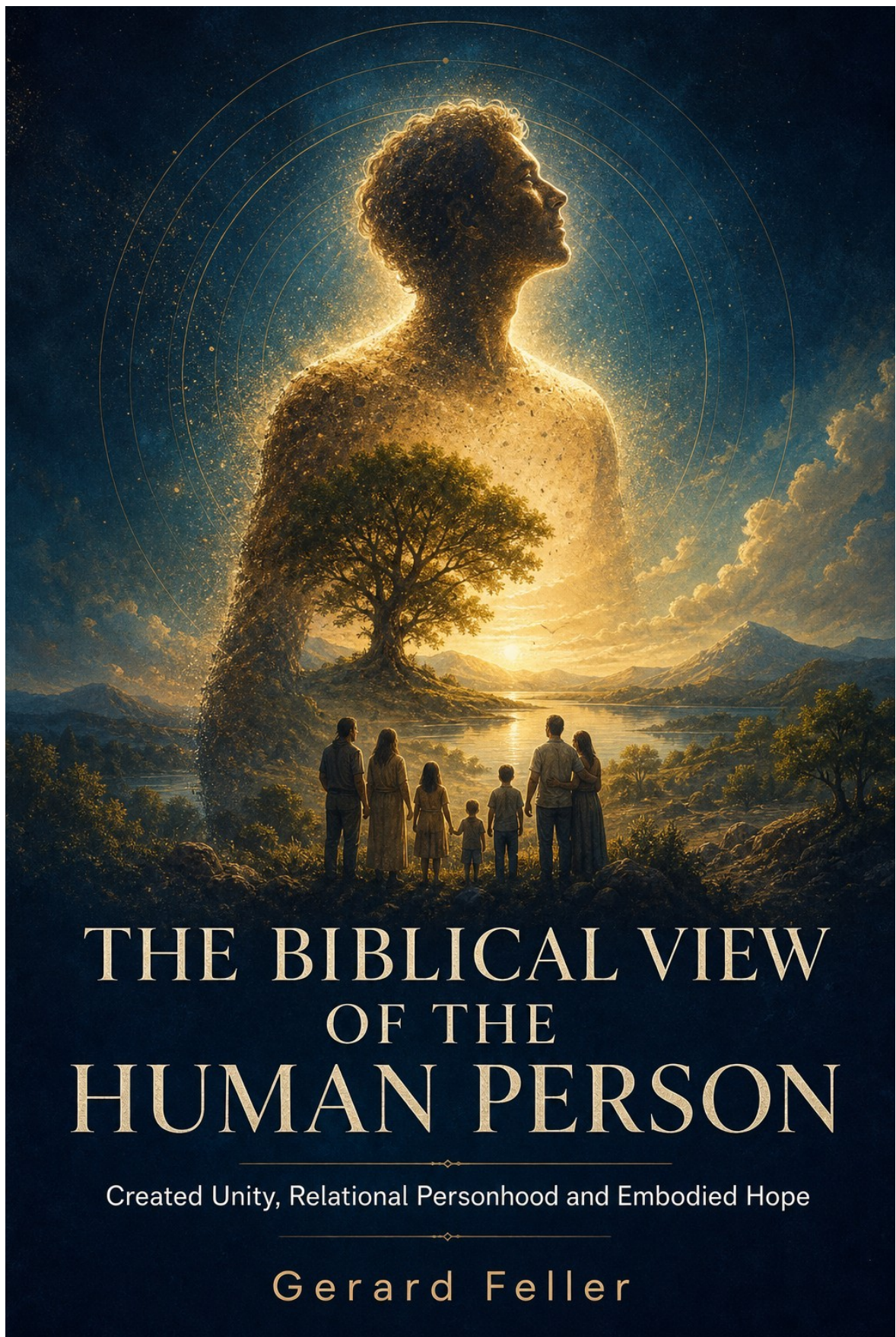




THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Created Unity, Relational Personhood and Embodied Hope

