

VOL. 2

REFORMED
SYSTEMATIC
THEOLOGY

Man and Christ

JOEL R. BEEKE
PAUL M. SMALLEY

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“*Reformed Systematic Theology* not only takes readers into the depths of our triune God, but also shows what these great truths have to do with the Christian life. No contemporary systematic theology will bring the reader to a greater understanding of how theology blossoms into doxology than this one.”

Matthew Barrett, Associate Professor of Christian Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Executive Editor, *Credo Magazine*

“*Reformed Systematic Theology* is the ripe fruit of Joel Beeke’s lifelong engagement as a preacher and as a teacher of preachers. This is not a systematic theology written by an ivory-tower theologian, but rather by a seasoned preacher for whom the doctrines he expounds have become, by the grace of God, an experiential reality.”

Bartel Elshout, Pastor, Heritage Reformed Congregation, Hull, Iowa; translator, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* and *The Christian’s Only Comfort in Life and Death*

“Beeke and Smalley have written a work useful to the church at large that teaches Christians what they should believe and how they should love, but they have not sacrificed academic rigor to achieve these goals.”

J. V. Fesko, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

“Joel Beeke has continued his decades-long service to Christ and his church by presenting us with his mature reflections on the nature of systematic theology. This work is fully reliable, well written, easily understood, and thoroughly researched.”

Richard C. Gamble, Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

“Joel Beeke is a rare gift to the church, a noted Christian leader who combines the skills of a learned theologian, master teacher, noted historian, and yet also a caring pastor. *Reformed Systematic Theology* is a virtual gold mine of biblical doctrine that is systematically arranged, carefully analyzed, historically scrutinized, and pastorally applied.”

Steven J. Lawson, President, OnePassion Ministries; Professor of Preaching, The Master’s Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“‘Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!’ This expression of praise from Paul’s great doxology is a fitting response to reading this wonderful work of doctrine and devotion. Though the Reformed faith is often caricatured as merely intellectual, this work demonstrates that Reformed theology is also profoundly experiential, as no chapter fails to move from theology to doxology.”

John MacArthur, Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California; Chancellor Emeritus, The Master’s University and Seminary

“Here is theology functioning as it ought to function—calling us to worship. You will not need to agree with the authors at every point to believe and to hope that this work will serve Christ’s church well in our generation and for generations to come.”

Jeremy Walker, Pastor, Maidenbower Baptist Church, Crawley, UK

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**Volume 2:
Man and Christ**

Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley

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For
**Stephen Myers, Adriaan Neele,
Greg Salazar, and Daniel Timmer**
treasured brothers, colleagues, and friends,
professors in the PhD program at Puritan
Reformed Theological Seminary,
who live out the motto:
“The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses,
the same commit thou to faithful men,
who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).
—Joel R. Beeke

And for
Tom Nettles and John Woodbridge
two seminary professors who taught me to love Christian history
and to read the great books of Christ-exalting
theologians from centuries past;
and
John Owen (1616–1683)
the first Puritan theologian whose writings I read,
herald of the glory of Christ, our Prophet, Priest, and King.
“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet
of him that bringeth good tidings,
that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings
of good, that publisheth salvation;
that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isa. 52:7).
—Paul M. Smalley

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Abbreviations

ACCS/OT	<i>Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament.</i> Edited by Thomas Oden. 15 vols. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001–2005.
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers.</i> Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Revised by A. Cleveland Coxe. 9 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918.
LW	<i>Luther's Works.</i> Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan et al. 79 vols. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958–2016.
NIDNTTE	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis.</i> Edited by Moisés Silva. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
NIDOTTE	<i>The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.</i> Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
NPNF ¹	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series.</i> Edited by Philip Schaff. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1888.

- NPNF² *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 14 vols. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1894.
- The Psalter* *The Psalter, with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*. Preface by Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning. 1965; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans for Reformation Heritage Books, 2003.
- RCS/OT *Reformation Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament*. Edited by Timothy George. 15 vols. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012–.
- Reformed Confessions* *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*. Compiled by James T. Denison Jr. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014.
- RST Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley. *Reformed Systematic Theology*. 4 vols. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019–.
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964.
- The Three Forms of Unity* *The Three Forms of Unity*. Introduction by Joel R. Beeke. Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2010.
- Trinity Hymnal—Baptist Edition* *Trinity Hymnal—Baptist Edition*. Revised by David Merck. Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1995.
- WJE *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 26 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–2008.

