THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Belief Topic: Humanity and Sin Spring 2024

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. This session focuses upon the doctrines of humanity and sin.

What is the Big Idea?

Theological anthropology, or the doctrine of humanity, is arguably the defining theological issue of our era. According to the Scriptures, God himself created the first human beings as a special act that marked the culmination of all His creative work. Humans alone were created in the image of God and given responsibility to serve as God's vice-regents over His other creatures. These first humans, and all their descendants, were also given a specific nature that included their being **embodied** and **gendered** beings.

Though the pinnacle of God's creation, the sin of the first humans not only negatively *affected* them, but it also *infected* all their naturally biological descendants. Apart from God's intervention, all humans are without spiritual hope because of the corrupting and ultimately condemning effects of sin. Furthermore, God's good creation is no longer in its original state of perfection but is now a distorted version of the original.

What do the Scriptures Say?

The most important passage for understanding God's creation of humanity is Genesis 1:26–31. This passage provides a number of details about God's creation of humanity. These themes found in Genesis 1:26–31 are echoed throughout the rest of the Scriptures in passages such as Gen 2:24; 5:1; 9:2, 6; Psa 8:4–8; James 3:7–9.

- God created humans in the same way He created all other things—through the means of His spoken words
- 2. God created humans in His own image—this is not true of any other creatures



- 3. Humans are gendered beings who perpetuate the human race through sexual intercourse
- 4. God commanded the first humans to exercise dominion over the other creatures (the cultural commission)
- 5. Humanity represents the culmination of God's creation—it was only after the creation of the first humans than God pronounced all He had made to be "very good"

Of all God's creatures, humans alone are embodied, meaning they have an immaterial soul or spirit in addition to their material bodies. These terms represent the "general life principle" of each person, though *soul* often refers to who we are as individuals and *spirit* often refers to who we are spiritually as we relate to God. (Gen 2:7; Deut 6:6; Matt 22:37; Rom 8:16; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12)

God made a covenant with Adam in the Garden. If Adam was obedient to all God's commands, including the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then he would live forever in covenant relationship with God. Eternal life was symbolized by the tree of life. (Gen 2:9, 15–17; 3:22–24; Rev. 22:1–2, 14)

The first human sin occurred when a diabolical serpent tempted Eve into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve, in turn, persuaded Adam to also eat from the forbidden tree. (Gen 3:1–7; Hos 6:7; 1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14)

The consequences of this original sin include covenantal/relational separation from God, relational separation from each other, a fallen physical world, and spiritual death. This is discussed at great length in Genesis 3:8–24. (Rom 6:23; 8:22)

Because Adam was a covenantal representative of the whole human race, every human has inherited the guilt/consequences of his sin. As soon as we are capable, we become actual sinners. (Psa 14:3; 51:5; Rom 3:23; 5:12, 18–19)

Because humans are captive to sin, we cannot do anything in and of ourselves that is perfectly good. Every part of our lives is tainted by sin. We cannot even restore our covenantal relationship with God without his divine aid. (Isa 64:6–7; Rom 7:18; 8:7–8) The soul or spirit of a person continues to exist after physical death, though those who are damned are considered spiritually dead or destroyed despite their ongoing existence in hell. At the end of time, the bodies and souls of all the dead will be reunited and we will once again be embodied beings. (Gen 35:18; Psa 30:3; Matt 10:28; Mark 8:36; John 5:28–30; James 5:19–20; Rev 6:9; 20:5–7)

What Has the Church Said?

A significant current debate is whether Adam and Eve were historical figures and, if so, whether all humans are connected to them biologically or just representationally.

There are three different views of the image of God. The **substantive view** argues that humans possess God's image because they share some characteristics with God that are not shared with God by other creatures. The **relational view** argues that humans bear God's image because, like the Triune God, we are inherently relational. The **functional view** argues that humans bear God's image because they represent God as his vice-regents and exercise dominion over the earth.

There are two different views of human embodiment, surrounding the relationship between the body and soul. In the **trichotomist** (three-part) view, the spirit represents the part of us that lives forever, while the soul is basically equivalent to the heart. In the **dichotomist** (two-part) view, the soul and the spirit are considered virtual synonyms in the Bible, though they are used differently in various passages.

Human gender and sexuality has been hotly contested since the 1960s. In terms of gender roles, **complementarians** argue God created men and women to fulfill different but complementary roles in the home and church, while **egalitarians** defend full equality of the sexes in both nature and roles. Complementarianism is the traditional view, though egalitarianism has become increasingly popular among western Christians in particular.

