

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Doctrine of Humanity

Created, Fallen, and Redeemable — What It Means to Be Human Before God

UNIT 1

Prolegomena — The Question That Defines Everything

Lesson 1

What Is Man? — Why Anthropology Matters

The Most Urgent Question of Our Age

"The Question Every Generation Must Answer, and Only Scripture Can Answer Rightly"

Key Texts: Psalm 8:3–6; Genesis 1:26–28; Jeremiah 17:9; Psalm 139:13–16

"What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!"

Psalm 8:4–5, NASB 1995

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Introduction

We venture now into territory that stands at the very center of every great theological controversy, every ethical debate, every existential crisis, and every pastoral encounter the church has ever faced. This first lesson of twenty-six in our Anthropology series, our systematic study of humanity as God has revealed it in Scripture, is not an entry into psychology or philosophy, though it will engage both. It is an entry into revealed theology: the kind of theology that begins not with what we think about ourselves but with what the living God has declared about us. Biblical Anthropology, the doctrine of humanity, is the study of the creature who alone bears the image of the Creator, who alone was breathed into existence by the divine breath, who alone was entrusted with the governance of creation, and who alone fell into the ruin from which only divine grace can rescue him.

Anthropology is derived from the Greek *anthropos* (man, human being) and *logos* (word, study). It is the branch of systematic theology that investigates what God has revealed in Scripture about the nature, origin, constitution, dignity, and destiny of human beings, a discipline that encompasses the full arc of the human story from the first breath drawn in Eden to the glorified body raised imperishable at the consummation of all things. That arc is not a detached narrative about a species; it is the story of every man and woman who has ever drawn breath. To study it is to hold the most personal of all questions to the light of the most authoritative of all sources: Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? And only the Creator who made the creature has the right and the knowledge to answer.

The church's history with this doctrine is at once glorious and sobering. On one side stands the magnificent tradition of Augustine, the Reformers, and the classical orthodox consensus, which understood humanity in radical dependence on God as creatures made in His image, fallen through voluntary rebellion, and incapable of recovery apart from sovereign, effectual grace. On the other side stands the long and catastrophic tradition of theological humanism, traceable from Pelagius through the Enlightenment to the therapeutic anthropologies of the modern church, which have consistently overestimated what human beings are, what they can do, and what they deserve. The only faithful path runs directly through the text, not domesticated by the assumptions of our age, but received with the humility of those who know that the Author alone has the right to define what He has made.

We live in a moment of peculiar anthropological crisis. The naturalism that governs the academy has stripped the human creature of soul, telos, and accountability before God. The existentialism that shapes therapeutic culture has made the self its own highest authority. The sexual revolution has severed embodiment from meaning. The transhumanist project proposes to redesign the very creature God has made. And the contemporary church has far too often accommodated this dissolution rather than offering the scripturally grounded, gospel-saturated account of humanity that a disoriented generation desperately needs. This is precisely why a rigorous, exegetically faithful, Reformationally disciplined doctrine of man is not a luxury for the church of our day, it is a necessity.

This lesson, the first of twenty-six in the Anthropology series, establishes the methodological, pastoral, and theological foundations for the study that follows. Before we examine specific doctrines, the image of God, the constitution of human nature, the original state, the fall, the covenant of works, human sexuality and gender, the cultural mandate, and the headship of Adam, we must establish why this study matters, what the secular alternatives are and why each fails, and what governing principles will guide our exegetical method. The Psalmist's cry of astonished wonder, "What is man that You take thought of him?" (Psalm 8:4, NASB 1995), is not merely a rhetorical flourish. It is the animating question of this entire series, and the answer that Scripture provides to it is the foundation upon which every subsequent doctrine in this curriculum will be built.

I. Anthropology Defined: The Study of Humanity God Alone Can Explain

The Branch of Systematic Theology That Answers the Question Every Age Must Face

A. What Biblical Anthropology Investigates

Biblical Anthropology is the branch of systematic theology that investigates the personal, embodied, image-bearing being whom God created on the sixth day of creation, breathed into with the breath of life, and placed as His vice-regent over the created order. This includes what Scripture reveals about humanity's origin (we are creatures, not self-existent or self-generated beings), our nature (embodied persons bearing the image of God, constituted of body and soul), our original state (created in righteousness, holiness, and true knowledge), our fall (a voluntary, culpable, and catastrophic act of covenantal treason), our redemption (possible only through the representative obedience and atoning sacrifice of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ), and our destiny (either the eternal beatitude of the glorified saints or the eternal just punishment of the impenitent). The scope of Anthropology is not merely a reflection on the human condition in the abstract; it is the theological account of the creature who stands at the center of the drama of redemption.

