

# A Concise Doctrine of Man

## Introduction

“What is man? Today this question is being asked with a new urgency. Some have observed that people today are no longer much interested in questions about ultimate reality, but they are vitally interested in questions about man, specifically their own identity. Ultimately, the question – “Who is Man?” – can only be answered in terms of origins. Christian theology argues that human beings the creature comes second to God the Creator both in the order of being and in the order of knowing.

Augustine’s famous prayer – ‘our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee’ – expresses a keen sense of humanity’s orientation towards God. The human creature comes second to God, both in the order of being (namely, creation) and in the order of knowledge (namely, revelation).

God’s ultimate purpose was not to create a human race because He was lonely or in need of companionship. God is self-sufficient! It was not because He was so loving and simply desired to pour His love onto people. The first (preeminent) thought of God has always been the exaltation of His Son Jesus Christ. The last (all encompassing) thought of God is establishing a kingdom for His Son to rule and reign by putting “all things under His feet” (Ps 8:6, Heb 2:8). Therefore, when we set out in a study of man we need to understand that ultimately our understanding of man must be subordinate to our understanding of God and God’s purposes! This is the first principle in seeking to understand man.

John Calvin spoke to this first principle when he said: ‘Without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self.’ That is why Christian theologians have typically placed their discussions of doctrine of man after the doctrine of God. Therefore, we say that the Biblical study of man, often referred to as theological anthropology<sup>1</sup> is not a foundational doctrine, but rather a derivative doctrine<sup>2</sup>. We only reach the stage of theological anthropology when we affirm that man is a being who has to do with God, or better, when we affirm that God is the one who has to do with human beings. That is why, when we try to understand human beings apart from God it only leads to disaster.<sup>3</sup>

## Purpose of This Paper

This paper is not meant to be an exhaustive, systematic theology on the doctrine of man. Rather, the intent for this paper is to set about providing the biblical framework and foundation for understanding who man is in relation to God, creation, others and himself. Understanding that we cannot address every point of doctrine or every question that could be asked. Yet, the elders

---

<sup>1</sup> By theological anthropology we simply mean the study of the nature and action of man in relation to God according to divine revelation.

<sup>2</sup> A derivative doctrine is one that is derived from another more foundational doctrine. Meaning that in order to best understand a derivative doctrine it must be studied in relation to another more foundational doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction with slight edits from Greg Spears "Doctrine of Man Table Talk Series"

of Waverly Place Baptist Church want to provide this paper as a means to further equip the congregation as we all think through church-life as well as how we interact in the world.

### Identity

- As noted above, identity has become the lynchpin for talks about anthropology, both from a Biblical and secular standpoint. Therefore Christians, "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect". (1 Peter 3:15 ESV)
- As Carl Trueman has noted, "man is not born free, autonomous, we are relationally defined and responsible to others with certain obligations". However, the idea of expressive individualism which has taken over our culture today, has moved away from understanding humanity in Biblical terms and has sought to understand man primarily through a self-determined feelings based "reality".
- Expressive individualism holds that human beings are defined by their individual psychological core, and that the purpose of life is allowing that core to find social expression in relationships. Anything that challenges it is deemed oppressive.<sup>4</sup>
- "The Bible only knows of Christians who realise that their identity does not lie in moving inward to establish who the authentic person is. It relies on them looking outward to the church around them and to God himself in order to establish who they are."<sup>5</sup>
- Put simply all humans are made in the image of God and therefore, are either in Adam (remaining in bondage to their sinful nature; sinners in need of grace) or are in Christ (having been converted and no longer in bondage to sin, but free indeed; sinners saved by grace)

### An important subject for church

- What the world says
  - The prevailing thought in America today, including among many Christians, is that one's identity is self-chosen and that it is actually harmful to refuse to accept this self-chosen identity. One's identity must be affirmed by all. Again, refusal to accept a person's self-chosen identity attacks their dignity and existence. Yet such feelings about self-chosen identity are not based on the objective reality of biology, God, or rarely on anything external of the person.

