

Lesson 8
“What Is Man?”
Psalm 8

Purpose:

Your students will have a biblical answer to a question that has become poorly answered in the world in which we live – “What Is Man?” in a study of the doctrines of man and sin.

In a Nutshell:

Reflecting on the excellent name of the Lord, David asked an important question: “What is man?” (Ps. 8:1-4). He asked that, not because he did not know what man was, but because he knew that man was undeserving of the beneficence God has bestowed on him. So his question in its entirety is actually a humble prayer, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” The psalmist knew what man is – an unworthy creature of the kind Creator. Like the psalmist, the founders of our country enjoyed some humble certainty about what man is. Committing their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to their cause of independence, they confidently defined its foundation in their *Declaration*, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Our founders knew what man is. Today, we live in a world full of men and women who no longer know the answer to the question, “What is man?” Some would say that man is merely advanced animal, while others believe he is a primitive machine. Some call him a product of chaotic evolutionary processes, while others say he is a god who may choose to be whatever he wants to be. When man loses the ability to ask humbly, personally, and worshipfully the question, “What is man that thou art mindful of him?”, he also loses the ability to answer correctly and truthfully the all important question for understanding his existence, “What is man?” For those with the worshipful humility to believe, the Bible offers two true answers to this important question. Man is first a creature made in the image of God (Ps. 8:5-8; Gen. 1:26-28). He is everything that His Creator made him to be, nothing more and nothing less. Secondly, man is tragically a fallen creature, sinful, separated from his Holy Creator, responsible for the ruination of creation, and in need of his Creator’s salvation (Gen. 3:1-24).

To the Testimony!

Man is a creature made in the image of God.

Gen. 1:20-31 1. Day five and six of the creation week bring the Creator’s work to completion with the appearance of living creatures in the sea and on the land. For most of these, the account records that God made these animals *after their kind* (vv. 21, 24-25). Verse 25 seems especially emphatic about this. When we come to the next verses (vv. 26-27), which introduce the creation of man, the phrase *after their kind* is dropped for a different phrase. What is that phrase? What does it say about the difference between man as creature and animals as creatures (vv. 29-30; 2:20; 3:21; 9:3-7)?

Answer: The phrase is *image and likeness of God*. Whereas animals were made after their kind, mankind was made after the image and likeness of God (see Gen. 5:1-2 and Jam. 3:9). Prior to their creation, nothing like the animals existed. Not so for man. This *Imago Dei* passes from parents to children (Gen. 5:3). What this says about man as creature and animals as creature is that they are not the same creatures. Man is not an animal. Because man is made in the image and likeness of God, he has dominion over the animals (1:26-30), gives the animals their names (2:20), clothes himself with their skins (3:21), and fills his hungry stomach with their flesh (9:3-7). Men should not have the same kind of dominion over other men with authority to name them (slavery), nor should they kill men to meet their personal needs (murder).

Application: God expects us to appreciate the intrinsic value of animal life (Prov. 12:10), but attributing human rights to animals deprecates human life. We have unalienable (non-transferable) rights as humans to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because we are made in the image of God and given dominion over creation. Slavery and murder are wrong when it comes to humans because they are violations of God’s creative design for man. The same is not true for animals. Attributing human rights to other creatures of nature, such as plants, mountains, rivers, or oceans, is still worse.

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Interesting Insight!

The first African-American man to address Congress was the pastor of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C. He was a former slave named Henry Highland Garnet, and he titled his sermon that day, “Let the Monster Perish.” He preached it to the 38th Congress on Sunday, February 12, 1865, just days prior to their adoption of the 13th amendment to the U. S. Constitution, which banned slavery. His message depended heavily on a biblical understanding of the difference between humans and animals:

“Great God! I would as soon attempt to enslave Gabriel or Michael as to enslave a man made in the image of God, and for whom Christ died. Slavery is snatching man from the high place to which he was lifted by the hand of God, and dragging him down to the level of the brute creation, where he is made to be the companion of the horse and the fellow of the ox. It tears the crown of glory from his head and as far as possible obliterates the image of God that is in him. Slavery preys upon man, and man only. Why? Because a brute has not reason, faith, nor an undying spirit, nor conscience. It does not look forward to the future with joy or fear, nor reflect upon the past with satisfaction or regret. . . .