Gerard Feller

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Created unity, relational person and embodied hope

An extensive biblical-theological and pastoral article Gerard Feller • expanded and updated edition, 2026

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What is a human being? That question is never just theoretical. It concerns how we deal with health and illness, guilt and responsibility, sexuality and relationships, disability and old age, prayer and treatment, dying and hope. A view of humanity often unnoticed determines what we consider “normal”, where we look for causes and what form of help we consider appropriate. That is why a biblical view of the human person is not just a chapter in systematic theology; it is an orientation for church, pastoral care, health care and daily life.

© 2026 Gerard Feller. All rights reserved. This extensive edition is based on the “Biblical View of the Human Person Psychosomatics Part 1”, originally published as “Biblical Holism in Healthcare” (2002). The text has been rebuilt, theologically expanded and provided with updated illustrations and additional literature.

Pastoral and medical boundaries. This article offers theological and pastoral reflection. It does not replace medical, psychiatric or psychological diagnosis or treatment. In the case of acute, serious or persistent symptoms, assessment by competent professionals is necessary.

Contents and Reading Guide

A concept of humanity is a coherent answer to questions about origins, identity, dignity, freedom, vulnerability and destiny. Modern culture offers several answers. Sometimes the human person is seen primarily as a biological organism; sometimes as autonomous consciousness; sometimes as a bundle of desires; sometimes as a product of social structures. Each perspective sees something real, but becomes reductionist when one layer has to explain the whole.

- Part I – Foundation: creation, image of God and human unity
- Part II – Biblical human words: body, soul, spirit, heart and mind
- Part III – Brokenness and renewal: sin, Christ, Spirit and resurrection
- Part IV – Application: psychosomatics, pastoral care and embodied spirituality
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THE HUMAN PERSON AS A CREATED UNITY



Distinct dimensions, yet no isolated parts: human life forms a dynamic whole.

Figure 1. The whole person lives in five interrelated relationships and dimensions.

Foreword

What is a human being? That question is never just theoretical. It concerns how we deal with health and illness, guilt and responsibility, sexuality and relationships, disability and old age, prayer and treatment, dying and hope. A view of humanity often unnoticed determines what we consider “normal”, where we look for causes and what form of help we consider appropriate. That is why a biblical view of the human person is not just a chapter in systematic theology; it is an orientation for church, pastoral care, health care and daily life.

This article builds on the section on the biblical view of the human person in Gerard Fellers **Biblical Holism in Healthcare** (2002). It describes the human person in terms of body, soul and spirit, with special attention to Genesis 2:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, the temple metaphor and the renewal of man in Christ. These lines are preserved here, but placed in a broader exegetical and theological framework. Biblical words such as body, flesh, soul, spirit, heart and mind often overlap. They should not be treated too hastily as if they indicated separate organs of a spiritual anatomy.

The central thesis is: the Bible portrays the human person as a created, embodied, relational and responsible entity that lives entirely before God. Within that unity there are truly distinguishable dimensions. The human person has an inner life, a physical existence and a special openness to God. But no part can be understood in isolation from the whole person. Moreover, Scripture tells not only what the human person **is**, but especially from Whom he receives his life, what he is called to do, how he is deformed by sin and how he is renewed in Christ.

1. Why a Biblical View of the Human Person Matters

A concept of humanity is a coherent answer to questions about origins, identity, dignity, freedom, vulnerability and destiny. Modern culture offers several answers. Sometimes the human person is seen primarily as a biological organism; sometimes as autonomous consciousness; sometimes as a bundle of desires; sometimes as a product of social structures. Each perspective sees something real, but becomes reductionist when one layer has to explain the whole.

