damage

We are helpless to rescue ourselves. We are spiritually blind, sick, and dead.

We can be rescued and restored by Christ.

1 Cor. 15:3:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures...”

Rom. 8:1:

“There is therefore now **no condemnation** to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Jesus was fully human, yet fully divine.

(He was)...tempted in every way as we are, **yet without sin**.

(Heb. 4:15)

...yet could **set aside** His divine attributes to live and die on earth.

(Phil.2)

Christ's exchange is perfect.

Isa. 53:5:

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our wrongdoing: the punishment for our peace was upon Him; and by His wounds we are healed.”

“To as many as received Him...”

Humanity today faces three negative trends:

1. Disenchantment
 - Scientific and secular world and people
 - No sacred, no mystery, no awe, no miraculous, no supernatural
 - Cynical, skeptical, bored
2. Dehumanization
 - Making people less than fully human
3. Dissatisfaction

Many people desire a “new humanity”: Human 2.0

- Life seems meaningless
- We still have wars
- We still don't love each other
- We're still finite and mortal

Human attempts to create the “new humanity”:

- Ultra-humanism
- Breeding (Aryans)
- New society/Worker's revolution (Marxists)
- Return to nature
- Meditation
- Drugs

- Technology (robots, AI, cyborgs, transhumanism)

What we try to create is exactly what Christ died to produce:

2 Cor. 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is **a new creation...**”

- Loved by God
- Meaning and purpose
- Love for others, joy, and peace
- A renewed universe
- An indestructible body

For Jesus’ followers, the promised future is glorious. Jesus will return with glory:

Rev. 20-22-

- New heavens and a new earth
- Resurrected bodies
- Presence of Christ
- No more sin, sickness, sorrow, death

Reference

1. Adler, M., *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967, p. 286.