The Hebrew word *nephesh*, often translated "soul" or "living being," appears first in the decisive statement of Genesis 2:7: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (NASB 1995). This text is the charter of biblical anthropology. Humanity is not a chance configuration of matter. Humanity is not the evolutionary apex of an unguided natural process. Humanity is the direct, personal, purposeful handiwork of the living God, shaped from the dust by the hands of the Creator and animated by the very breath of divine life. To study Anthropology is to stand in reverent attention before the question the Psalmist asks on our behalf: "What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?" (Psalm 8:4, NASB 1995). The answer Scripture gives is simultaneously humbling and astonishing.

The scope of this inquiry is broader than many students initially suppose. Anthropology does not merely address the question of what the soul is, or whether the body is good, or how sin entered the world. It addresses the entire structure of what it means to be human before God. It treats the question of human origins, and the Reformed tradition insists, with the full weight of the biblical testimony behind it, that those origins lie not in a primordial soup but in the direct, purposeful, personal act of a Creator who formed man from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life. It treats the question of human dignity, and grounds that dignity not in rationality, social utility, or evolutionary fitness, but in the unchangeable decree of the God who made every human being in His own image. And it treats the question of human destiny, and holds before the student of the doctrine not the cold horizon of biological dissolution but the blazing hope of resurrection, glorification, and eternal life in the new creation. This is the scope of what we are undertaking, and it is vast.

B. The Neglected Yet Indispensable Doctrine

The neglect of a robust biblical anthropology in much of contemporary evangelical and even Reformed theology is neither intellectually defensible nor theologically innocent. The doctrine of humanity is not a peripheral locus that can be safely set aside while attention is given to more "practical" matters. What a congregation believes about what human beings are, creatures or accidents, image-bearers or social constructs, fallen or merely underdeveloped, free or enslaved by sin, determines what that congregation believes about everything else. It shapes the doctrine of sin (Hamartiology). It shapes the doctrine of salvation (Soteriology). It shapes ethics, pastoral care, the theology of suffering, the theology of sexuality

and gender, the theology of work, and the theology of the body. There is no theological locus in which a corrupted anthropology does not bear corrupting fruit.

The Christological significance of Anthropology makes this neglect all the more serious. The entire sweep of the New Testament's presentation of the gospel is built upon the parallel between the first Adam and the Last Adam. Romans 5:12–21, the great apostolic argument for imputed righteousness, is incomprehensible apart from a rigorous doctrine of federal headship, original sin, and the representative status of Adam before God. The Christology of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's magisterial account of resurrection, depends upon the contrast between the "natural body" belonging to "the first man, Adam" who "became a living soul" and the resurrection body belonging to "the last Adam" who "became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45, NASB 1995). A biblical theology that cannot give an account of the first Adam cannot give an adequate account of the Last.

The pastoral implications of this neglect are severe and immediate. When a congregation lacks a well-formed biblical anthropology, it will consistently misdiagnose the spiritual condition of the people in its pews. A man who does not know that he bears the image of God will not know why his life carries the weight it does, why his choices matter eternally, or why the disciplines of the body, sexual purity, sobriety, care for health and for the bodies of others, are matters of theological significance rather than mere lifestyle preference. A woman who does not know that her dignity is grounded in creation rather than performance will be perpetually vulnerable to the twin tyrannies of the culture that defines her by her productivity and the therapeutic movement that defines her by her feelings. What a congregation knows and believes about what they are is inseparable from what they know and believe about what God has done for them in Christ. The doctrine of man and the doctrine of salvation are bound together at the root.

II. The Three Secular Alternatives, And Why Each Fails

Naturalism, Existentialism, and Transhumanism in the Dock of Scripture

A. Naturalism: Man as Sophisticated Animal

The first and most culturally dominant secular alternative is naturalism, the view that human beings are the products of purely material, unguided natural processes, distinguished from other animals only by the complexity of their neural architecture. On this account, human consciousness is nothing more than the epiphenomenon of physical processes in the brain; moral convictions are the residue of evolutionary pressures that selected for behaviors conducive to reproductive success; and the persistent human sense of transcendence, dignity, and purpose is a useful cognitive illusion maintained by natural selection because it conferred adaptive advantages on the organisms that possessed it. There is no soul on this account, no image of God, no moral accountability, and no destiny beyond the dissolution of biological systems.

The Reformed tradition, grounded in the conviction that Scripture is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, recognizes naturalism as precisely the catastrophic suppression of truth that Paul diagnoses in Romans 1:18–23, the determined refusal of the creature to acknowledge what the creation, the conscience, and the constitution of the human person all bear witness to: namely, that we are not self-originating, self-explaining, or self-sufficient beings. Naturalism does not produce intellectual honesty; it produces, as Paul shows, the darkening of the foolish heart and the exchange of the glory of the incorruptible God for the image of corruptible creatures (Romans 1:21–23). The philosophical infrastructure of naturalism is not a neutral description of reality; it is an ideological framework constructed for the purpose of avoiding the One in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The pastoral and apologetic response to naturalism must be clear-eyed and theologically confident. It is not sufficient to argue that naturalism is philosophically self-defeating, though it is, since its own claims to truth cannot be grounded on the naturalist account of the mind as a product of unguided evolutionary processes. It is not sufficient to argue that naturalism cannot ground human dignity, though it cannot, as the brutal track record of thoroughgoing materialist regimes in the twentieth century demonstrates with horrifying clarity. The most fundamental response is theological: naturalism is not merely an intellectual error but a spiritual rebellion, the suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18) that leaves its practitioners, as Paul describes, without excuse. The church's answer to naturalism is not a better cosmology or a more sophisticated evolutionary account; it is the proclamation of the God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), the Creator before whom every naturalist stands as a creature, whether they acknowledge it or not.