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Preface to Volume 2

Jesus Christ came so that people would know the truth (John 8:31–32; 18:37). As the cross loomed on the horizon, our Lord Jesus prayed to his Father, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,” and interceded for the people whom the Father had given him, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (17:3, 17). Christ brought us truth—life-giving, holiness-producing knowledge of God. Through this true word, God applies to our lives Christ’s saving work on the cross.

The work of a systematic theologian is to gather the truth from the Holy Scriptures and present it in a way that, by the Holy Spirit’s power, both illuminates the mind and ignites the heart to direct the whole life to the glory of God. The publication of this second volume marks the halfway point in our attempt to produce a systematic theology that is biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and practical. Here we address the topics of creation, human nature, sin, God’s covenants, and the person and work of Christ.

We are profoundly grateful to the Lord for his blessing on this project. We never could have produced this systematic theology without the help of other men and women who are instruments in the Lord’s hands. We are indebted to the many pastors and theologians (past and present) whose teachings have nourished our souls over the years. We thank Justin Taylor for his support of the project, Greg Bailey for his skillful editing of the manuscript, and the rest of the staff at Crossway for their assistance in publishing and promoting this set of books. Our writing has often been clarified by the editorial suggestions of Ray Lanning and Scott Lang. We also want to thank the following theologians for suggesting refinements of portions of the book: Robert Oliver, Steve Wellum, and Stephen Myers. And we are greatly indebted to the love and prayers of our dear wives,

Mary Beeke and Dawn Smalley, both of whom are women who put Christian theology into practice.

Most of all, we thank the triune God for the Mediator. Writing about the person and work of Jesus Christ has impressed upon us afresh that God dwells in unapproachable light, and our attempt to describe Christ's glory is but the stammering of children. *Soli Deo gloria!*

Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley

PART 3

**ANTHROPOLOGY:
THE DOCTRINE OF MAN**

Analytical Outline: Anthropology

- I. Introduction to Anthropology
 - A. What Is Theological Anthropology?
 - B. Why Study Anthropology?
 1. Its Importance in the Bible
 2. Its Integral Relation to Other Doctrines
 3. Its Value to Other Academic Disciplines
 4. Its Implications for Contemporary Existential Crises
 5. Its Impact upon Practical Ministry
 - C. How Does the World Approach Anthropology?
 1. Man Defined by Philosophical Idealism
 2. Man Defined by Physical Biology
 3. Man Defined by Sexual Desires
 4. Man Defined by Material Wealth
 5. Man Defined by Individual Freedom
 6. Man Defined by Social Relationships
 7. Man Defined by Emotional Health
 8. Man Undefined by Existential Absurdity
 - D. How Does the Bible Approach Anthropology?
 1. The State of Original Innocence
 2. The State of Fallen Nature
 3. The State of Grace
 4. The State of Glory

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- II. The Creation of the World
 - A. False Theories of Origins
 1. Polytheism
 2. Pantheism

3. Panentheism
4. Materialism
- B. God's Work of Creation
 1. The Uniqueness of the Work of Creation
 2. The Universality of the Work of Creation
- C. Creation and the Glory of God
 1. The Uniqueness of the Creator
 2. The Trinity of the Creator
 3. The Power of the Creator
 4. The Authority of the Creator
 5. The Wisdom of the Creator
 6. The Goodness of the Creator
 7. Knowing and Celebrating the Glory of the Creator
- D. Questions about the Doctrine of Creation
 1. Is Genesis 1 a Myth?
 2. Is Genesis 1–2 Historical Narrative?
 - a. Historical Narrative versus Poetry
 - b. Genealogies
 - c. Christ
 3. Did God Create *ex Nihilo*?
 - a. Genesis 1:1
 - b. God Created Everything
 - c. Hebrews 11:3
 - d. Colossians 1:16
 - e. Romans 4:17
 - f. Biblical View of God
 4. How Should We Interpret the Six Days of Creation?
 - a. Augustine: Instantaneous Creation, Allegorical Days, Young Earth
 - b. The Gap View: Long Ages in Genesis 1:1–2
 - c. The Day-Age View: Six Days as a Sequence of Six Long Ages
 - d. The Framework View: Six Days as Structured Metaphor
 - e. The Calendar Day View: Six Literal Days in Chronological Sequence
 5. Does Science Prove That the World Is Billions of Years Old?
 6. Is the Bible Compatible with Neo-Darwinian Evolution?
 - a. Rational and Empirical Problems with Evolution