---

<sup>4</sup> Carl Trueman, <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/report/how-expressive-individualism-threatens-civil-society>

<sup>5</sup> Carl Trueman, <https://www.evangelical-times.org/articles/carl-trueman-gives-lecture-on-identity/>

- What the Word says
  - “God has said who we are, and though we may rebel against him, we cannot change who humanity is or who we are. We may deny our creatureliness, but denial cannot undo the work of God.”<sup>6</sup>
  - God has revealed in Scripture and nature who man is, what man is and what man is made for. Yet it is Scripture that provides the foundational categories for understanding man, as it is very lens through which we understand anything.
  - This paper will explore these and many other truths. But let us set forth this foundational truth from Genesis 2:7, "then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."
    - We are NOT the Creator
    - We ARE the creature
    - The Creator-creature distinction is of utmost importance in understanding who God is, who we are, and therefore beginning to grasp all of reality
    -

### Who are we?

- Imago Dei (Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7, 21-23)
  - Man is the image bearer of God, meaning every human that has ever lived, is living or will live, is made in the image of God. At the core of every human, a foundation component of their identity, is the fact that they are made in the image of the triune God of the Bible.
  - “Image of God is an ontological<sup>7</sup> reality that leads to function.”<sup>8</sup>
    - “Mankind is the representative of God on earth. The image, then, is not fundamentally a trait or attribute. To see humanity is to see the likeness of God”<sup>9</sup>
    - We represent God as His image bearers. As theologian Mark Cortez says, “we need to view the imago Dei as a declaration that God intended to create human persons to be the physical means through which he would manifest his own divine presence in the world”.

---

<sup>6</sup> Owen Strachan, Reenchanted Humanity A Theology of Mankind, pg 31

<sup>7</sup> Ontology refers to the nature of being

<sup>8</sup> Strachan, Reenchanted Humanity, pg 29

<sup>9</sup> Strachan, Reenchanted Humanity, pg 29

- We are either in Adam or in Christ
  - Jesus Christ is the true image of God (Col 1:15, 2 Cor 4:4) and because of his redemptive work on the cross sinners are saved. However, not all will be counted among the redeemed. Many will remain unregenerate sinners in rebellion to God.
  - "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Eph. 4:17-24
  - Another foundational component of human identity is their nature in relation to sin either through Adam or Christ.
    - 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation."
  - "In Adam" - the sinners state apart from saving grace of God
  - "In Christ" - the sinners state made possible by the saving grace of God

### What are we?

- Human
  - Body-soul - "How many parts are there to man? Everyone agrees that we have physical bodies. Most people (both Christians and non-Christians) sense that they also have an immaterial part — a "soul" that will live on after their bodies die." <sup>10</sup>
    - There are many verses and passages in the Bible which speak of the body. For example, as referenced already in Genesis 2:7, God formed man (body) from the dust of the ground. There are many verses in the Bible that note the existence of the soul. We read about both in Matthew 10:28 -- "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
  - Heart-mind
    - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