B. *Existentialism and Transhumanism: Man as Self-Defining Project*

The second secular alternative is existentialism, the tradition associated with Sartre, Camus, and their heirs, which accepts the naturalist premise that there is no Creator who has given humanity a fixed nature or a predetermined purpose, but refuses to draw the despairing conclusions that strict naturalism implies. On the existentialist account, humanity's distinctiveness lies precisely in the freedom to define oneself in the absence of any given essence: "existence precedes essence," as Sartre famously declared. The human being is not something that has been made with a particular nature; the human being is something that makes itself through its choices. The self is not received; it is constructed.

Contemporary gender ideology, the sexual revolution, and the therapeutic culture's insistence on "living your truth" are all downstream from this existentialist premise. The cultural claim that a person's gender identity is self-determined, that sexual expression is entirely a matter of individual preference unconstrained by biological reality or moral authority, and that the authentic self is whatever one feels most deeply one is, all of these are applications of the existentialist anthropology to the most intimate dimensions of human experience. The third secular alternative is transhumanism: the programmatic project of using biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering to transcend the biological limitations of the human condition, to redesign the human organism, to achieve indefinite life extension, and ultimately to create a post-human species that has moved beyond the constraints that define our present existence. All three alternatives share the fundamental refusal to be what Scripture declares us to be: creatures, made by a Creator, for His purposes, answerable to His authority.

What Scripture sets against all three of these alternatives is not a competing philosophical anthropology but a revealed one. The biblical account of humanity does not begin with human self-reflection; it begins with divine action: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26, NASB 1995). The human creature is not the author of his own nature; he is the recipient of it, given to him by a Creator whose purposes in making him are not arbitrary but purposeful, not temporary but eternal, not malleable to cultural revision but fixed in the sovereign decree of the God who changes not. This is the anthropological foundation that naturalism, existentialism, and transhumanism all lack and all need, and it is the foundation that the church, in this moment of cultural anthropological crisis, has the extraordinary privilege and responsibility of proclaiming. It is a proclamation that begins not with an argument but with a declaration: In the beginning, God.

"What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!"

Psalm 8:4–5, NASB 1995

III. The Biblical Framework: Humanity Can Only Be Understood in Relation to God

The Creator-Creature Distinction as the Foundation of All Anthropological Reflection

A. *Creatures, Not Autonomous Beings*

The most fundamental statement the Bible makes about human beings is not about our dignity, our freedom, our creativity, or our capacity for relationship, though Scripture speaks to all of these with extraordinary richness. The most fundamental statement is ontological: we are creatures. We are not self-originating, self-sustaining, or self-explaining. We exist because God chose to create us; we continue to exist because God continues to sustain us; we have a purpose because God has given us one; and we have a destiny because God has decreed it. The Creator-creature distinction is not merely one truth among many in biblical anthropology; it is the architectonic principle upon which every other truth in the doctrine of humanity is built.

This is why the Psalmist's question, "What is man that You take thought of him?" (Psalm 8:4, NASB 1995), is the proper starting point for the study. The question is not posed from a position of self-confident inquiry; it is posed from a position of astonished humility. The Psalmist has contemplated the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars which He has ordained (Psalm 8:3), and the smallness of the human creature before the majesty of the cosmos has overwhelmed him. And yet, and this is the astonishment at the heart of the doctrine, God takes thought of this creature. He cares for him. He has made him only a little lower than Himself (or the heavenly beings, the Hebrew Elohim admits both readings) and has crowned him with glory and majesty. The creature who is nothing before the cosmos is everything before God, not because of what the creature is in himself, but because of what God has chosen to make him and to do for him.

The Creator-creature distinction also carries an important epistemological implication that governs the entire method of this series. If human beings are creatures, then self-knowledge is not the product of introspection alone; it is the product of revelation. We do not come to know what we are by looking inward with sufficient intensity; we come to know what we are by attending with sufficient humility to what the One who made us has declared about us. This is why the study of biblical anthropology is not a supplement to self-knowledge but its very precondition. Calvin opens his Institutes with precisely this observation: "Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." And he quickly adds that the two are so intertwined that it is nearly impossible to say which comes first, for the knowledge of God illumines our knowledge of ourselves, and the knowledge of ourselves drives us toward the knowledge of God. The study of Anthropology, pursued in this conviction, is not an exercise in narcissism; it is an exercise in the kind of self-knowledge that begins and ends in the fear of the Lord.