- b. Evolution and Biblical Truth
 - i. Creation in Six Days
 - ii. Creation by Supernatural Divine Fiat
 - iii. Creation of Each “according to Its Kind”
 - iv. The Order of Creation Days
 - v. Animal Suffering and Death before the Fall
 - vi. Genesis 2:7
 - vii. Genesis 2:21–23
- 7. Was the Flood Global or Local?
 - a. Total Destruction
 - b. Making Sense of the Text
 - c. A Geological Disturbance
 - d. Ancient Flood Stories
 - e. The Authority of God’s Word
 - f. The Theological Message
 - g. The Trustworthiness of God’s Covenants

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 - 1. The Climax of the Creation Account
 - 2. The Counsel of God
 - 3. The Image of God (Introduction)
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 - 5. The Consecration of Worship
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 - 2. The Lord of Our Life: God’s Supernatural Creation of Man
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4. Serpents Do Not Talk
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- C. Adam and Biblical Authority
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 3. The Danger of Shrinking God's Word to Human Experience
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 - b. Images for God's Worship
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 - b. A Mental Image
 - c. A Mental Image versus a Moral Likeness
 - d. A Moral Image
 2. Functional Perspectives on God's Image
 - a. A Royal Image
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 - C. Systematic and Practical Theology
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2. A Holistic Reformed Theology of God's Image
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 - B. Basic Biblical Teaching on Gender
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 1. Old Testament Teaching on Homosexuality
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 3. The Modern Concept of Sexual Orientation
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 1. Biblical Terminology for Aspects of the Human Constitution
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 - b. Soul (Hebrew *nephesh*; Greek *psychē*)

- c. Spirit (Hebrew *ruakh*; Greek *pneuma*)
 - d. Heart (Hebrew *leb* or *lebab*; Greek *kardia*)
 - e. Reins/Kidneys (Hebrew *kilyah*; Greek *nephros*)
 - f. Mind (Greek *nous*; cf. Hebrew *leb* or *lebab*)
 - g. Flesh (Hebrew *bashar*; Greek *sarx*)
 - h. Bone (Hebrew *'etsem*; Greek *osteon*)
 - i. Body (Greek *sōma*; cf. Hebrew *bashar*)
2. The Functional Unity of the Human Person
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- B. The Essential and Common Elements of Covenants
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Introduction to Anthropology

It was part of Christ's wisdom that "he knew what was in man" (John 2:25). This knowledge enabled our Lord Jesus to deal skillfully with people ranging from Pharisees to prostitutes. Christ understood people. As the light of the world, he both revealed himself to us and revealed us to ourselves (John 3:19; cf. 15:22). Our Lord Jesus not only said many "I am" statements, but also made some very pointed "Ye are" statements.¹

A true anthropology is foundational for right and wise ethical decisions. Much of the confusion of our age arises from false anthropologies. Stephen Wellum frames the matter provocatively: "Are we creatures of dignity because we are created in God's image? Or are we merely animals, by-products of an impersonal evolutionary process, things that can be, technologically speaking, manipulated and re-fashioned for whatever ends we deem best?"²

Of course, man is not the greatest subject for our minds to contemplate. There is a reason why the first of the loci considered in theology is the doctrine of God (theology proper). However, the Bible does reflect back to us an image of ourselves, just as a mirror reflects the face of a man so that he can see himself and make appropriate changes (James 1:23–24). This is the function of anthropology: to use the Word of God as a mirror in which to see what we are, so that, by grace, we may become what we should be.

1. Matt. 10:31; Luke 16:15; John 8:23, 44, 47; 10:26.

2. Stephen J. Wellum, "Editorial: The Urgent Need for a Theological Anthropology Today," *Southern Baptist Theological Journal* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 2 (full article, 2–3).

What Is Theological Anthropology?

“What is man?” So asks more than one biblical writer. It is a question that has stirred the hearts of men, women, and children since the earliest days. Who am I? What are we, and why are we here? Human beings are unique among the creatures that walk upon this earth in their self-consciousness and reflection upon the meaning of their identity. The ancient philosophers considered it to be a maxim of wisdom, “Know thyself.”³

There are many legitimate ways to study human life. For example, a medical doctor studies the anatomy of the human body in order to understand its functioning and remedy its illnesses. An athletic trainer might study the performance of people in a sport in order to help his clients play as well as possible. Likewise, we might study the behavior of groups of people in relationship to each other as an exercise in sociology and political science.