“Our poor and forlorn brother whom thou hast labeled ‘slave,’ is also a man. He may be unfortunate, weak, helpless and despised and hated; nevertheless he is a man. His God and thine has stamped on his forehead his title to his inalienable rights in characters that can be read by every intelligent being. Pitiless storms of outrage may have beaten upon his defenseless head, and he may have descended through ages of oppression; yet he is a man. God made him such, and his brother cannot unmake him. Woe, woe to him who attempts to commit the accursed crime.”

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Gen. 1:26-28 2. What part does human sexuality play in answering the question, "What is man?"

Answer: God not only made man, He also made them male and female, and He did so telling them to be fruitful and to multiply and to fill the earth. Therefore, by virtue of this creation, it follows that the answer to the question, "What is man?" is never, "Man is homosexual" or "Man is transgender." Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as a homosexual human, only heterosexual humans that practice homosexuality. Nor is there any such thing as a female male, only females who seek to become like males, or vice versa.

Application: God's call is certainly never to abandon one sin in favor of another. Bigotry and cruelty are never His will for His people. To the contrary, after our loving Him first, He desires next that we love our neighbors as ourselves. What does this mean for a Christian's relationship with the neighbor who claims to be a homosexual? Were that friend to claim to be less than equally human, to belong as a slave among the chattel and possessions of another, we would know how to love him. We would say in the name of the Creator God of heaven, in the words of Henry Garnet, "You are a man, equal with other men, by virtue of God's stamp upon you. No one, yourself included, can unmake what you are." We would treat such a one with the dignity belonging to what he is by virtue of the Creator's stamp, a man equally human before God.

In much the same way, were another friend to claim to be less than equally heterosexual, to belong to a classification called homosexual, we would know how to love him. We would say in the name of the Creator God of heaven, "You are a heterosexual, as is all mankind, by virtue of God's stamp upon you. No one, yourself included, can unmake what you are." We would treat such a one with the dignity belonging to what he is, a male or female equally heterosexual before God. It is impossible for us who recognize every person as a dignified heterosexual creature made in God's own image to discriminate against those creatures on the basis of their homosexuality. Such homosexuality simply does not exist.

Of course, every equally human and equally heterosexual person created by God is fallen in nature and corrupted by sin. The Christian freeman must always discriminate against sinful thoughts and behaviors, both his own and those of others, seeking for all the only path to mercy and forgiveness in the Redeemer's shed blood and glorious resurrection. The sister florist will provide beautiful flowers for everyone's Mother's Day celebration, for everyone is a dignified heterosexual made in the image of God, but she cannot be part of adorning a celebration of homosexuality, and that for the very same reason.

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Gen. 2:7 Job 32:8 Prov. 20:27 1 Cor. 2:11

3. Another phrase important to the intrinsic difference God created between man and animals is found in Genesis' second chapter's more detailed recounting of the creation of man and woman. (That man's creation gets a second chapter is itself significant.) What is that phrase in verse 7, and what more does it say about the difference between man and animals?

Answer: The phrase this time is *the breath of life*, which caused man to become a living soul in a way the animals are not alive. Man has an immortal spiritual component to his nature that can be either spiritually alive or spiritually dead. It makes him aware of himself and of God in a way animals are not (Job 32:8 and Prov. 20:27), and it is something that functions within us in a way that parallels the function of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Godhead (1 Cor. 2:11).

Application: Simply put, animals do not have immortal souls, and humans do. We are sentient beings that are aware of ourselves and our God. We have a conscience, an innate sense of the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. We must be sensitive and wise, using correctly this difference between us and animals to know and do God's will (Ps. 73:22).

Notes: One passage that may be used to understand this special breath of the Lord as the equal possession of both man and animals is Gen. 7:21-22. In this regard, Robert Reymond notes: "the verses should be read 'and all mankind – all on dry land [which excludes the occupants of the ark] in whose nostrils was the [breath] of life died.' The text is equating "all mankind" with "all who have the breath of life."

Matt. 10:28 1 Thess. 5:23 Dan. 5:21, 7:15 Rom. 12:1-2 1 Cor. 6:20

4. The creation account in Genesis 2 indicates that man is a unity of two basic components – the material or physical and the immaterial or spiritual. The physical comes from the dust of the earth, and the spiritual comes from the breath of God. Other passages of Scripture employ this dichotomy of the inner and outer parts of man (2 Cor. 4:16). From the passages cited, list some words used to describe the immaterial or spiritual part of man in contrast to or in complement with the body of man. Then from Matt. 10:28, explain how the physical and spiritual components of man's nature are on the one hand different, but on the other the same.