B. *The Relationship Between Anthropology and Other Theological Loci*

No locus of systematic theology exists in isolation, but Anthropology is perhaps more systematically connected to every other locus than any other single doctrine. What we believe about humanity shapes what we believe about sin: if humanity is essentially good and only environmentally corrupted, the doctrine of total depravity is unthinkable; if humanity is genuinely fallen in the comprehensive sense the Reformers insisted upon, then the grace of God must be effectual and sovereign to accomplish anything redemptively. What we believe about humanity shapes what we believe about salvation: if the will is genuinely free in the Pelagian sense, then grace is merely assistance and the human contribution to salvation is decisive; if the will is genuinely enslaved by sin as Paul declares in Romans 6 and 8, then salvation must be entirely of God from first to last.

What we believe about humanity shapes what we believe about ethics: if human beings are merely complex animals, then ethics reduces to enlightened self-interest or social convention; if human beings are image-bearers of God, then ethics is grounded in the character of God and the dignity He has conferred on every human person. What we believe about humanity shapes what we believe about the church: if conversion is merely a decision, then the church is a voluntary association of like-minded people; if conversion is the new creation, the regenerate bringing forth the life of the Spirit in dead souls, then the church is a covenant community of those who have been sovereignly drawn into the life of the risen Christ. The doctrine of humanity is the lens through which the whole of theological existence comes into focus or blurs into confusion.

The interconnection between Anthropology and Soteriology deserves particular emphasis because it is here that the stakes of the doctrine are most immediately felt. The question of what human beings are is inseparable from the question of what human beings need. If the fall has only wounded human nature, leaving the will and the affections substantially intact, then the grace of God can be construed as assistance, a resource made available to the human being who possesses sufficient native capacity to receive and cooperate with it. This is Pelagianism in its ancient form and Semi-Pelagianism in its perennial modern dress. But if the fall has done what Paul declares it has done, rendered human beings dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), enslaved to the passions of the flesh (Romans 6:17–20), darkened in their understanding and hardened in their hearts (Ephesians 4:17–18), then the grace of God must be sovereign, effectual, and entirely monergistic if it is to accomplish anything at all. The Reformation was, at its theological heart, a dispute about anthropology as much as it was a dispute about soteriology. Luther and Calvin recovered the gospel precisely because they recovered, from Augustine and from Paul, a biblical account of what the fall had done to the human creature. This series will follow them in that recovery.

IV. The Cultural Urgency: Why Anthropology Is the Most Contested Doctrine of Our Age

The Church Must Offer Sober, Biblical Teaching on What It Means to Be Human

A. The Strange Confusion of the Present Age

We live in an age of remarkable intellectual sophistication and equally remarkable anthropological confusion. The same culture that produced the digital revolution, gene-editing technology, and the mapping of the human genome cannot agree on whether a man can become a woman, whether the unborn child is a human being, whether human dignity is a meaningful concept apart from a theological foundation, or whether the category of "human nature" refers to anything real at all. The philosophical inheritance of the Enlightenment told the modern mind that autonomous reason, freed from the constraints of divine revelation and ecclesiastical authority, would produce clarity about the human condition. What it has produced instead is a proliferation of competing and contradictory anthropologies, none of which can ground human dignity with any principled stability, and all of which are subject to revision whenever the prevailing cultural mood demands it.

This cultural confusion is not merely an intellectual problem; it is a pastoral emergency. The questions that define the anthropological debates of our moment, questions about gender identity, sexual orientation, the beginning and end of life, the nature of human consciousness, the meaning of embodiment, the ethics of genetic manipulation, and the obligations we owe to one another as human beings, are questions that present themselves in every pastoral conversation, every counseling session, every conversation with a young person formed by secular education, and every encounter between the church and the culture it is called to reach with the gospel. The church that lacks a rigorous, scripturally

grounded, theologically articulate doctrine of humanity will find itself perpetually reactive and perpetually outflanked by ideologies that have answers, wrong answers, to be sure, but confident ones, to these most urgent questions.

The speed of this cultural shift has been without historical precedent. Within living memory, the broad consensus of Western civilization, including its secular wing, held that human beings are constituted as male and female, that the unborn child is a human being deserving of protection, that the body is not merely an instrument of the will but the locus of personal identity, and that human dignity is a real and non-negotiable fact about every person regardless of capacity or condition. That consensus has not merely eroded; it has in many quarters been aggressively dismantled. The church that responds to this dismantling with embarrassment, equivocation, or accommodation will find that it has surrendered the only anthropology that can actually bear the weight of human experience, the only account of humanity that can explain both the grandeur and the wretchedness of the creature simultaneously, that can ground dignity without sentimentality and acknowledge sin without despair. The church that responds with theological confidence, pastoral compassion, and exegetical rigor will find that the very extremity of the cultural moment is an extraordinary opportunity for the gospel.

B. *The Pastoral Stakes of Getting Anthropology Right*

What a congregation believes about what human beings are has immediate, practical consequences for the way its members understand themselves, relate to one another, interpret their own suffering, evaluate the culture in which they live, and commend the gospel to those outside the faith. A congregation that has absorbed the therapeutic anthropology of the surrounding culture, the view that human beings are fundamentally good, merely wounded by circumstances, and in need above all of affirmation, self-expression, and the removal of obstacles to self-actualization, will find it nearly impossible to preach the cross as the necessary solution to a real problem called sin. It will tend toward a Christianity that is long on comfort and short on repentance, long on self-esteem and short on mortification, long on what God can do for us and short on the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

Equally, a congregation that has absorbed a reductive naturalism, even the implicit naturalism that treats the spiritual dimension of human existence as a kind of optional add-on to essentially physical creatures, will lack the resources to take seriously the inner life, the conscience, the soul, the intermediate state, or the resurrection of the body. The answer to both pastoral failures is the same: a rigorously exegetical, theologically comprehensive, Reformationally disciplined engagement with what the Scriptures actually teach about humanity. This is what the twenty-six lessons of this series are designed to provide.

The pastoral vision that drives this series is simple: that every person in the pew would come to know, with the kind of knowledge that descends from the mind to the affections and from the affections into the pattern of daily life, that they are creatures of the living God, made in His image, redeemed by His Son, and being renewed by His Spirit into the likeness of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ. This knowledge is not merely the answer to an academic question; it is the foundation of a life. It is what enables a person to say with the Psalmist, in the face of the full weight of human suffering and human sin: "What is man that You take thought of him?", and to hear in that question not accusation but astonishment, not despair but worship. It is what enables the believer, knowing what he is and knowing what God has done for what he is, to press toward the heavenly prize with the kind of confidence that the world cannot give and cannot take away.

"Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

Genesis 2:7, NASB 1995

V. The Methodological Principle: Scripture Alone as the Sufficient Guide

What This Series Will and Will Not Attempt

A. The Governing Rubric: Receive What God Has Revealed, Refuse What He Has Not

The methodological principle governing every lesson in this series can be stated in a single sentence: we will receive everything Scripture teaches about humanity with full doctrinal confidence, and we will evaluate every other account of human nature by that standard. This is not a counsel of anti-intellectual isolationism; the Scriptures themselves invite engagement with the full range of human intellectual inquiry, and we will engage philosophy, science, history, and psychology throughout this series. But engagement is not capitulation. The Scriptures are not a hypothesis to be tested by secular inquiry; they are the Word of God to be received in faith and applied with wisdom. No scientific consensus, however confidently asserted, and no philosophical tradition, however elegantly constructed, has the authority to revise what the Creator has declared about His creature.

The discipline of this methodological principle has three components corresponding to the three errors that together define the boundaries of responsible anthropological inquiry. First, we will not affirm more than Scripture teaches, which guards against the speculative elaborations of medieval faculty psychology, the over-confident claims of certain theological traditions about the precise constitution of human nature, and the tendency to build entire ethical systems on anthropological premises that Scripture does not clearly warrant. Second, we will not affirm less than Scripture teaches, which guards against the functional naturalism that strips biblical anthropology of its soul, its image, its federal headship, and its eschatological destiny. Third, we will not affirm other than Scripture teaches, which guards against the substitution of culturally derived accounts of human nature, whether therapeutic, existentialist, or transhumanist, for the theologically precise picture that the Scriptures themselves paint.

This threefold methodological principle is not a straitjacket; it is a framework of intellectual freedom. The student who is bound by the Word of God is freed from the tyranny of every competing authority, freed from the pressure to capitulate to scientific consensus when that consensus overreaches its proper domain, freed from the pressure to accommodate cultural opinion when that opinion contradicts the plain testimony of Scripture, and freed from the pressure to speculate beyond what is written when human curiosity reaches the boundaries of what God has chosen to reveal. Within those boundaries, however, there is extraordinary richness. The Scriptures have a great deal to say about what human beings are, and the student who comes to them with the combination of scholarly rigor and creaturely humility that the text demands will find that the doctrine of humanity is not a small or simple subject. It is one of the most complex, most far-reaching, and most pastorally vital doctrines in the whole of systematic theology, and every lesson in this series is designed to demonstrate that claim.

B. The Scope of This Series

Twenty-six lessons across nine units will cover the full range of material that a responsible biblical anthropology requires. Unit 1 (Lessons 1–2) establishes the prolegomena: why Anthropology matters,

what the secular alternatives are, and how the church has engaged the doctrine across its history. Unit 2 (Lessons 3–6) examines the creation of humanity: the special creation of Adam and Eve, the goodness of the material world, and the creationist affirmation of direct divine creation against evolutionary alternatives. Unit 3 (Lessons 7–10) investigates the image of God in its structural, functional, relational, and ethical dimensions, and the profound implications of the imago Dei for human dignity and Christian ethics.