When the biblical writers ask, “What is man?” it is notable that they address the question to God. Job said in his pain, “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? And that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?” (Job 7:17). David gazed up at the stars in wonder and exclaimed, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4; cf. 144:3). In the biblical perspective, the question of man’s identity cannot be separated from God and our relationship with him. John Calvin (1509–1564) said, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.”⁴

The theological discipline of anthropology seeks to address this question: What is man, especially in relation to God? The term *anthropology* derives from a combination of the Greek word for “man” or “human being” (*anthrōpos*) and the term for “speech,” “thought,” or “word” (*logos*). Theology, in general, is the knowledge and wisdom derived from meditating upon and obeying the word of God.⁵ There-

3. This was one of the maxims inscribed at Delphi and often quoted by Greek philosophers. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1918), 10.24.1, Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Paus.+10.24&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0160>.

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.1.1.

5. For a study in what theology is and how it is rightly done, see *RST*, 1:39–173 (chaps. 1–9).

fore, theological anthropology is the submissive study of God's Word to learn about ourselves.

Why Study Anthropology?

Theology is both an academic discipline and a spiritual discipline. For this reason, it demands much of us. It is worthwhile, therefore, to start our study of anthropology by asking why this labor deserves our time and trouble. Why should we study the doctrine of man?⁶

Its Importance in the Bible

The Lord devotes much of the Bible to teaching us about who and what we are. Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) wrote “that man occupies a place of central importance in Scripture and that the knowledge of man in relation to God is essential to its proper understanding,” for “man is not only the crown of creation, but also the object of God's special care.”⁷

Since it is good to study the works of God (Pss. 92:4–5; 111:2), much more we should consider the climax of God's creative work, which is the creation of man (8:4), whom he has placed over all his other works (v. 6). Such a study enables us to adoringly exclaim, “O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (vv. 1, 9). Calvin said about the study of man, “Among all God's works here is the noblest and most remarkable example of his justice, wisdom, and goodness.”⁸

God's Word models for us a healthy attention to anthropology. Large tracts of the Scriptures consist of historical narratives and personal vignettes that expose us to the character of men and nations. Entire books, such as Ruth and Esther, describe no miracles and contain no prophetic revelations (though the secret providence of God looms in the background), but report only the faithful actions of godly people, whether peasant or queen. Proverbs focuses largely upon human life in God's world, offering pithy sayings that illuminate human nature and identify different kinds of people. The Bible also contains major doctrinal statements about man, such as “And God said, Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26) and “You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

6. We are indebted for several thoughts in this chapter to Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 424–35.

7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958), 181.

8. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.1.

We need self-knowledge for our salvation. Consider the epistle to the Romans, perhaps the preeminent exposition of the gospel in the Holy Scriptures. It is full of teaching about the work of Jesus Christ, how God applies that work by the Spirit and faith, and what response we should offer in thankful love. However, most of the first three chapters of Romans consist of the dark truths about human sin and its consequences. Evidently, anthropology is a crucial part of the gospel. We should appreciate its place in the Bible and study it carefully.

Its Integral Relation to Other Doctrines

Much of systematic theology consists of linking particular biblical truths so that we develop a biblical system of thought. Anthropology is part of this web of knowledge. It sheds light on the doctrine of God, for man was created in God's image (Gen. 1:26). Understanding humanity helps us to understand the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, for God's Son became "like unto his brethren" in all things human except sin (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). What God originally made us to be points ahead to what we will become if we are united to Christ, for the new creation will be like paradise—only better, because of the Lamb of God (Rev. 22:1–5).

Our origin as God's creation reinforces our moral obligation to obey his commandments. Anthropology, therefore, lays a foundation upon which we build our ethics. What is right or wrong in our treatment of others largely depends on who they are. Murder, adultery, theft, lying—these violations of the Ten Commandments are sins because of the nature of those against whom we commit them. The same is true of ethical questions regarding genetic engineering, cloning, abortion, euthanasia, racism, and economic oppression.

The doctrine of anthropology interfaces with every major teaching of the Christian faith. Right views of anthropology significantly strengthen our overall system of belief. Wrong views of anthropology unravel that system of belief and can undermine the very gospel of salvation.

Its Value to Other Academic Disciplines

Anthropology touches on the earthiest of topics in theology, so it overlaps to some degree with academic disciplines outside of the field of theology, such as biology, psychology, and sociology. In medicine, scientists are increasingly recognizing the close relationship between a healthy mind and a

healthy body—and good mental health arises from functioning according to our human nature as God created us to be.