The Bible begins differently. The human person is not a self-made project, but a creature. He receives existence, breath, place and assignment. His identity is therefore relational: he is known by God, addressed by God and placed in relation to his neighbor and the earth. Brian Rosner emphasizes that biblical identity comes not only through self-knowledge, but through being known by God and finding a received identity in Christ [8]. This puts both self-elevation and self-rejection into perspective.

A biblical view of the human person protects against at least four narrowings. It opposes materialism that resolves mind, meaning and responsibility into biology; against spiritualism that treats the body as lower or secondary; against individualism that forgets relationships and community; and against moralism that too quickly explains suffering as personal guilt. The human person is embodied and spiritual, personally and socially, responsible and dependent, fallen and called to recovery.

2. Created from Dust and Breath

Genesis 2:7 is a basic text: God forms the human being from the dust of the ground, breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human being becomes a living being. The text does not simply say that God places a pre-existing “soul” into a body. The formed material body becomes a living *nephesh*: a living person through God's breath. The human person is earth-born and breath-bearer at the same time. His humility lies in the dust; his dignity in God's personal, life-giving action.

The word play between *adam* and *adamah* connects humans with the earth. Physicality is therefore not an accident after the fall, but part of God's good creation. Hunger, sleep, senses, sexuality, work, rest and dependence belong to created existence. At the same time, human beings do not live by themselves. Every breath proclaims life received. This double truth prevents both deification of humanity and contempt for the body.

In the source document, Genesis 2:7 is mentioned to describe the relationship between body, soul and spirit: through the union of formed body and divine breath of life, a living person comes into being. That intuition is valuable when it is not hardened into a mechanical scheme. The text presents an event of creation, not a technical analysis of human constituents. The emphasis is on the whole person who is called into life by God.

3. The Image of God

Genesis 1:26-28 calls man and woman together the image and likeness of God. Throughout history, several aspects have been emphasized: reason and freedom, relationality, moral fitness, royal representation, and vocation to communion with God. These approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive. The image of God includes who the human person receives from God and what he may do on behalf of God.

In the world of the Ancient Near East, an image referred to representation of royal authority. Genesis democratizes that dignity: not only a king, but every human being has a God-given representative calling. The command to rule therefore does not legitimize exploitation. God's own kingship is the standard: creating, ordering, protecting and life-promoting. J. Richard Middleton and Carmen Joy Imes develop on this royal-priestly lineage [9-10].

The image is also relational. The human person stands before God, next to fellow human beings and within creation. Isolation does not suit his purpose. Man and woman are equal images of God; difference should never be used to diminish the basic dignity of a human being. Illness, cognitive impairment, dementia or unborn life do not cancel the dignity received. If the image is linked exclusively to performance, it is precisely the most vulnerable who are threatened.

In the New Testament the image is given a Christological center. Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). True humanity becomes visible in his obedience, love, holiness, service and physical self-giving. Believers are being renewed into His image (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10). The image is therefore gift, calling and destiny.

4. Unity and Distinction

Scripture can address the human person from several perspectives. Sometimes “soul” stands for the life or person, “body” for the concrete embodiment, “heart” for the inner center and “spirit” for the breath of life or the God-related dimension. These words are meaningful, but their fields overlap. The same activity can be attributed to heart, soul or mind. Therefore, caution is needed when drawing sharp boundaries.

BIBLICAL TERMS FOR THE PERSON: OVERLAPPING WINDOWS

Body / sōma	embodiment • action • vulnerability
Flesh / bāšār, sarx	mortality • kinship • sometimes sinful orientation
Soul / nefeš, psychē	living being • life • desire • the person
Spirit / rūaḥ, pneuma	breath • life-principle • openness to God
Heart / lēb, kardia	centre of thought • will • feeling • moral direction
Mind / nous	understanding • discernment • renewed thinking

These words are usually perspectives on the whole person, not an anatomical map.