Answer: Some words describing the immaterial component of man include *soul* (Matt. 10:28, 1 Thess. 5:23), *heart* or *mind* (Dan. 5:21, Rom. 12:1-2), and *spirit* (Dan. 7:15, 1 Cor. 6:20). Jesus explained that this part of man other men cannot kill, unlike the body, which other men can kill. What body and soul have in common is that God can destroy both in hell. Both the physical (by way of resurrection) and the spiritual components of man are immortal.

Application: Jesus says not to fear those who can kill the body, but to fear the One who will judge both body and soul. So bodies are important (Rom. 12:1, 1 Cor. 6:20), but our spirits are more so (Rom. 12:2, 1 Cor. 6:20, 1 Tim. 4:8, 2 Cor. 4:16). Do we care for our spiritual health?

Notes: Two questions related to the dichotomous nature of man have been raised by theologians. The first issue asks about the relationship between these components during life and then after death. Clearly, the physical does seem to be connected to the spiritual in a way that allows one to affect the other. It is as though the body is a tool for the soul, without at least certain parts of which the soul cannot properly function. But still, no part of the body is identifiable as the self or seat of human consciousness, what I refer to when I say “I” or “me.” See the next *Interesting Insight!*.

After death, it would seem that the immaterial part of the departed is still visibly recognizable in some sense (1 Sam. 28:12-14). (Note that Rolland McCune postulates on the basis of 2 Cor. 5:1-5 that men and women receive an “intermediate body” after death; *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 2:13.) To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and clothed with a new house that ultimately involves the reunification of soul and body in the resurrection. Further details about the intermediate state have not been revealed to us.

Second, theologians have asked about the origination of the spiritual part of an individual. We read about that in regard to Adam in Gen. 2:7. We know that the physical body of Adam’s children come from Adam and Eve’s bodies through a physical process designed and controlled by God (Deut. 28:4, Rom. 4:19-20). But what of the spirit of Adam’s children? Two theories have been proposed: (1) creationism says that God creates a new soul at the conception of each individual; (2) traducianism (from the Latin *tradux* meaning *to sprout*) says that the conception of an individual involves a union of the souls of mother and father to form the soul of a child through a spiritual process designed and controlled by God.

Roland McCune gives three good reasons for preferring the second of these answers to the question: (1) it preserves the unity of the human race as progenitors of the image of God, which includes both body and soul (Gen. 5:1-3; Adam’s procreation of Seth is to Adam and Seth what God’s creation of Adam was to God and Adam – both involving the soul); (2) it explains original sin – how it is that men are conceived in iniquity (Ps. 51:5); and (3) it agrees with biblical statements about the creation week, that God ended His work of creation (Gen. 2:2, Exod. 20:11) [2:23]. To these could be added (1) the hint that departed souls are visibly recognizable (Samuel), evidently retaining features similar to their prior physical existence, which were inherited from parents, and (2) the obvious truth that psychological traits such as personality and disposition are inherited traits that cannot be explained in purely physical or behavioral terms.

Interesting Insight!

To what do we refer when we say “I” or “me”? A proponent of intelligent design addresses the inability of Darwinism to answer this question [Angus Menuge, *Agents Under Fire: Materialism and the Rationality of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Little, 2004), 144]. He concludes that Darwinism therefore undermines rational science: “The two schools of Darwinism psychology are motivated by an atomistic paradigm [i.e., that man is no more than the complex of his atoms] that has been rejected by physics and that does not work in biology or psychology either. The irreducible complexity of practical and theoretical reasoning cannot be explained by Darwinian psychology; instead, it points to design. Since the activity of science itself depends on such reasoning, Darwinian psychology is antiscientific. Further, our thoughts, experiences, and actions are synthesized and interpreted in a way best explained by positing an enduring unitary self [the spirit or soul] of precisely the kind that Darwinian psychology denies. By

making room for [immaterial] agency as an irreducible feature of reality, intelligent design is therefore in the right position to uphold the rationality of science and to account for the psychological facts.”

Man is a sinner in need of a Savior.

Gen. 2:15-17 5. Like the demons who followed the rebellion of Lucifer, man is one of God’s fallen creatures. Genesis 3 tells us how that happened. God’s law forbade the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:15-17), and Eve and Adam with her broke that law by eating from that tree. Satan, in the form of a serpent, played the role of tempter who deceived the woman. What about Eve’s actions in Gen. 3:6 demonstrates that she was not only disobedient, but also deceived?