As western societies have increasingly viewed homosexuality and transgenderism positively, different Christians have responded in different ways. Theologically conservative Christians are sexual traditionalists while progressive Christians are sexual revisionists. The biggest historical debate over sin is the transmission of sin from Adam to other people. Historically, there have been three major views.

The **paradigm view** claims the guilt of Adam's sin is not transferred to other people. Instead, Adam is the paradigm for what happens to all people. Every human is born good (or at least neutral), but as soon as we are offered the choice we inevitably choose to sin. Sin is inevitable, but Adam's sin only affects him. There is no such thing as original sin—only actual sin matters. This view is associated with the famous fourth-century heretic Pelagius. Liberal Protestants who believe in a literal Adam often tend toward this view.

The **biological view** claims the guilt of Adam's sin is transferred to other people biologically through sexual intercourse. Every naturally born human being is guilty of Adam's original sin, and as soon as we are intellectually capable of doing so, we choose to become actual sinners. This view was associated with Augustine, is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, and is also affirmed by many Protestants.

The **representative view** claims the guilt of Adam's sin is transferred to other people covenantally because Adam was the representative head of the human race. As with the biological view, every naturally born human being is guilty of Adam's original sin, and as soon as we are intellectually capably of doing so, we willfully choose to become actual sinners. This view was associated with John Calvin and is affirmed by many Protestants.

What Should We Believe?

Of all creatures, humans alone are created in the image of God. This image has been marred by the fall, but it hasn't been totally lost. The image is progressively restored as we become more and more like Christ through the process of sanctification. Regarding the question of what it means to reflect God's image, it seems best to combine the three different views and understand them as different aspects of the *imago Dei*. We share certain characteristics with God. Like God, we are inherently relational beings. God has tasked us with exercising dominion over His creation. In all these ways, we reflect God. When we love God and embrace each of these roles as acts of worship, we glorify the God who created us in His image. Human beings are embodied creatures that will exist after physical death. We are a combination of physical and immaterial components. The dichotomist view seems more convincing than the trichotomist position, though this is ultimately a speculative matter that has little effect on the Christian life.

Our gender is a part of our human nature and enables our fulfillment of God's command to be fruitful and multiply. One's gender is biological, reflects God's design for that person, and thus cannot be changed. Though many people struggle with same-sex attraction and gender confusion, homosexuality and transgenderism are incompatible with a biblical view of sexuality. Regarding gender roles, men and women are equal in nature and dignity, but they fulfill different complementary roles in the home and in local churches. According to Scripture, husbands are the spiritual head of the household and the role of elder/pastor/bishop is reserved for men.

Scripture teaches that Adam and Eve introduced human sin into the world and that all humans inherit Adam's original guilt because of his representative status. All humans, with the exception of Jesus Christ, are sinners by status and by choice because of the sin of the first humans. All humans are guilty of original sin, which early in life leads to actual sin. Human sin has warped all of creation and leads to distortion, disease, despair, and death. Sin is a terminal condition with both temporal and eternal consequences that cannot be reversed by our own intervention.

How Should We Then Live?

We should defend the dignity of human life because humanity alone is created in God's image.

We should fulfill the cultural commission to exercise dominion faithfully as God's vice-regents.

We should live in light of eternity.

We should affirm, pass on, and contend for biblical patterns of gender and sexuality.

We should mortify our sin and pursue holiness.

Recommended Resources

John S. Hammett and Katie J. McCoy, *Humanity*, Theology for the People of God (B&H Academic, 2023).

Gregg Allison, Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World (Baker, 2021).

Katie J. McCoy, To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond (B&H, 2023).

Andrew Walker, God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say about Gender Identity? (Good Book Co., 2021).

Kevin DeYoung, What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality? (Crossway, 2015).

Cornelius Plantinga Jr., Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Eerdmans, 1995).

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

The theme of the annual Christian Worldview Week at North Greenville University this year is "Thinking Christianly about Human Nature." The speakers are theologian Katie McCoy and ethicist Jason Thacker. You are invited to the evening lectures on March 4–5, 2024. Each lecture is at 7:00pm in Hamlin Recital Hall on the NGU Campus. The lectures will be approximately 45 minutes, followed by 30 minutes of Q&A from the audience.

March 4: Katie McCoy, "Clarity and Compassion for a Gender-Confused Generation"

March 5: Jason Thacker, "Following Jesus in a Digital Age: How Technology Shapes the Christian Life"