Figure 2. Biblical human words are overlapping windows into the whole person.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 prays that spirit, soul and body may be preserved blameless. The text can be a three-part summary that expresses completeness, such as the commandment to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. Hebrews 4:12 speaks of piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow; Here too, the all-pervasive effect of God's word is central. These texts allow distinction, but do not simply prove that the human person consists of three independently functioning substances.

At the same time, holism should not be confused with the denial of interiority or continued existence with God. The New Testament can speak of dying and “being with Christ” and of spirits of the righteous. Christians therefore differ on the best anthropological formulation: trichotomy, dichotomy, holistic duality, or nonreductive bodily holism. John Cooper defends a holistic duality; Nancey Murphy a Christian non-reductive physicalism; Joel Green emphasizes the psychosomatic unity [3-5]. A careful article acknowledges this conversation without losing the clear biblical point: God's ultimate hope is not escape from the body, but resurrection of the whole person.

5. Soul: Life, Desire and the Person

The Hebrew *nefeš* is often translated “soul,” but frequently denotes the living person, the life, the throat, or the desiring self. Animals are also called living beings. The soul can hunger, thirst, love, be sad and die. That language is concrete and embodied. “My soul” often simply means “myself in my deepest desire.”

The Greek *psychē* takes over several functions. Jesus can appeal not to want to preserve life at the expense of faithfulness, and at the same time speak about losing or gaining the soul. Context determines whether life, person or inner self is meant. The pastoral benefit of this word study is great: care for the soul is not care for an incorporeal part of a person, but attention for the entire life lived before God.

The source study rightly emphasizes that thinking, feeling and wanting are closely related. However, it is wise not to allocate these powers exclusively to one “part”. The Bible also connects thinking with the heart, joy with body and mind, and desire with soul and flesh. Human functions work in an integrated manner. A thought can evoke physical tension; physical exhaustion can constrict the mind; relational security can regulate emotions; prayer can open meaning and space for action.

6. Spirit: Breath, Orientation and Communion with God

Rûah and *pneuma* can indicate wind, breath, life principle, human spirit or God's Spirit. The human spirit is saddened, hardened, renewed or strengthened. It often refers to the human person in their deepest life force and receptivity. However, God's Spirit is not simply a higher human capacity. The Holy Spirit is God who gives life, convicts, sanctifies, comforts and brings about communion with Christ.

The temple metaphor used in the source study distinguishes the forecourt, holy place and most holy place as an image for body, soul and spirit. As an educational image, this can help make visible that the whole person belongs entirely to God and that communion with God aims to order life. But the metaphor should not be used as anatomical evidence. In 1 Corinthians 3 the church is collectively God's temple; in 1 Corinthians 6 the body of the believer is called the temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple language emphasizes sacredness, ownership and presence, not an exact three-part architectural plan.

Spiritual life is therefore not the same as an intense feeling or intuitive certainty. It includes living by God's promise, obedience, fruit of the Spirit, testing and fellowship. Psychological processes can also feel strong and immediate. A pastoral counselor tests spiritual impressions against Scripture, character, reality, wisdom and the safety of those involved.

7. Heart, Mind, Will and Conscience

In the Bible, the heart is much more than the seat of emotions. It thinks, considers, plans, remembers, desires, chooses and hardens itself. Proverbs 4:23 calls for keeping the heart because from it are the wellsprings of life. The heart is the guiding center of the person. Therefore, conversion involves not just different ideas or feelings, but a reorientation of desire, trust, and action.

The mind is not neutral computing power either. Romans 12:2 connects renewing your mind with discerning God's will. Ephesians 4 describes darkened minds, hardened hearts and a new way of life as a coherent reality. Biblically, truth is not only known, but also loved and done. The purpose of knowledge is wisdom: seeing reality in the light of God and acting appropriately.

Conscience testifies about right and wrong, but it is not infallible. It may be weak, stained, malformed or properly cleaned. Pastoral care must not manipulate conscience by giving human preferences the status of God's commandment. Nor is every feeling of guilt evidence of actual guilt. What is needed is Scriptural testing, concrete appointment, room for confession where real evil has been done, and liberation from false or imposed guilt.

8. The Body as a Good Gift

The Christian confession of creation, incarnation and resurrection gives the body lasting dignity. God forms the body; the Son becomes flesh; Jesus touches the sick, eats, sleeps, cries and suffers; the grave is empty; the future is bodily resurrection. The body is therefore not a package that is ultimately thrown away.

Paul's contrast between "flesh" and "Spirit" is not simply body versus soul.*Sarx* can indicate physicality or mortality, but often describes the whole person in rebellion against God. Acts of the flesh also include internal and relational sins. The "spiritual body" of 1 Corinthians 15 is not a disembodied body, but a body raised and governed by God's Spirit. The contrast is between corruptible and imperishable, Adam and Christ.

Physical care is therefore a form of stewardship, not self-salvation. Nutrition, sleep, exercise, medical monitoring, medication and limitations can be mentally responsible. At the same time, health should not become an idol. A person retains dignity when recovery is not forthcoming. Christian community also carries weak, limited and dying bodies.

9. The Human Person as a Relational Being

“It is not good for a man to be alone” is more than a statement about marriage. Human beings were created for reciprocity, language, cooperation, care and community. Identity is personal, but never purely individual. Family, people, community, culture and history shape us without completely defining us.

Sin damages relationships through shame, accusation, power, violence, and withdrawal. Grace not only restores a private relationship with God, but creates a people. The New Testament uses physical images for the church: one body with many members. Difference is not a threat there, and dependence is not a shame. The eye cannot tell the hand that it is not needed.

This relational anthropology has direct consequences for health. Loneliness, exclusion, abuse and chronic insecurity can leave physical and psychological marks. A safe community can support capacity, meaning and recovery. However, the municipality may not replace professional care when specialist diagnostics or treatment is necessary.

10. Vocation, Freedom and Responsibility

The human person receives the assignment to cultivate and preserve the earth. Work is broader than paid work: cultivating, caring, researching, educating, making and organizing. Vocation connects gifts with service to God and neighbor. This makes human action meaningful without making performance the basis of dignity.

Biblical freedom is not absolute independence. The human person is free as a creature: dependent on God, limited by body and situation, influenced by habits and relationships, and yet truly approachable. Sin narrows freedom by binding desire and habit. Grace does not free us from created dependence, but to loving obedience.

Responsibility must therefore be applied carefully. Not everything that happens to someone is chosen; not every behaviour is equally free; trauma, addiction, illness, developmental history and social pressure can limit room for action. Understanding influence does not always abolish responsibility, but requires proportionate, truthful and compassionate assessment.

11. Vulnerability, Disability and Dignity

Mortality and vulnerability are associated with pain and disruption after the fall, but dependence itself is not sinful. Even before the fall, human beings needed food, rest, community and God. The modern dream of autonomy can make normal dependency feel like failure. The Bible teaches to receive, ask, thank and bear.

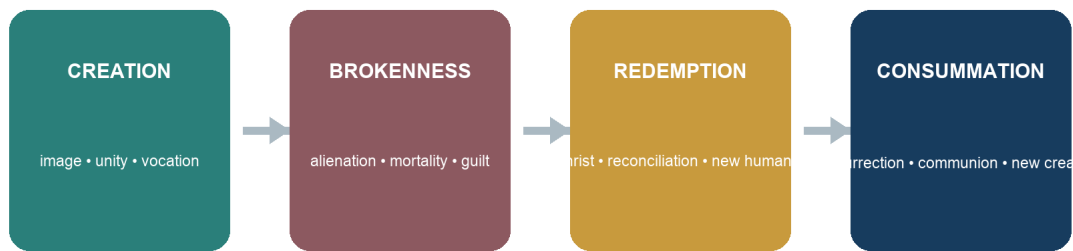
A disability does not make someone an incomplete image of God. When dignity is linked to rationality, productivity or independence, children, people with severe disabilities and people with dementia are placed on the margins. Received dignity precedes wealth. The community has a calling to organize its rhythm, language and buildings in such a way that vulnerable members truly participate.