Answer: Eve’s willingness to assess the fruit independently before eating it in violation of God’s command demonstrates the effectiveness of Satan’s deception of her.

Satan’s strategy is both subtle and effective. First, he addresses Eve rather than Adam. He forces her to take the lead while Adam stands by with her in silence (v. 6; Robert Reymond: “the phrase, ‘[who was] with her’ in 3:6 is significant. It shows that Adam was present throughout the entire conversation between the serpent and his wife and that he had abdicated his headship role over his wife” [p. 445]). This is Adam’s failing more so than Eve’s.

Second, Satan poses a question that puts Eve in a position not only to confess but also to assess what God had said. He claims to seek clarity on whether God has forbidden consumption of every tree, a somewhat ridiculous suggestion on its face, and one that is easily answered by Eve. But the question is also one that forces Eve to focus on and overemphasize (“neither shall ye touch it,” v. 3) the one prohibition of her relation to God rather than on God’s many provisions. That is the beginning of her negative assessment of the command of God. Her reason for obedience becomes the phrase, “lest ye die,” rather than, “God has said.”

Third, Satan encourages Eve’s new-found position as an autonomous assessor of God’s commandment by challenging the empirical validity of the command. He knows Eve will accept his “You shall not surely die” (v. 4), because Eve no longer bases the validity of God’s command on God’s authority but her own experience. She had never seen anyone die before from the tree’s fruit. Taking this wrong approach, she further assesses the validity of God’s command by examining the nature of the fruit (v. 6), which then leads her to the conclusion that God’s command was untrue and could be disobeyed safely.

Application: It is the essence of pleasing God to trust His word with childlike faith (Job 13:15, Matt. 26:39, Heb. 10:22-23, 11:6). His word is true and good, not because it has conformed to our specifications for truth and goodness, but because the true and good God has said it. As fallen creatures, our greatest idolatry is demanding that God’s command conform to our specifications. The idea that issues are gray rather than black and white serves this natural desire. We want spiritual autonomy. We will not have God’s objective standards of truth, goodness, and beauty rule us, so it helps that cause to deny their existence. We want this autonomy because we are fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. The autonomy promised by Satan to them and us is only an illusion, hell’s curse upon us disguised as a blessing.

Gen. 3:8-24
Ps. 51:5
58:3
Rom. 5:12
8:18-25

6. From the passages listed, recount some of the consequences of the fall of man.

Answer: Some consequences of the fall of man include:

- (1) the voice of the Lord, that once provided the comfort of sweet fellowship, now causes man to fear, run, and hide (Gen. 3:8-10);
- (2) this happened because man died spiritually (Gen. 2:17; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 3:10-19);
- (3) consciousness of sin brings with it shame over nakedness (3:10-11; cp. 2:25);
- (4) the blame game – Adam blames the woman and God, and Eve blames the serpent (3:11-13; victimization vs. a sense of personal responsibility);
- (5) the curse on the serpent (3:14);
- (6) the curse on the woman – sorrow in childbirth, authoritarianism from her husband (3:16; sin crouches at the door with a desire to control (toward) us, and we must rule over it; in the same way the woman is cursed with a desire to control (toward) her husband, but he will rule over her);
- (7) the curse on the ground, which is cursed for the sake of Adam, who would have to earn a living with the sweat of his brow (3:17-19);
- (8) physical death entered the cosmos with the death of man (3:19-20; Rom. 5:12);
- (9) animals died to provide clothing for Adam and Eve (3:21);
- (10) man gained an experiential knowledge of both good and evil – what it is to experience calamity (3:22);
- (11) man is barred from the tree of life (3:22);
- (12) man is barred from the Garden of Eden (3:23-24);
- (13) Adam’s offspring are conceived and born as sinners (Ps. 51:5, 58:3 – “original sin”);
- (14) God’s creation was no longer very good – it begins to groan (Rom. 8:18-25);
- (15) and Adam’s race became totally depraved (Rom. 3:10-20; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 7:18; 1 Cor. 2:14-16):

- scriptural terminology: “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), “fleshly desires” (Eph. 2:3), “none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:10), “no spiritual understanding” (Rom. 3:11, 1 Cor. 2:14-16), “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18);
- total depravity includes the sinner’s inability to understand God’s truth on his own (1 Cor. 2:14-16) and the inability to merit acceptance with God (Eph. 2:1-3);
- because of these two debilitating aspects of the sinner’s total depravity, God’s salvation for the sinner must provide two things: (1) special revelation and spiritual illumination [the Holy Spirit’s works] to address the sinner’s inability to understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:8-13); and (2) grace [Christ’s work of atonement] through faith to address the sinner’s inability to merit acceptance with God through works (Eph. 2:8-10).