Anthropology answers pressing questions about the roots of human malice and suffering, and enables us to form a practical worldview by which we can live wisely in this world. It guards us from treating people like mere animals or trash. Calvin quoted Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153): “How can he upon whom God has set his heart be nothing?”⁹ Yet anthropology also protects us from naively viewing human beings like angels on earth—despite how cute babies may be or how righteous we may seem in our own eyes. Calvin said, “We always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness. . . . We are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured.”¹⁰ A biblical view of man will make us not only better Christians, but also better parents and children, better friends, better neighbors, better citizens, and better employees and employers.

The doctrine of man touches a matter of vital concern for all people, because it is about each one of us. Millard Erickson writes, “The doctrine of humanity is one point where it is possible to get a toehold in the mind of the modern secular person.”¹¹ Whether we are preaching or in a personal conversation with an unbeliever, anthropology provides ways to approach people through matters that they value highly, and then to lead them to God to find answers that an unbelieving worldview cannot provide.

Its Implications for Contemporary Existential Crises

As the nations in Europe and North America reap the bitter fruit of rejecting their Christian heritage, we see a disintegration of human culture all around us, whether we consider public morality, education, crime and safety, or media and the arts. This disintegration produces considerable anxiety and sometimes despair. Cultural forces erode our sense of personal identity and dissolve relationships into superficiality. Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) said, “The growing supremacy of technology; the growth of

9. Quoted in Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.25.

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

11. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 427.

bureaucracy; the increase of mass-production methods; and the growing impact of mass media . . . tend to depersonalize humanity.”¹²

Profound and searching questions disturb those not lulled to sleep by pleasure, leisure, and entertainment, such as:

- Who am I? What are my roots? Do I belong to something bigger than myself?
- Why is my life so painful and confusing?
- What does it mean to be human? How are we different from animals?
- How can I know what is right and wrong? Are all things merely relative?
- Why are we in the mess that we are in?
- Why is it that despite our remarkable technology and information systems, we cannot solve basic problems such as social justice and world peace?
- Why do people who are not so different from us commit atrocities such as genocide, terrorism, human trafficking, and ethnic oppression?
- Where is our world going? Do I have any cause for hope?

The Bible offers us a perspective on human life that answers such questions in a manner that is *realistic* (so that we can deal wisely with ourselves and other people), *idealistic* (so that we can aim for high and worthy goals), and *optimistic* (so that we can keep striving for what is good and right with a solid hope of making a difference).

Its Impact upon Practical Ministry

Pastors need to understand and believe what the Bible teaches them about the people whom they serve. Shepherds must know their sheep (Prov. 27:23). While this requires personal relationships as pastors watch over the souls entrusted to them (Heb. 13:17), it also requires a deep knowledge of God’s Word, which is sufficient to equip God’s servants for their work (2 Tim. 3:17).

As Erickson points out, an imbalanced view of human nature can distort the way we do ministry.¹³ If we view people as mere minds, we

12. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 2.

13. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 429.

will focus on intellectual ministry and expect teaching in itself to change them. If we believe that people are driven by emotions, then we will seek to motivate them by counseling them through past experiences and creating new emotional experiences. If we reduce people to their relationships, then our ministry might minimize doctrine and maximize fellowship. If we overspiritualize our understanding of people, we will treat physical problems as moral failures. We need a biblically balanced perspective on man in order to exercise a wise, balanced, holistic ministry.

Anthropology benefits all Christians in ministry. The Word of God reveals much about human nature that guides us in how to relate to other people. How can we serve people in Christ's name if we do not know who they are or what their deepest needs and problems are? Let us never forget that when we serve mankind, we care for "the masterpiece of the lower creation," as Thomas Boston (1676–1732) said.¹⁴

How Does the World Approach Anthropology?

The only thing more dangerous than the church being in the world is the world being in the church. Christians must resist the efforts of this wicked world to conform us to its mindset (Rom. 12:2). Therefore, before beginning our study of what the Bible teaches about mankind, we will review how people in this world commonly define man so that we can examine ourselves for how worldliness may have infiltrated our minds.

1. *Man defined by philosophical idealism.* In this perspective, the most real thing about human beings is their mind or spirit. The fleshly body is demeaned and viewed at best as a shell around the person and at worst as an evil to be escaped. Hoekema wrote, "We find this view in ancient Greek philosophy; according to Plato [427–347 BC], for example, what is real about man is his or her intellect or reason, which is actually a spark of the divine within the person that continues to exist after the body dies."¹⁵ Idealism may result in an unhealthy emphasis upon the intellect, ascetic mistreatment of the body, or careless indulgence of physical desires. Though not as common in our present materialistic society, this elevation of spirit and degradation of body persists in some groups today and can infect the church. Paul writes that the Holy Spirit foretold the apostasy of people

14. Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston, Ettrick*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (1853; repr., Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker, 2002), 1:177.

15. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 2.

into demonic doctrines: “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3; cf. Col. 2:20–23).

2. *Man defined by physical biology.* Naturalism, with its denial of the invisible world, reduces all things to their scientifically measurable, physical being. Human beings, then, consist entirely of the material and processes of their physical bodies, and their minds are but the electrochemical interchanges of their brains. This belief has the practical implication that our problems are all rooted in biology and solved by physical mechanics and chemistry. In a culture dominated by the theory of evolution, it is common for people to view human beings as just highly developed animals or, in the case of some radical environmentalists, the worst of all animals. Man is no more, in the words of Desmond Morris, than “the naked ape.”¹⁶ Those who treat human life on a merely biological level nurture their bodies but neglect their souls. Christ warned, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

3. *Man defined by sexual desires.* This form of naturalism, developed especially by psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), asserts that inner psychological conflict generally arises out of the frustration of one’s desires for sexual satisfaction.¹⁷ If man is essentially an evolved animal, then, it is claimed, his primary drive is the libido or energy that strives for survival and sexual fulfillment. As Erickson notes, this theory is adopted in its crudest form by prostitution and the pornography industry, which treat people as animals that exist only to give and receive sexual pleasure.¹⁸ In popular media, lack of sexual fulfillment is often portrayed as the most pitiful of all conditions. In more recent times, people have also defined themselves by their perceived “sexual orientation,” so that any criticism of their sexual practices is seen as an act of violence against their very persons. This definition of man is used to justify living to gratify “the lust of the flesh” (1 John 2:16).

4. *Man defined by material wealth.* No one can deny that food, clothing, and other necessities are essential to life or that the desire for money and possessions strongly motivates people (cf. Matt. 6:24–26). However, in

16. Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist’s Study of the Human Animal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

17. Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. G. Stanley Hall (New York: Horace Liveright, 1920), 259–60, 267–68.

18. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 431.

this perspective, men are explicitly or implicitly defined by what they own. People often measure one another by their possessions or by their usefulness for increasing their own wealth—the kind of attitude rebuked by the apostle James (James 2:1–5). This is the theoretical perspective of Marxism, which interprets history according to economic factors and the struggle for wealth, though it also may be the practical perspective of capitalism. The Lord Jesus warned, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Only God can be that portion that satisfies us in life and in death (Ps. 73:24–28). Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) said, “The more money is increased, the more the love of money is increased; and the more the love of money is increased, the more the soul is unsatisfied. ’Tis only an infinite God, and an infinite good that can fill and satisfy the precious and immortal soul of man.”¹⁹

5. *Man defined by individual freedom.* The Reformers sought to restore the freedom of the Christian from bondage to man’s religious laws and doctrines. Later, the Puritans and various other movements struggled for freedom against what they perceived as political tyranny. However, in modern culture, *freedom* has been redefined as the liberty of the individual to do whatever he pleases without constraint, restraint, or rebuke, so long as it does not harm others. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) said, “Obedience to a self-prescribed law is liberty.”²⁰ Oppression, then, is the imposition of a standard that we did not choose for ourselves. William Ernest Henley (1849–1903) boldly captured the spirit of this assertion in his poem “Invictus”:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul. . . .

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,

19. Thomas Brooks, *London’s Lamentations: or, a Serious Discourse Concerning that Late Fiery Dispensation that Turned Our (Once Renowned) City into a Ruinous Heap* (London: for John Hancock and Nathaniel Ponder, 1670), 194; cf. *The Works of Thomas Brooks* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 6:259.

20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, trans. H. J. Tozer, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature (Ware, Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth, 1998), 1.8 (20). Rousseau recognized that ideal liberty may be limited by the necessities of living in society.

I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.²¹

Relativism and postmodernism take this principle to its logical end, asserting that each person has the right to construct his own reality, and that teaching absolute truth and morality is a form of hatred. In fact, teaching absolute truth and morality is an act of love (1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:15).

6. *Man defined by social relationships.* In this view, man is less like individual birds than like a flock, whether geese flying in V formation or starlings swirling as one cloud. Family dynamics and social structures determine who we are and how we act. We find this idea illustrated in an extreme and speculative form in the Foundation series of books by science fiction author Isaac Asimov (1920–1992), who postulated a world where scientists could predict future history by a mathematical model of the behavior of large groups of people.²² The Scriptures recognize that relationships affect behavior (Prov. 22:24; 1 Cor. 15:33), but emphasize individual responsibility before God (2 Cor. 5:10).