Suffering should not be romanticized either. Jesus has mercy, heals and weeps. The Psalms give language to protest and desolation. Christian hope can bear pain without calling it good. It anticipates God's justice, presence and ultimate renewal.

12. Sin as Alienation and Disintegration

Sin is guilty rebellion against God, but its effect is broader than individual offenses. It distorts worship, desire, thinking, relationships, institutions and embodied life. Genesis 3 immediately shows fear, shame, hiding, and blaming. The human person loses sight of his creaturely boundaries and wants to be the source of good and evil himself.

THE BIBLICAL STORY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE



A biblical anthropology begins with God's action in history, not with isolated human faculties.

Figure 3. The Biblical storyline from creation through brokenness and redemption to completion.

The source study depicts fallen humanity as an order in which the connection with God is broken and the “soul” and body follow their own directions. As a pedagogical image, this makes it clear that sin disintegrates. Yet one must avoid presenting physicality or emotionality itself as lower or more sinful. Sin can actually misuse religious language, conscience, and spiritual ambition. Pride can present itself very “spiritually”.

Sin should therefore never be an automatic explanation for physical or psychological symptoms. Job, John 9, and Christ's crown of thorns break retaliation schemes. Sometimes sinful choices have physical consequences; sometimes one suffers from the evil of others; sometimes biological or unknown factors play a role. Pastoral wisdom investigates without accusing.

13. Christ as the True Human Being

The Christian view of humanity is ultimately Christological. In Jesus we see not only God coming to us, but also true humanity: received life, dependent prayer, obedience, compassion, courage, physical presence and love to the end. He is the last Adam who represents a new humanity.

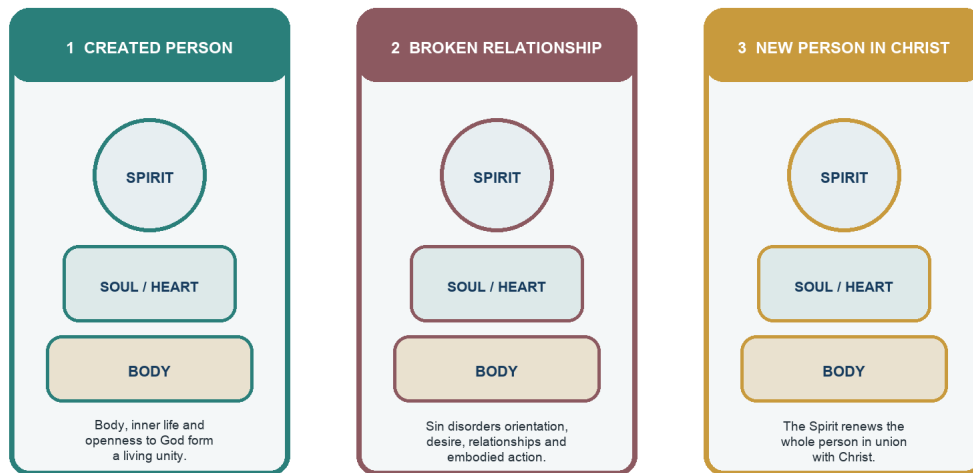
The incarnation confirms the created body. The Son does not take on an apparent body, but shares hunger, fatigue, pain and mortality. Salvation does not take place outside the body: Christ gives his body, bears wounds and rises bodily. Therefore, faith and imitation are also embodied in speaking, eating, serving, respecting boundaries, sexuality, possessions and dealing with power.

Unity with Christ provides a received identity. The believer is not saved by discovering an inner spark, but by being connected to Christ in his death and life. The “new person” is both personal and communal. Renewal of thoughts, desires, behaviour and relationships comes from grace, not from self-construction.