Application: Perhaps the greatest consequence of man’s sin, however, is the curse on the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). His heel would be bruised by the serpent’s seed in the crushing of the serpent’s head. The serpent’s seed are sinners who rejected and crucified Christ (John 8:39-45). God’s immediate and loving response to the fall of humanity was to promise a human that would suffer to crush the serpent. This was Jesus Christ, “born of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4).

Notes: Two further issues have occupied the attention of theologians when it comes to the sinfulness of man. The first concerns the question of total inability. Some teach under this doctrine that the sinful nature of man must be changed before he can believe the gospel and be saved. It requires the idea that regeneration, being born again, precedes faith. “Dead men cannot believe” is the common assertion from Eph. 2:1. Clearly, the man that is dead in his trespasses and sins cannot contribute any merit to his salvation. Still, Paul’s emphasis in Ephesians 2 seems to be that man cannot work for his salvation because of his depraved deadness in trespasses and sins, and that he must therefore believe (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul explains that works-salvation causes boasting, and elsewhere he shows that this boasting is excluded by a law of faith (Rom. 3:27-28; 4:2-3). Scripture never quite teaches that we must see our inability to believe in order to avoid boasting, nor that a sinner cannot believe. That a prevenient work of God’s Spirit in the life of the sinner is necessary to saving faith is clear, for without such a work he cannot understand the spiritual truth that he must believe. But it is less clear that this is a work of regeneration. What is clear is that the Spirit’s work of special revelation, conviction, and illumination are required, which cause a man or woman to understand the saving gospel in a way that the natural man cannot by himself (John 16:7-11; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:31-32, 45; 1 Cor. 2:9-14). Our witness plays an important role in this work (Acts 1:8).

The second issue has to do with the sense in which it is true that many were made sinners by the one sin of Adam (Rom. 5:18-19, “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”). Some Bible students em-

phasize the parallel between Christ and Adam in this passage, note that righteousness in Christ is ours by imputation (reckoning or crediting to our account; see Rom. 4:5-8), and conclude that sin in Adam is ours also by imputation. This is called the "Federal Headship" view of the effects of Adam's sin on his offspring.

The idea has much to commend it, but it is not without its problems. When Paul says that righteousness is imputed to us, he is not saying that our natures become sinless, but forgiven. The point of imputation of righteousness is that it is not impartation of righteousness. That change of nature is a work of sanctification and ultimately glorification, not justification. So the parallelism of the Federal Headship view begins to break down when we consider the real nature of imputation. The effect of Adam's sin on his offspring was more than imputation could accomplish; they were actually made sinners by it (both forensically and naturally; see Rom. 5:19, where *many were made sinners* is in parallel with *many will be made righteous* [future tense]). Our future righteousness in Christ is both a righteous standing and a righteous nature, which come from both the imputation of forensic righteousness through justification and the impartation of natural righteousness through sanctification and glorification. Imputation fails really to explain how Adam's offspring became sinful by nature.

Perhaps it is best to see that when Adam sinned and died spiritually, the human race experienced this death, if not this specific sin. Adam, as a spiritually dead human, can give birth only to spiritually dead humans (see the notes above about traducianism under question 4). In Rom. 5:12, Paul explains that "death spread to all men, for all have sinned." The evidence that death has spread is that all have sinned. Spiritual death comes first and causes the sin, which is then evidence of the death. Adam's spiritually dead nature, which he passes along to his offspring, has caused all men to sin from conception.

NBBC Doctrinal Statement

Man

We believe God created man in His own image in holiness and innocence. However, man fell into sin by voluntary disobedience, incurring guilt and condemnation, becoming totally depraved. Adam's fallen nature is perpetuated to all his posterity and as a result, all members of the human race are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. Natural man is wholly disinclined to everything morally good and prone to choose and delight in evil (Genesis 2:17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:10-12; 5:12; Ephesians 2:1; Luke 24:44, 45).