Unit 4 (Lessons 11–13) examines the constitution of human nature, the dichotomist understanding of body and soul, the origin of the individual soul, and the intermediate state. Unit 5 (Lessons 14–16) treats the original state of Adam, the covenant of works, and the probationary test. Unit 6 (Lessons 17–19) engages the biblical doctrine of human sexuality, marriage as a creation ordinance, and the complementarian understanding of male-female relationships. Unit 7 (Lessons 20–22) develops the theology of the cultural mandate and human vocation. Unit 8 (Lessons 23–25) addresses the unity of the human race under Adam's headship, the doctrine of federal representation, and the transition to Hamartiology. Unit 9 (Lesson 26) brings the series to its doxological conclusion: the full arc of the human story, from dust to glory.

The careful reader will observe that the series is structured to move in the same direction that Scripture itself moves: from creation through fall toward redemption and glory. This is not an arbitrary pedagogical choice; it reflects the deep structure of the biblical narrative and the logic of the gospel itself. One cannot understand what redemption is without understanding what was lost. One cannot understand what was lost without understanding what was originally given. And one cannot understand what was originally given without understanding the God who gave it, the Creator whose purposes in making the human creature were not exhausted by the fall and are not frustrated by history, but are moving, with the inexorable confidence of sovereign grace, toward the consummation in which the image of God in man, marred by sin and being renewed by the Spirit, will at last be perfected in the full conformity of the redeemed to the likeness of the Son. This is the trajectory of the series: not a circle that returns us to the garden, but a helix that carries us, through the redemption accomplished by the Last Adam, to a glory that exceeds even what the first Adam stood to gain.

VI. The Doxological Conclusion: Anthropology Terminates in the Worship of God

The Doctrine of Humanity Is the Doctrine That Teaches the Creature to Bow Before the Creator

The most theologically dense meditation on the human condition in all of Scripture is found not in a systematic theology textbook but in the eighth Psalm. David surveys the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon, the stars, and is arrested by the disproportion. What is man, against the backdrop of a universe whose dimensions exceed the comprehension of its most intelligent inhabitant? The question is not rhetorical; it is genuinely theological. What is the human creature, considered from the perspective of the Creator who made both the human creature and the vast cosmos that dwarfs him?

The answer David receives, and it is clearly received, not deduced, is simultaneously humbling and staggering. The creature who is nothing before the cosmos is the creature whom God has crowned with glory and majesty (Psalm 8:5), whom God has made ruler over the works of His hands (Psalm 8:6), to whom all things are placed under his feet. The author of Hebrews reads this text through the lens of its eschatological fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:5–9), recognizing that the glory and dominion promised to humanity in Psalm 8 are fully realized only in the glorified humanity of the risen Lord, but realized there in a way that opens the path for all who are united to Him by faith. The doctrine of humanity, when pursued faithfully, does not terminate in a richer self-understanding; it terminates in a

deeper Christology. To know what man is, in the full biblical sense, is to see more clearly what the Son of God became, and what He accomplished, when He took our nature upon Himself.