14. The Holy Spirit and Human Renewal

The Spirit gives life, convicts of sin, testifies of sonship, distributes gifts and shapes Christ's character. Spiritual renewal involves the whole person. Romans 8 connects the indwelling of the Spirit with the future raising to life of mortal bodies. Galatians 5 places fruit of the Spirit in concrete relational behaviour: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

RENEWED SOURCE MODEL: BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT



These layers are theological perspectives on the whole person, not independently operating compartments.

Figure 4. Renewed synthesis of the original body-soul-mind schemas.

The original diagrams record a movement of God's Spirit into human spirit, inner life and body. In a renewed form, this can be understood as a continuation: God's grace renews confidence and focus, the mind is transformed, desires are exercised and the body is made available as an instrument of justice. However, the movement is not exclusively from the inside out. Physical and communal practices—kneeling, singing, resting, fasting, communion, service—also shape the inner life.

Spiritual growth is therefore not an escape from psychological or physical reality. The Spirit often works through ordinary means: Scripture, community, medical care, therapy, time, sleep, exercise, and wise boundaries. Recognizing means does not diminish God's action; it confesses that all creation belongs to Him.

15. Resurrection and Human Destiny

Biblical hope does not end with an immortal soul in heaven, but with resurrection and new creation. 1 Corinthians 15 ties our future to Christ's bodily resurrection. Continuity and change belong together: the same person is raised incorruptible by God's power.

This hope corrects both body contempt and body idolatry. The present body is precious, but not absolute; it can get sick, age and die. God does not forget the person. The ultimate identity rests in its faithfulness, which is stronger than dissolution and death.

Resurrection hope is public and cosmic. Romans 8 shows creation and believers groaning together for deliverance. Revelation 21 speaks of God living among people and wiping away tears. The goal is restored community, righteousness, and embodied life before God.

16. Biblical Anthropology and Psychosomatics

Psychosomatics investigates how physical processes, cognitions, emotions, behaviour, relationships and meaning influence each other. A biblical view of the human person supports such an integral view, but adds important safeguards. The human person is more than their symptom, more than his brain, more than his family history and also more than his religious experience.

The mutual influence is visible in Scripture: fear can destroy strength, sadness can be felt physically, hope can give strength, words can wound or heal. These are wisdom patterns, not universal diagnostic formulas. Imagery about bones, heart and intestines may not be converted directly into medical causality.

A careful assessment starts with safety and somatic severity. Then thoughts, feelings, behaviour, relationships, living conditions and religious meaning are examined. No domain automatically has declaration precedence. A spiritual question can be important while at the same time an endocrine, neurological or trauma-related factor requires treatment.

17. Pastoral Care for the Whole Person

Pastoral care starts with presence, listening and safety. The pastoral caregiver does not quickly collect explanations, but helps to organize the story. What was physically examined? What emotions and beliefs play a role? What events, losses or relationships contribute? How does someone experience God, prayer, guilt and hope? What help is already available?

The language of body, soul and mind can open a conversation when used flexibly. It becomes harmful when symptoms are classified into “lower physical” and “higher spiritual”, or when a pastor claims to know exactly which inner deficit causes a disease. Humility is part of a biblical view of the human person: the human person is fully known by God, but the counselor is not.

Good guidance works together. Acute physical symptoms, suicidality, psychosis, eating disorders, severe addiction, violence or trauma require appropriate professional assessment. Prayer can be next to treatment. Forgiveness can go hand in hand with boundaries and justice. Community can bear without enforcing secrecy surrounding abuse.

18. Practices of Embodied Spirituality

Biblical spirituality takes embodied form. Scripture is heard and spoken; prayer uses breath, voice and posture; baptism and communion work with water, bread and wine; rest is practiced in time and body; mercy requires hands, money and presence. These practices are not techniques to manipulate God, but responses to grace received.