7. *Man defined by emotional health.* In our present culture, which is pervasively influenced by therapeutic psychology, people commonly believe that “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.”²³ This mindset appears in the lines sung by Whitney Houston (1963–2012): “Learning to love yourself—it is the greatest love of all.”²⁴ People with this mindset search for jobs and relationships that provide emotional satisfaction and believe that the most important principle for life is to accept themselves and follow their hearts. The Christian worldview acknowledges the central place of joy in life (Neh. 8:10), but it subordinates immediate personal satisfaction to repentance from sin, self-denial, and sacrificial service for the sake of loving God and others in hope of ultimate life and joy in God’s glory (Luke 9:23–26).

8. *Man undefined by existential absurdity.* Some people view human life with profound agnosticism and even cynicism. They regard life as mean-

21. William Ernest Henley, “Invictus,” *Modern British Poetry*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (1920), <http://www.bartleby.com/103/7.html>.

22. Isaac Asimov, *The Foundation Trilogy: Three Classics of Science Fiction* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951–1953). Asimov was an atheistic humanist raised in Judaism.

23. Christian Smith with Melina Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163.

24. Whitney Houston, “The Greatest Love of All,” lyrics by Linda Creed, music by Michael Masser, *Whitney Houston* (Arista Records, February 14, 1985).

ingless and purposeless (nihilism). In the words of William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *Macbeth*:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.²⁵

Atheistic existentialism embraces this nihilistic perspective and irrationally calls people to forge their own meaning by being authentic to themselves. However, man is too small and transient to act as his own creator; he must find his reference point in the Lord who created all things for his pleasure and works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11; Rev. 4:11).

In each of the above definitions, a real component of human life has been elevated to a position it cannot sustain. Even existentialism reflects man's sense of mystery and alienation in a fallen world. This explains why each definition resonates with us to some extent, and yet ultimately fails to explain who we are. Hoekema observed, "One way of evaluating these views would be to say that they are one-sided; that is, they emphasize one aspect of the human being at the expense of others." However, he perceptively noted the deeper problem: "Since each of these above-named views of man considers one aspect of the human being to be ultimate, apart from any dependence on or responsibility to God the Creator, each of these anthropologies is guilty of idolatry: of worshiping an aspect of creation in the place of God."²⁶

How Does the Bible Approach Anthropology?

The Word of God has a well-developed anthropology. We might summarize the Bible's approach to the question "What is man?" with the terms *theological* and *redemptive-historical*. It is *theological* anthropology because it understands man in a manner inseparable from his relationship with God. Man's purpose is inextricably bound up in the God who created him. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states it beautifully in its first question and answer: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36), and to enjoy him for ever (Ps. 73:25–28)."²⁷

25. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 5, scene 5.

26. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 4.

27. *Reformed Confessions*, 4:353.

Samuel Willard (1640–1707) explained that though we cannot add to God’s essential glory, “to glorify God is to shew forth his glory, to declare him to be most glorious.” We glorify God by thinking rightly of him and having hearts of adoration, fear, and trust toward him, with submission under his commands and quietness under his providence.²⁸

The Bible’s anthropology is also *redemptive-historical* because it considers man’s condition according to the stages of human existence from creation and the fall to redemption and the new creation. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) contrasted the first stage with the last by saying that in paradise man was able to sin or not to sin against God, but in glory man will not be able to sin.²⁹ Augustine posited four stages for man’s condition after the fall: (1) “before the law,” when the sinner lives contentedly in wickedness; (2) “under the law,” when the sinner is agitated by the law, but only to greater guilt and sin; (3) “under grace,” when God gives faith and love so that the person fights against lust and grows in holiness; and (4) “full and perfect peace,”³⁰ which is glory itself.

Later, theologians reformulated this scheme, following the redemptive-historical pattern of creation, fall, redemption, and completion. Medieval theologians consolidated the first and second of Augustine’s steps, “before the law” and “under the law,” into the one spiritual state of sin and included man’s state before the fall in their schema. The result, presented in the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (c. 1096–1160)³¹ and found in the writings of Reformed theologians such as Johannes Wollebius (1586–1629) and Francis Turretin (1623–1687), was the doctrine of human nature in its fourfold state.³² Its most famous exposition may well have been by Boston.³³ In brief, these states are:

1. *The state of original innocence.* God created man in his image, which made man the pinnacle and ruler of a world that was very good (Gen.

28. Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity in Two Hundred and Fifty Expository Lectures on the Assembly’s Shorter Catechism* (Boston: by B. Green and S. Kneeland for B. Eliot and D. Henschman, 1726), 5–6.

29. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 105, in *NPNF*¹, 3:271. See also Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, chap. 33, in *NPNF*¹, 5:485; and *The City of God*, 22.30, in *NPNF*¹, 2:510.

30. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 118, in *NPNF*¹, 3:275. We note here the importance of legal conviction in Augustinian theology, a theme taken up in Lutheran and Reformed theology.

31. Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, trans. Giulio Silano, 4 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institutes of Mediaeval Studies, 2007–2010), 2.25.5–6 (2:118).

32. Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 1.8.xii, in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee III, A Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 65. Henceforth cited as Wollebius, *Compendium*, 1.8.xii (65). See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–1997), 8.1.9 (1:571).

33. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964).

1:26, 31). In this state, man was free to do the good that pleased God and had the ability to not sin (Latin *posse non peccare*). However, he was also able to sin (*posse peccare*) against God.

2. *The state of fallen nature.* After Adam's sin, man's heart continuously generates moral evil and nothing but moral evil in all its motions (Gen. 6:5). Consequently, "there is none that doeth good" (Ps. 14:1). Fallen mankind, apart from Christ, does not have the ability to do anything pleasing to God, and so is unable to not sin (*non posse non peccare*).

3. *The state of grace.* Those sinners united to Christ by a Spirit-worked faith have been saved from the ruling power of sin (Romans 6), but not its presence in their souls (Rom. 7:14–25). Consequently, they are able to not sin (*posse non peccare*) and free to do good, but not perfectly.

4. *The state of glory.* When Christ comes and brings his people into his glory, they will be like him and see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Their complete salvation and perfect communion with him will make them unable to sin (*non posse peccare*).

We will refer to all four states, but our focus will be on the states of original innocence and fallen nature, for they are the burden of anthropology.³⁴ Calvin said, "This knowledge of ourselves is twofold: namely, to know what we were like when we were first created and what our condition became after the fall of Adam."³⁵

Let us then proceed with our study of anthropology for the glory of God. Too often we have thought of ourselves without thinking of God. David Dickson (c. 1583–1662) said, "Oh, how great is our atheism! The Lord rub it off! Let us meditate on our making, that we may fall in love with our Maker."³⁶ Before you read any further, stop and pray for God to show himself to you as you learn more about yourself and your fellow human beings, and to cause you to love your Maker.

Sing to the Lord

God's Teaching and Guidance for Those Who Trust Him

To Thee I lift my soul,
In Thee my trust repose;

34. The state of grace is the subject of soteriology, and the state of glory, eschatology.

35. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.1; cf. 2.1.1.

36. David Dickson, *Exposition of the Tenth Chapter of Job*, in *Select Practical Writings of David Dickson* (Edinburgh: The Committee of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland for the Publication of the Works of Scottish Reformers and Divines, 1845), 1:37.

My God, O put me not to shame
Before triumphant foes.

None shall be put to shame
That humbly wait for Thee,
But those that willfully transgress,
On them the shame shall be.

Show me Thy paths, O Lord,
Teach me Thy perfect way,
O guide me in Thy truth divine,
And lead me day by day.

For Thou art God that dost
To me salvation send,
And patiently through all the day
Upon Thee I attend.

Recall Thy mercies, Lord,
Their tenderness untold,
And all Thy lovingkindnesses,
For they have been of old.

Psalm 25

Tune: Dennis

The Psalter, No. 60

Questions for Meditation or Discussion

1. What is theological anthropology?
2. What are several reasons why we should study theological anthropology?
3. How can an understanding of theological anthropology help us to minister to people?
4. What are some ways the world defines us merely by physical things?
5. Of these, what is one that you personally have embraced or encountered? How does that way of looking at people affect one's life?
6. What are some other (nonphysical) ways that the world tends to define us?
7. Choose one of the ways listed in your answer to question 6 and explain how it might shape a nation's culture if accepted by many people.

8. What is the fourfold state of man? What is the relation of each state to sin?
9. In which state would you consider yourself to be? Why?

Questions for Deeper Reflection

10. What does it mean that biblical anthropology is (1) theological and (2) redemptive-historical? Why is it important?
11. With regard to the four states of man, what harm might it do if we viewed and treated
 - a person in the second state as if he were in the first?
 - a person in the second state as if he were in the third?
 - a person in the third state as if he were in the second?
 - a person in the third state as if he were in the fourth?

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THEOLOGY

