



“What Is Man?”

Psalm 8

Lesson 8

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 es-

pecially 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)?

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.”

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

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?

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.

Interesting Insight!

To what do we refer when we say “I” or “me”? Below, 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
3:1-7
1 Tim. 2:13-14

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?

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.

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).