The Sabbath is a reminder that human worth does not coincide with production. Sleep and rest are not evidence of mental weakness. Fasting can make desire visible, but is inappropriate or dangerous for certain medical conditions or eating problems. Physical practices therefore require wisdom, freedom and sometimes professional advice.

Embodied spirituality also includes boundaries. Jesus withdrew, slept, refused some demands and moved on with purpose. Love is not the same as permanent availability. For people with trauma, freedom of choice in touch, prayer posture, and group participation can be essential.

19. A Framework for Assessing Theological Claims about Humanity

A responsible statement about being human existence is tested against several questions. Does it do justice to all of Scripture, or does it rest on one word or metaphor? Does it hold creation, sin, Christ and resurrection together? Does it protect the dignity of vulnerable people? Does it acknowledge both responsibility and influence? Does it promote truth, love and safety?

Translation and genre also count. Poetry speaks differently than a letter; wisdom describes patterns, not automatic guarantees; apocalypticism uses symbols; words shift by context. A diagram can support education, but is always smaller than Biblical reality.

Finally, the fruit must be examined. A doctrine that systematically leads to body contempt, induction of guilt, exclusion of the disabled or rejection of necessary care requires re-examination. Truth can confront, but bears the character of Christ: full of grace and truth.

20. Summary Statements

1. The human person is a creature: received life, limited and dependent. 2. The human person bears the image of God: dignified, relational and called to representation. 3. The human being is an embodied entity: Biblical human words distinguish perspectives without dividing the person into compartments. 4. The body is good and destined for resurrection. 5. The heart is the guiding center of thought, desire and action. 6. Sin alienates and disintegrates the whole person. 7. Christ is the true image and source of the new humanity. 8. The Spirit renews all life. 9. Identity is received: known by God and found in Christ. 10. Pastoral care and care serve the whole person with truth, humility and cooperation.

Conclusion

The human person is dust touched by God, a living being who breathes, desires, thinks, loves, works and suffers. He is an image that represents an Other, a person who can only exist in relationship, a sinner who cannot repair himself and a creature who receives a new future in Christ. Body, soul, mind, heart and mind each provide a window into this secret, but no window contains the whole house.

Appendix A. Key Concepts at a Glance

Concept	Core meaning
Image of God	Received dignity and representative, relational vocation.
Nefesh / psychē	Living being, life, desire or the person; not automatically a separate immortal part.
Rûaḥ / pneuma	Wind, breath, life principle, human spirit or—depending on the context—God's Spirit.
Bāśār / sarx	Physicality, kinship and mortality; in Paul also humanity in sinful orientation.
Sōma	The embodied self that acts, suffers, serves, and is destined for resurrection.
Heart / lēb / kardia	Guiding center of thinking, desire, choice and moral attitude.
Conscience	Inner testimony about good and evil that can be formed, distorted and cleansed.

Appendix B. Questions for Study and Pastoral Care

- What image of humanity does my language convey about illness, guilt, identity and recovery?
- Do I treat body and inner life as rivals or as related dimensions?
- Where do I use a Biblical word out of context as a fixed technical term?
- How does the image of God protect the dignity of someone with severe disabilities?
- What role do community, power, and security play in this person's well-being?
- What medical or psychological assessment is necessary before making pastoral conclusions?
- How do creation, cross, Spirit and resurrection connect in my vision of recovery?
- Which concrete practice helps to live received identity embodied in Christ?

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Bible texts by theme

Theme	Key Scriptures
Creation and Unity	Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 18-25; Psalm 8; 139
Body and Dignity	John 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 15; Romans 8:11, 23
Soul, spirit and heart	Deuteronomy 6:5; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 10:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12
Image and identity	Colossians 1:15; 3:10; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18
New Person	Romans 6-8; Ephesians 4:17-32; Colossians 3:1-17
Resurrection and Consummation	1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 21-22