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# LUTHERAN THEOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATION TO MENTAL HEALTH

WE ARE CREATED BEINGS:  
APPLYING BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY TO MENTAL HEALTH

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“Unless something bad happens to me, I mostly take my body for granted, like the air I breathe. Even though it is my constant companion, I seldom consider how I relate to it and what it is meant to be. Yet it is, or should be, obvious how important it is to me and the people around me. It locates me in a particular place at a particular time with particular people in my particular society, family, marriage, and workplace. I am born with my body and die when it can no longer sustain me. The pattern of my life as a whole involves me with my body from childhood to adolescence, marriage to parenthood, employment to retirement, old age to death. My body also marks the daily rhythm of my life with waking and sleeping, dressing and undressing, working and resting from work, eating and drinking, engaging in sexual intercourse and disengaging from it. It governs how I interact with others and how they interact with me. I experience the world around me through it. I live with my body and do everything with it. My human life is, most obviously and simply, life in the body. Yet I did not make my body; it was given to me and remains given to me as a foundation for my life here on earth. It is never apart from me, nor am I ever apart from it for as long as I live here.” *Wonderfully Made* by John Kleinig, pg. 2-3

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## *What We Know About Humans*

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**Consider the following passages and complete the sentence: Humans are ...**

1. *Genesis 1:27; Genesis 9:6*
2. *Genesis 2:7; Psalm 139:14*
3. *Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-18*
4. *1 John 3:4; Rom. 14:23*
5. *Genesis 6:5; Romans 7:14-25*

**Consider the following passages and complete the sentence: In Christ, humans are ...**

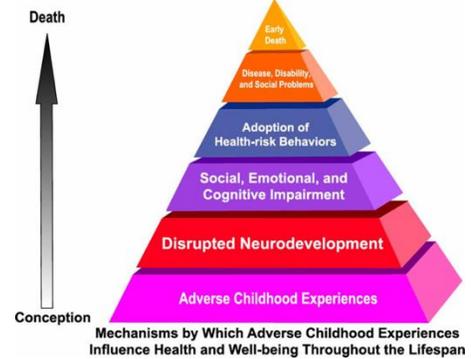
1. *John 3:16; Galatians 2:21*
2. *Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Cor. 5:17*
3. *1 Corinthians 9:19; Romans 13:8*
4. *Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:8-10*
5. *Ephesians 4:22-24; Roman 6:6 & 7:18*

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## Soul Care or Brain Care?

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What is the result of sin on the body?



React to this statement and its implications for soul care and mental health care: “The reasoning, the will, and the emotions of the soul become evident through the actions of the body. The will inside of the soul may decide to be generous, but it takes the organs of the body for the act of generosity to be carried out. So close is the connection between body and the organs of the soul that the body can be called the instrument or tool of the soul.” (Grace Abounds pg. 166-167)

Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” What factors can make identifying the enemy so difficult?

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## Spiritual Factors that Can Have an Effect on Mental and Spiritual Health

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### 1. Humans Are Fragile

“Yet our greater levels of scientific knowledge about [the] complexities of our created brains and bodies make us even more aware of just how fragile we are. ... A bump on the head, or a small blood clot, or seeing a traumatic event all have the possibility of changing the neurobiology of the complex three pounds of brain that our Lord has given to us, our reason and all our senses.” *Making Christian Counseling More Christ-Centered by Dr. Rick Marrs, pg. 25-26*

### 2. Humans Search for Identity and Meaning

“If I belong to myself, then I am the only one who can set limits on who I am or what I can do. No one else has the right to define me, to choose my journey in life, or to assure me that I am okay. I belong to myself. But the freedom of sovereign individualism comes at a great price. Once I am liberated from all social, moral, natural, and religious values, I become responsible for the meaning of my own life. With no God to judge or justify me, I have to be my own judge and redeemer. This burden

manifests as a desperate need to justify our lives through identity crafting and expression. But because everyone else is also working frantically to craft and express their own identity, society becomes a space of vicious competition between individuals vying for attention, meaning, and significance, not unlike the contrived drama of reality TV." *"You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God in an Inhuman World"* by Alan Noble, pg. 4

### 3. *Anfektung*

"I did not learn my theology all at once, but had to search constantly deeper and deeper for it. My temptations did that for me, for no one can understand Holy Scripture without practice and temptations. This is what the enthusiasts and sects lack. They don't have the right critic, the devil, who is the best teacher of theology. If we don't have that kind of devil, then we become nothing but speculative theologians, who do nothing but walk around in our own thoughts and speculate with our reason alone as to whether things should be like this, or like that." (*Luther's Works, AE 55, pg. 147*)

What about medication? Can I trust God *AND* take medication?

1. It is a kingdom agenda to relieve our suffering; it is a kingdom agenda to redeem us through suffering.
2. Medications are a gift of God's grace; medications can be used idolatrously.
3. Too much suffering can be hazardous to spiritual growth; too little suffering may be hazardous to spiritual growth.
4. A person can have wrong motives for wanting to take medication; a person can have wrong motives for not wanting to take medication.
5. Using medications may make it more difficult to address moral-spiritual issues; not using medications may make it more difficult to address moral-spiritual issues.

*Making Christian Counseling More Christ Centered, pg. 30*

*(quoting a journal entry by Michael Emler:*

*Listening to Prozac...and to the Scriptures: A Primer on Psychoactive Medications)*

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### *Gospel Response*

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Consider the practical value for us of the following doctrines as it relates to anthropology.

- Christ's incarnation *John 1:14; Colossians 1:21-23; Hebrews 4:15*
- Identity rooted in Christ *Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 5:6, 13-15*
- Christ's resurrection and our resurrection *1 Corinthians 15:58; Philippians 3:20-21*