This series, then, will be conducted not merely as theological inquiry but as devotional formation. Every lesson is offered in the conviction that a right understanding of humanity, pursued faithfully and humbly through the Scriptures, bounded by the Word of God, and submitted to the Christological center of all biblical revelation, will produce not merely more accurate doctrine but deeper worship, more honest self-knowledge, more compassionate engagement with human suffering, and a more vivid and scripturally grounded sense of what it means to be a creature made in the image of the living God, fallen into ruin, and raised to glory in the Last Adam, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is fitting, then, that the series should close, as it opens, with Psalm 8. The doctrine of humanity begins in the astonishment of the creature before the Creator. It ends in the same place. But the astonishment that greets us at the end of twenty-six lessons is richer, deeper, and more personally grounded than the astonishment with which we began, because it is now the astonishment of those who know not merely that God has made man a little lower than Himself and crowned him with glory and majesty, but that the eternal Son of God became that man, bore that crown stripped of its glory in the humiliation of the cross, and now wears it in the full splendor of His resurrection life, with the promise that all who are in Him by faith will one day share that splendor fully and forever. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:9, NASB 1995). Let that doxology be both the starting point and the destination of every lesson in this series.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Ephesians 2:10, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Anthropology (Biblical)	From the Greek anthropos (man, human being) and logos (word, study). The branch of systematic theology that investigates what God has revealed in Scripture about the nature, origin, constitution, dignity, and destiny of human beings. Biblical Anthropology encompasses the full arc of the human story from creation in God's image through the fall and redemption to the glorification of the saints in the new creation.
Imago Dei	Latin for "image of God." The defining characteristic of humanity established in Genesis 1:26–27. The imago Dei denotes humanity's representational likeness to God, not a physical resemblance but the capacity for rationality, moral agency, spiritual fellowship, creative dominion, and relational communion that sets human beings apart from every other creature. Reformed theology distinguishes between the image in the broader sense (personhood, rationality, moral agency, retained after the fall) and the image in the narrower sense (original righteousness and holiness, lost in the fall, restored in regeneration, perfected in glorification).
Naturalism	The philosophical view that the universe is a closed material system in which natural causes are sufficient to explain all that exists, and in which there is no room for the supernatural, the spiritual, or the divine. Applied to Anthropology, naturalism holds that human beings are the products of unguided evolutionary processes and that consciousness, moral conviction, and religious experience are entirely explicable in terms of physical brain states. Naturalism represents what Paul in Romans 1:18–23 identifies as the suppression of truth about the Creator-creature relationship.
Federal Headship	The biblical doctrine that Adam stood before God not merely as a private individual but as the covenantal representative of all his natural posterity. His obedience or disobedience would be reckoned to all who descend from him through natural generation. Romans 5:12–21 establishes the Adam-Christ parallel in which Adam's trespass brought condemnation to all through representation, and Christ's obedience brings justification to all who are in Him through representation. Federal headship is the structural principle that makes both the fall and the atonement intelligible.
Original Righteousness	The positive moral state in which Adam was created, not merely a state of moral neutrality but of genuine holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge. Ecclesiastes 7:29 states: "God made men upright." The restoration language of Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 implies that the "new self" restores what the "old self" lost, which means the original self was created in positive moral rectitude. The fall was not a stumble from neutrality; it was a plunge from glory.
Covenant of Works	The arrangement established by God with Adam in the garden, in which life was promised upon condition of perfect and personal obedience and death was threatened upon disobedience (Genesis 2:15–17). The elements of the covenant are present in Genesis 2 even if the term "covenant" does not appear: a sovereign Lord, a covenant servant, a stipulation, a penalty, and an implied reward. The covenant of works establishes the principle of do-and-live that Christ, the Last Adam, fulfilled on behalf of His people through His active obedience.

Dichotomy	The traditional Reformed view of human nature, holding that the human being consists of two fundamental components: a material body and an immaterial soul/spirit. Against trichotomy (which distinguishes body, soul, and spirit as three distinct substances) and against physicalism/monism (which denies any immaterial dimension), dichotomy holds that "soul" (nephesh/psyche) and "spirit" (ruach/pneuma) are interchangeable terms for the one immaterial aspect of the person. The distinction is critical for the doctrine of the intermediate state.
Creationism (Soul)	The view that God creates each individual human soul directly at the moment of conception or birth, rather than the soul being propagated naturally from the parents (traducianism). Supported by Zechariah 12:1, Ecclesiastes 12:7, and Hebrews 12:9. Creationism preserves the direct creative activity of God in the origin of each individual person and is the predominant view in Reformed theology (Hodge, Berkhof, Turretin), though it must account for how a divinely-created soul inherits a sin nature.
Cultural Mandate	The original commission given by God to humanity in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." The cultural mandate defines humanity's vocation as God's vice-regent: to develop the potential of creation, to build culture, to exercise stewardship over the created order, and to fill the earth with image-bearers who reflect the glory of God.
Total Depravity	The Reformed doctrine that the fall of Adam has affected every dimension of human nature, mind, will, affections, conscience, and body, so that apart from the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, no fallen human being is able to will, do, or desire what is truly good in the sight of God. Total depravity does not mean that fallen human beings are as evil as they could possibly be, but that the corruption of sin extends to every part of the person, leaving no faculty of human nature untouched. This doctrine makes the sovereign, effectual grace of God in redemption both necessary and glorious.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the question "What is man?" is not a question human beings are competent to answer from the resources of unaided reason, cultural consensus, or personal experience. The Creator alone has the right and the competence to define what He has made, and He has exercised that right definitively in the pages of Holy Scripture. We must therefore resist with principled theological conviction every secular anthropology that substitutes a human answer for the divine one, whether the naturalist account that reduces humanity to sophisticated biology, the existentialist account that makes the self its own author and authority, or the transhumanist account that treats the human condition as a design problem awaiting a technical solution.

We must believe that every human being, without exception, is a creature made in the image of God, created by the direct, purposeful, personal act of the living God, animated by the breath of divine life, and bearing a dignity that no evolutionary history, no cultural construction, and no personal failure can strip away. We must believe that this dignity does not depend on productivity, health, intellectual capacity, or social status, but is grounded solely in the creative and loving decree of the God who made us. And we must believe that this same God, who made us in His image, has not abandoned us in our fall, but has sent His Son to reclaim, redeem, and restore the humanity that sin has ruined, a restoration that will be complete only at the resurrection, when we are conformed fully to the image of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ our Lord.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the Psalmist's astonishment press itself upon your spiritual imagination: the God who measures the universe with the span of His hand, who holds the waters of the sea in the hollow of His palm, who weighs the mountains in a balance, this God takes thought of you. He does not merely take thought of humanity in the abstract or of the church as a collective body; He takes thought of you, by name, individually and personally, as the potter takes thought of each vessel He forms with his hands. The Hebrew of Psalm 8:4 is striking in its intimacy: the word *paqad*, translated "take thought," carries the sense of visiting, attending to, caring for with purposeful attention. God visits man with a care that the scale of the cosmos makes astonishing.

