

Beneath Our Feet and O'er Our Head

Reginald Heber (1783–1826)

Beneath our feet and o'er our head
Is equal warning given;
Beneath us lie the countless dead,
Above us is the heaven!
Death rides on every passing breeze,
And lurks in every flower;
Each season hath its own disease,
Its peril every hour!

Our eyes have seen the rosy light
Of youth's soft cheek decay;
And fate descend in sudden night
On manhood's middle day.
Our eyes have seen the steps of age
Halt feebly to the tomb;
And yet shall earth our hearts engage,
And dreams of days to come?

Then, mortal, turn! thy danger know;
Where'er thy foot can tread,
The earth rings hollow from below,
And warns thee of her dead!
Turn, mortal, turn! thy soul apply
To truths divinely given:
The dead, who underneath thee lie,
Shall live for hell or heaven!



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In the Nick of Time

Spirit, Soul, and Body, Part 7: The Human Race

Kevin T. Bauder

If the human soul is procreated along with the human body, then important consequences follow. For one thing, all humans descend from Adam, both body and soul. Thus, only one human race exists, not several. Various theologies of racial superiority have tried to propose an additional ultimate ancestor, or more than one. Some attempt to trace certain bloodlines to non-Adamic ancestors before the flood. Others seek to find a bloodline of “serpent seed” individuals who are at best only partly human. Biblical evidence for these theories is scant to non-existent.

The human race is one: red and yellow, black and white. When speaking of human beings, we should never refer to races. What people have called races are actually humanly devised constructs based on ephemeral qualities such as the presence or absence of melanin, eye pigmentation, hair texture, and bone structure. These classifications have sometimes been used to identify individuals for sinful purposes, but the Bible never treats them as important distinctions.

But we can speak of peoples or people groups. The Bible refers to these people groups as *nations*, the Greek singular for which is *ethnos*. A biblical nation or ethnicity descends from a common ancestor (see Gen 10). It may also share a common language, home territory, religion, and culture. The human race includes many such ethnicities, but it is still one race.

At the moment of this writing, the living human race consists of over eight billion individuals. Population growth seems to be flattening out and perhaps even declining. Perhaps a century or so from now, the human race will have grown to nine billion people. Or perhaps it will have shrunk to seven billion. In any event, all presently-living humans will have died. But here's the thing: the human race will still be one. It will still be the same human race.

The relationship of individual humans to the race is analogous to the relationship of cells to our bodies. Our bodies continue to be the same bodies—they continue to be *us*—even when the individual cells change. When I was born, my body contained fewer than three percent of the cells that it now has. Most of those have been exchanged during the intervening years. My

body has few or none of the cells with which I started. But it is still my body. It is still *me*. Its continuity does not consist in its individual cells.

This is an important matter for the resurrection. Believers have been burned to death because of their testimony. The particles of their bodies have been scattered to the winds. Other believers have been fed to wild animals that were eaten by still others. The particles of those believers' bodies temporarily became particles of some lion or bear.

An extreme example is the body of Roger Williams, arguably the first Baptist in America. After he was buried, an apple tree grew near his grave. A root from the tree grew down into the coffin and followed the contours of his legs and feet. Years later, his coffin was exhumed. People believed that the root had drawn nourishment from Williams's body, consuming his particles. Passersby had eaten apples from the tree, further dispersing the particles. Given the number of people who ate Roger Williams, how can God put him and them back together again in the resurrection?

Reconstituted bodies are only possible if the identity of the body does not depend upon the continuity of its particles. My body is mine today, even if it includes few or none of the cells with which it started. It will be mine in the resurrection, even if none of my present particles go into it. How God puts the resurrection body together is His problem, and He is fully capable of solving it. I am just happy to know that He will raise me again.

Likewise, today's human race consists of over eight billion people. When I was born, it consisted of fewer than three billion. At the end of the Eighteenth Century, it numbered in the hundreds of millions. It was the same race in 1799 as today. Just as our bodies are the same bodies through growth and shrinkage, the human race is the same race whether population increases and declines.

At some point in the past, the human race was measured in the thousands. At an earlier point it was measured in the hundreds. And at one point, it was measured as a single individual—Adam.

And here is the unique thing about Adam: he was not just the first individual human being. When he was created, he was the entire human race. Even when the woman was made from him, she remained in a special relationship: bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh. Even then, and even at the temptation, Adam constituted the human race. That is why the Fall did not occur when Eve ate the fruit, but when Adam did.

When Adam did eat the fruit, he sinned a sin that no one else has ever been able to duplicate. When Adam sinned, he did not simply commit a personal transgression. When Adam sinned, the entire human race sinned.

This is not to suggest that every single human was personally and consciously present in Adam, willing to sin with him. It is to observe that if the race sinned, then every subsequent naturally-born human has participated in Adam's sin. None of us comes from anywhere except Adam. None of us has a nature that derives from any other source.

Because we are humans, we participate in the human race. This same race sinned in our first father, and that is why God justly charges us with Adam's guilt. According to Romans 5:12, "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (NASB). That simple past tense verb speaks volumes. All sinned. When? In Adam. How? Because the race sinned in him.

Indeed, we are not simply charged with Adam's guilt. If the race sinned, then it is our guilt as well. In fact, because of our identification with Adam, we were constituted sinners (simple past tense of *kathistemi*) through one man's disobedience (Rom 5:19). God is not merely righteous to condemn us for Adam's sin. He could not be righteous if He did *not* condemn us for Adam's sin.

There is one and only one human race. It is the race from which we are all born. It is the same race that was Adam when he sinned. Because the race sinned in Adam, we also sinned then, even if we were not personally and individually present.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