---

<sup>10</sup> Spears, Doctrine of Man Table Talk Series

- God “made no distinction between [Jew] and [Gentile], having cleansed their hearts by faith.” (Acts 15:9)
  - Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. (2 Timothy 3:8)
  - They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. (Ephesians 4:18)
  - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)
  - There are many other verses and passages that discuss the heart and mind of man. It is clear from Scripture that the mind seeks to serve the heart and that apart from the work of God, man's heart is selfish and darkened. Yet it is through that work of God that man is given a new heart and a mind that is being renewed.
- Male and female (Gen 1:26-28; Gen 2:18-23; Gen 3:14-19)
    - Biology – apart from mutations/genetic disease males are born with XY chromosomes and females are born with XX chromosomes
    - Sex – refers to the act of sexual intercourse. However, the focus of this paper in regards to sex will be the objective, God created categories of male and female which result in reproductive functions (again understanding that due to the curse of sin there are genetic defects which result in “abnormal” instances of sterility due to non-functional sex organs). Therefore, the normal way sex is identified and assigned is by observing physically the sex organs and genetically testing the DNA (chromosomes).
    - Gender - while sex is the objective reality, gender is a term used to describe a subjective expression with association to one's sex, for example manhood and womanhood. Manhood and womanhood each consist of traits, characteristics and functions corresponding to the person's biological sex.
    - “Women and men equally image God, even in their sexual differences, even in their differences with regard to authority and submission. (A fuller discussion on complementarity is outside the scope of this paper. For any questions please see an Elder) The reason is that the image of God embraces everything that is human. Both men and women, therefore, resemble God and are called to represent\* him throughout the creation, exercising control, authority, and presence in his name.”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> John Frame Systematic Theology, pg 796

- \*In regards to image, Frame suggests that man represents God, meaning, “the image of God consists of those qualities that equip man to be lord of the world, under God”. This is similar in meaning to the Cortez quote from above. Or to put it yet another way, among many other activities we will rule, subdue and multiply hopefully all to the glory of God.

### What are we made for?

- Worship
  - "Worship is the end of humanity. If we connect adoration with obedience and service, we set ourselves up to understand what eternity will involve."<sup>12</sup>
  - Rightly ordered life (Vertically) Matthew 22:37-38, "And he (Jesus) said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'"
  - Idolatry - We are worshipping creatures, therefore we will either worship the Creator or his creation
- Relationships (rightly ordered life horizontally) Matthew 22:39-40, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
  - It can be demonstrated from Scripture that rightly ordered horizontal relationships that flow from our rightly ordered vertical relationship with God, are themselves acts of worship
  - Therefore having been made for relationships we consider some as demonstrated by the below God ordained institutions
    - Marriage/Family (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5 and 6 just to name a few)
    - Church (Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 10, Acts, and others)
    - State (Romans 13 among others demonstrate that we are designed culture makers)
- Telos
  - The Westminster Catechism (WC) asks and answers, “What is the chief end of man?” "Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”
  - In talking about the WC question, John Piper notes that "the word *end* is singular — man’s chief end, not ends. One end is two things: (1) to glorify God and (2) to

---

<sup>12</sup> Strachan Reenchanted Humanity pg 35

enjoy him. Which certainly seems to say that these two are not two distinct acts — the first glorifying and the second enjoying — but one act."

- Jonathan Edwards says it this way, "God glorifies himself towards the creatures in two ways: by appearing to their understanding and, two, in communicating himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing in him, the manifestations which he makes of himself. God is glorified not only in his glory's being seen, but in its being rejoiced in."
- John Piper's thought is summarized in his well known phrase, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him."
- Eternal life or eternal death - as we have noted above all men are either sinners in need of grace or sinners saved by grace. Those that have been united with Christ will live with and worship him forever (John 3:16) and those that remain in their sinful state rebelling against God will experience eternal death and pain (Matthew 25:46)

### Summary

We are finite creatures living in a world created by a transcendent God. If we are to begin to understand who we are, what we are, why we exist, we must look beyond ourselves, not inward but rather outward and upward.

We must get our most fundamental categories for understanding humanity from Scripture, not science, psychology, sociology, philosophy or any other body of worldly wisdom. It is not that these cannot offer some insight at various points, but they are not the grounds or foundation for rightly understanding man. They are downstream from the grounds for truth and must be understood and processed through the framework of a biblical worldview. We as Christians must not only know what God has said about man, but we must believe it, teach it and defend it. Carl Henry notes that, "Divine revelation is the starting point of all human knowledge."

To understand what the Church is warring against we need to have a truly Biblical anthropology. The Church must know what God has revealed about humanity. And as John Calvin reminds us, "No man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone."