

Christian Ministry Unit 1

Introduction to Theology

Week 3 – Biblical Anthropology

Introduction

“Anthropology” means the study of humans. Biblical anthropology focuses on the Bible's revelation about humans, especially our *original design* (CREATION), our *present abnormal state* (FALL), and the *effect of our salvation* through Christ (REDEMPTION). We will focus on the first two areas tonight; the third area will be covered extensively later.

Why is biblical anthropology so important?

It provides an explanation for why humans are great and capable of noble acts—yet also tragic and capable of terrible evil. This duality is present in every human being, family, society, etc. Is this duality an accident? Is it God's design? Or is it the corruption of God's design?

Appreciating the extent of our sinfulness motivates us to appreciate the extent of God's grace.

Understanding God's original design for humans provides content for Christian sanctification, which is the process by which God restores us to the image in which he created us (Col. 3:10). It also provides a picture of what we can look forward to in God's eternal kingdom, which is the completion of our restoration.

It shapes our view of human nature. This, in turn, affects practical areas like PARENTING (e.g., discipline), DELEGATED AUTHORITY (its importance in a fallen world), SOCIAL ETHICS (sexuality; abortion; euthanasia), PSYCHOLOGY (our root problems are spiritual), our response to SUFFERING, etc. How can we be effective at following and representing Christ in these various areas unless we have an accurate understanding of human nature?

God's original design for humans (Gen. 1:24-2:25)

Humans were created in God's image (1:26,27). Notice that the repetition of “according to its/their kind” in 1:20-25 is abruptly broken with the statement “in Our image” in 1:26. Unlike the rest of the created order, man is created in the image of God himself. Humans are thus qualitatively different from other created beings, somehow mirroring what God is like to the rest of the created order. This is the basis for the Christian belief in the inherent equality and dignity of all men. Gen. 1,2 tells us about four crucial elements of God's original design for humans:

God created humans to be in a personal, dependent and obedient relationship with him. As Creator, God is the foundation of human life. God gave ample proof of his wisdom and goodness through the good gifts that he gave to the first humans. He also personally communed with them on a regular basis so that they knew his love personally (3:8). He called them to trust his character by freely obeying his command, and he explicitly warned them that rebellion against him would bring death—the disintegration of their good lives (2:16,17).

God created humans to be positively self-aware—total openness without shame (2:25). The nakedness of Adam and Eve expressed their true psychological health. They were secure in God’s love, no secrets from God or others, and no shame tormenting their souls—free to be self-forgetful as they focused on God, one another, and the beauty of God’s creation.

God created humans to be in personal relationships with other humans. God revealed himself as “Us” in Gen. 1:26. This is the first of many biblical references to God as a community of Persons who love one another (see Week #1 on the Trinity). Humans, because they are created in God’s image, can flourish only in love relationships with other humans (2:18)—not in isolation, even if that isolation includes relating to God. Human marriage is a special mirroring of God—not because God is sexual, but because in the commitment of heterosexual monogamy, two persons become one in loving union (2:24) and bring forth other persons (1:27,28).

God created humans to have benevolent rulership over nature. Humans are related to God because he made them as spiritual beings—but they are also related to the earth because he made them embodied and placed them in nature (2:7,8). God did not give humans a license to exploit nature; he called humans to be his stewards and cause the earth to flourish under their care (1:26,28; 2:15). Thus, God designed humans to use their intelligence and creativity to work—to sustain their physical lives from nature in ways that also benefitted nature.

It is impossible to read Gen. 1,2 without feeling a sense of longing—that this is what we were made to experience, and that this is largely foreign to our experience. Obviously, something went terribly wrong! Theologians refer to this tragedy as “the Fall.”

The Fall (Gen. 3:1-6)

The Serpent was not simply an especially intelligent snake. He is Satan, one of God’s angels who rebelled against him and seeks to destroy his image-bearers (Rev. 12:9).

Jesus said that Satan is a liar who always speaks lies (Jn. 8:44). Satan’s first lie (3:1) was to suggest that God was excessively restrictive. Next, flatly denied the negative consequences of rebellion against God (3:4). He then stated that choosing moral self-determination (“the knowledge of good and evil”) would actually fulfill and exalt them (3:5). All of these lies were rooted in cynicism about God’s character: “How can you be so stupid as to believe that God’s commands are motivated by love for you? He is out for himself at your expense! See through him and grow up!”

NOTE: The root of Satan’s temptation in our lives is always to incite mistrust of God’s goodness and wisdom. Once we embrace this mistrust, we begin to inordinately desire something in the created order (e.g., a relationship; sexual encounter; people’s approval; etc.)—to the point that we are willing to directly disobey God’s will to get it. Do you try to fight temptation primarily by resisting the action—or do you ask what you want so much that you are willing to disobey God, and what you mistrust about God’s goodness and wisdom?

NOTE: Eve sinned actively by eating the fruit. Adam, who was apparently with her throughout her temptation, sinned passively by not resisting Satan’s lies to Eve. It is also possible that Adam’s active participation in eating the fruit was because of

his inordinate desire to have his wife more than to trust and obey God. In any case, Adam was fully responsible for his part in the first human rebellion.

The effects of the Fall (Gen. 3:7-5:32)

What Satan promised would be a noble rise from slavery to life and freedom was actually a tragic fall to slavery and death. The following narrative describes this death as the undoing of the four crucial elements of God's design for humans.

They had enjoyed personal closeness with God—but now they were alienated from God.

On the one hand, they hid themselves from God (3:8-11) instead of humbly confessing their sin and asking for forgiveness. On the other hand, God expelled them from his presence because of their true moral guilt (3:22-24). This is *theological alienation*, and it can be healed only by God's saving action and our willingness to humbly receive his salvation.

They had been positively self-aware (naked and unashamed)—but they immediately became negatively self-aware (3:8). Their pride resulted in shame—the awareness that something was wrong with them in the very core of their being, and the fear of exposure and disapproval.¹ So they made clothes out of fig-leaves and hid in the bushes in order to hide their true selves from each other and from God. This theme continues as Cain and his descendents live in exile from God and try to forge their own identities (“make a name for themselves”) apart from God (4:17 contrasted to Seth in 4:26). This pride-based shame is at the heart of the *psychological alienation* that has plagued humans ever since.

They had enjoyed wonderful relational closeness with one another—but now they were alienated from one another. Instead of taking responsibility for their sins, they justified themselves by blaming each other and the Serpent (3:12,13). Humans now use their power to dominate and exploit one another (3:16b). This is *sociological alienation*, and it grows in Cain's murder of Abel (4:8) and Lamech's polygamy and intimidation of his wives (contrast Lamech's song in 4:23,24 to Adam's song in 2:23).

They had enjoyed benevolent dominion over nature—but now, because they had become hostile toward God, nature became hostile toward them (3:17-19). Nature would no longer cooperate in their cultivation of it for food, and nature would ultimately overcome humans in death. All human work now involves elements of frustration and tedium. This is *ecological alienation*, and this is the reason for the refrain “and he died” in Gen. 5. This is also the ultimate reason for natural disasters, disease, etc. Nature has been subjected to futility because humans have rebelled, and it will not truly flourish until humans have been fully redeemed by God (Rom. 8:19-22).

¹ “To experience shame is to feel *seen* in a painfully diminished sense. Our eyes turn inward at the moment of shame, and suddenly we've become impaled under the magnifying glass of our own eyes . . . Exposure is what we feel . . . (We) yearn to disappear, to escape all those watching eyes, to find cover. Gershon Kaufman, *Coming Out of Shame* (Main Street Books, 1996), p. 17.

Federal headship

So humans retain God's image, but are now in a deeply broken state. And the Bible teaches all descendants of Adam and Eve reap the consequences of their rebellion. Theologians call this "federal headship." Rom. 5:12-19** teaches this important doctrine.

"Federal headship" means that the choice of the head affects all of his descendants. Adam's choice to rebel against God affected all who descend from him physically, and Jesus' choice to obey God affect all who descend spiritually from him.

ILLUSTRATION: If my great-great-great-grandfather chose to get into a duel before getting married and having children, that choice affected me even though I had was not there and had no choice in the matter. If he lost, I would never be born! Likewise, his choice to immigrate from France to the United States affected some of the most important features of my life (language; environment; etc.).

Romans 5 teaches that Adam's decision to sin had immediate negative effects that subsequently spread to ALL of humanity. Because we all descend from Adam, we reap the consequences of Adam's choice. (Students should know these consequences for the exam.)

- We all inherit physical and spiritual death (5:12 – "death spread;" 5:15a – "the many died;" 5:17a – "death spread through the one").
- We all inherit separation from God (5:18a – "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men"). We are not held guilty for Adam's sinful choice (see Ezek. 18:20,21), but we are born already separated from God – which leads to eventual sin and condemnation.
- We all inherit a sinful nature (5:19a – "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners"). This sinful nature is aversive to God's presence distrustful of his character, and compulsively committed to pride and idolatry (see Mk. 7:20-23).
- See also 1 Cor. 15:21,22; Ps. 51:5; Gen. 8:21; Prov. 22:15 for other biblical passages which teach that human sinfulness is inherited.

OBJECTION: "This is not fair! Why should I have to suffer the consequences of someone else's wrong decision?"

- Free will requires that our choices affect others. It is the nature of reality and an essential aspect of free will that our choices have a real impact on the external world. Removing the impact of our choices essentially curtails our ability to freely make decisions. This includes having a negative impact on others—even if they don't agree with our choice, even if they have no voice in it, even if they haven't been born yet.

ILLUSTRATION: The Chernobyl resulted from a series of flawed human decisions and immediately affected thousands of people. The radioactive fallout will continue to adversely affect the environment and cause birth defects for many years to come. In the same way, Adam's sin affected his offspring. Every one of his descendants inherited the moral "fallout" of his rebellion against God.

- The principle of federal headship can also bring undeserved blessing and joy. Although we complain about having to reap the negative consequences of someone else's wrong choices, we don't mind reaping the positive consequences of someone's wise choices. I have yet to hear of anyone filing a complaint about having to receive a large monetary inheritance! Likewise, people do not complain about inheriting artistic talent, intelligence, athletic ability, physical beauty, etc. Think of those in Washington who would have been killed on Sept 11 if the flight that crashed in Pennsylvania had succeeded in reaching its target. The heroic choices of a few to resist the hijackers on that plane had a positive effect on countless lives in Washington DC.

The greatest example is the undeserved blessing that we inherit from Jesus' obedience. Because he received the condemnation and death that we deserve, we receive the justification and life that he deserved! And though we could not choose our physical descent from Adam, we can (and must) choose our spiritual descent from Jesus (5:17 – “those who *receive* the abundance of grace [through] Jesus Christ”).

Total depravity

"Total depravity" is the term theologians use to summarize the effects of the Fall. Paul describes what this means in Rom. 3:9-20**.

Total depravity does not mean that:

Humans are without value. Though deeply fallen, we still retain vestiges of God's image (Jas. 3:9) and (more importantly) we remain the objects of God's redemptive love (Jn. 3:16). This is why all forms of prejudice (racial; ethnic; gender; cultural; economic; educational; etc.) are wrong.

Humans are as evil as they could be. Fallen humans (including non-Christians) are capable of doing good and noble things.

Total depravity does mean that:

The Fall affects every human being. Notice the “none” and “all” in Rom. 3:9-11.

Every area of our lives has been adversely affected. Paul speaks of our sinful speech and actions which result from corrupted, prideful hearts (Rom. 3:13-18). We are not good people who sometimes do bad things; we are deeply sinful people with corrupted bodies, minds, emotions, will, etc. There is no part of our humanity that does not need to be redeemed by God. Even our good deeds are now tainted with evil motives.

None of us can be accepted by God on the basis of our own righteousness or moral/spiritual effort (Rom. 3:19,20). As sinful beings, God's acceptance must be an undeserved gift (grace).

We would never seek for God without his prior initiative. "No one seeks for God" on their own (Romans 3:11). The fact that we become seekers is the result of God's prior initiative to seek us and convict us of our need for him (Jn. 6:44).

The only answer for total depravity is God's radical grace! We cannot save ourselves; God must save us—and he will save us!

God speaks the first word of his plan of salvation to Adam and Eve in Gen. 3:15. One of Eve's male descendants will sustain a painful wound from Satan, but will crush and defeat him. This promise is the first of many Old Testament predictions of Jesus, God's Messiah who lays down his perfect life so that we may be saved (NEXT WEEK)!

Read Rev. 22:1-5. Notice that the tree of life, from which humans were barred after their rebellion, will be freely available in the new heavens and new earth. Notice the full healing and glorification that will be ours—all because Jesus hung from another tree and took our curse upon himself.