

What do we believe about ... **Being Human?**

Being human
Christian relationship
gospel life
spirituality
waywardness eternal soul-full
actions dark side
divinity shadows
image of God humanity
human believe nature
participation creator
reflect humankind
image glory words



The
United
Reformed
Church

What do we believe about Being Human?

Human nature

We might sometimes state, in exasperation, that we are ‘only human’. But that is what we are created, and thus meant, to be. The question is, what does it mean to be human?

With the whole Christian Church, the United Reformed Church affirms that all human beings are human *by nature*. We are

‘the image of God’
(Genesis 1:27-28).

all, then, subject to the forces of nature, its unpredictability, its impulses and its brevity.

Nevertheless, human beings are also spiritual, or soul-full,

creatures, who stand outside nature and the world and possess, at least potentially, the means of eternal relationship with God.

Our remarkable status as those who are both part of nature and yet who stand outside its bounds leads us to recognise that all humans have ultimate significance. However, when we are tempted to bask in such elevated views of humankind, we are repeatedly humbled by the wicked things that we do to one another and to the created world in which we live. There are deep shadows in the glory of our being. Christians believe that this ‘dark’ side of our nature, although real, is not an essential feature of what it is to be human.



As humans, we bear the divine reflection. But in our waywardness this likeness has been disfigured and we no longer faithfully reflect the good character of our creator, what the Bible calls ‘the image of God’ (Genesis 1:27-28). We think, feel and know that we have fallen short of the ideal. Salvation, we hold, is to be understood not as participation in divinity but rather as a journey back to full humanity. It is a journey we cannot make on our own or in our own strength.

Fullness of life

What does full humanity look like? Christians tend to respond not with generic or philosophical concepts but with the account of an historical person, a young Jewish rabbi who lived in an outlying province of the Roman Empire, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus' words and actions show what we should and might still be as humans. We see in his short, heroic life true freedom, loving kindness, courage and deep joy. This is how we were all meant to be.

If we are to be fully human, how should we then live? The prophet Micah answered in this way:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6:8)

'love God with all that we are and to love our neighbour as our self'

Jesus reminded us that the whole divine law can be summarised by the simple precepts to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbour as our self.

Humanity and the gospel

But to explain what it is to be fully human in terms of obedience to the divine law is to misinterpret the Christian message. The good news that leads us back to full humanity has to do



with grace rather than law. It is about child-like trust in God's promises rather than obedience to the divine commands. We do not have the means to liberate ourselves from our addictive behaviour. No medicine is available to heal the wounds of our heart and the pains of our memories. Our fears and dark habits are not to be overcome by programmes. We cannot simply renounce our tendency to self-absorption by an extraordinary act of the will. The dark deeds of our lives are not excused by religious or charitable acts. We need help from beyond ourselves. It is for this we believe that God gave us his Son.

'energised and renewed by the Spirit of Christ'

The true humanity or divine image shown forth in the life of Jesus is not simply to be copied or imitated. It is to be received, to be embraced by faith. The forces that empowered his person

become ours. As the apostle Paul wrote: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). The truly human life is one that is energised and renewed by the Spirit of Christ. We were made to be in relation to God, dependent on God's life-giving force. Turning away from our creator is to lose something of our full humanity. Part of us dies even while we continue to live. Our full humanity is restored when fullness of life is bestowed as a gracious gift, given by Christ, received by faith.

What are the marks of the person who is becoming fully human? According to Paul they include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

(Galatians 5:22). These flow 'naturally' from the life of the one who is led by the Spirit of Christ. There are other more specific features. The one who has been forgiven so much will be ready to forgive those who have

'a gracious gift,
given by Christ,
received by faith'

caused them offence. Arrogance will be replaced by humility. Combativeness will give way to peace-making. This is what true humanity looks like. Jesus is reported to have said: 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (John10:10b). God's goal was our full humanity.



This is one in a series of booklets about the United Reformed Church. The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/believe



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