Desire, above all, the humility of the creature who knows what it is. The beginning of self-knowledge, in the biblical sense, is not introspection but theology: we know ourselves rightly only as we stand in the presence of the God who made us and receive from His Word what He has declared us to be. This is the spiritual posture that this series is designed, under God, to cultivate: the posture of the creature who has heard the question "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9), who knows that it is not merely a question about physical location, and who answers it by running not from God but toward Him, finding in the doctrine of humanity not a cause for despair but an occasion for the worship that the creature was made to offer to the Creator.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Begin this series by reading Psalm 8 slowly and meditatively, paying close attention to the movement from the heavens to humanity and back to the heavens again. Notice that the Psalm begins and ends in the same place: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!" The doctrine of humanity, rightly understood, does not begin and end with humanity; it begins and

ends with the God who made humanity and whose glory is the purpose for which humanity was made.

- Read Genesis 1:26–2:25 as a devotional exercise and a doctrinal text simultaneously. Mark every detail that would be lost if evolutionary naturalism were true: the personal, purposeful formation of Adam from the dust, the divine breath that animates him, the personal creation of Eve from Adam's side, the declaration that the union of male and female is "very good." Ask yourself: what vision of human dignity, human identity, and human purpose is embedded in this text, and what is at stake if it is surrendered?
- Evaluate the anthropology of the culture you inhabit. Listen, over the coming week, to how the world around you answers the question "What is man?", in the news, in entertainment, in the conversations of colleagues and neighbors. What assumptions about human nature, human dignity, and human purpose are embedded in those answers? Where do they contradict the biblical account? Where do they, perhaps unknowingly, echo it? Begin to develop the habit of reading the culture anthropologically, through the lens of Scripture.
- **Read primary sources.** For this series, the following are indispensable: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.15 (on the human soul); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (his Anthropology section remains a reliable and comprehensive Reformed summary); Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (1986), the finest modern Reformed treatment of the *imago Dei*; and Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, which offers the most philosophically rigorous and exegetically rich account of biblical anthropology in the Reformed tradition.
- Pray with deliberate attention to your creaturely status. In your private devotion this week, begin your prayers not with your requests but with the acknowledgment that you are a creature, made from the dust, sustained by the breath of God, entirely dependent on the One who holds your life in His hands. Let the Psalmist's question become your prayer: "What is man that You take thought of him?" And let the silence that follows be filled not with your own answer but with the patient, receptive attention of a creature learning to hear what its Creator has said.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before beginning this study, how would you describe your current working doctrine of humanity, not the textbook answer, but the operative view that actually shapes the way you think about yourself, about other people, and about human suffering, dignity, and purpose? Is the doctrine of the imago Dei more present to your mind as a theological category or as a living conviction that governs your daily encounter with other human beings? Share honestly, and return to your answer at the close of the series.

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Psalm 8:3–9 carefully. What is the logical structure of David's argument? What triggers the question "What is man?" in verse 4, and what answer does the Psalm provide? How does the Psalm move from the smallness of humanity before the cosmos to the dignity of humanity before God? What do the verbs in verses 5–8 ("made him," "crowned him," "given him dominion") tell us about the origin and nature of human dignity?
- Read Genesis 1:26–2:7. What specific details in these verses are incompatible with a purely naturalistic or evolutionary account of human origins? What do the terms "image" (tselem) and "likeness" (demut) in 1:26 suggest about the nature of humanity's relationship to God? What is the significance of the statement that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7)? What does this detail imply about the nature of the human person?
- Read Romans 5:12–21. How many times does Paul use the phrase "one man" or its equivalent? What does the repetition of this phrase reveal about the structure of Paul's argument? What does the Adam-Christ parallel require us to believe about the historicity of Adam? How does this passage establish the federal principle as the structural mechanism of both condemnation and redemption?
- Read Ephesians 2:1–10. What three terms or phrases does Paul use in verses 1–3 to describe the pre-regenerate human condition? What does verse 10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works", suggest about the relationship between the original creation of humanity and the new creation in Christ?
- Read Psalm 139:13–16. What does David's account of divine involvement in the formation of the individual human person imply for the anthropological debates of our age, particularly the question of when human life begins? What does the phrase "fearfully and wonderfully made" (verse 14) suggest about the proper response of the creature to the Creator's work?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson identifies three secular alternatives to biblical anthropology: naturalism, existentialism, and transhumanism. In your estimation, which of these three poses the greatest challenge to the church's doctrine of humanity in the contemporary cultural moment? Is it possible for these alternatives to infiltrate the thinking of believers who would explicitly reject them as philosophical systems? What would that look like in practice?
- The lesson argues that what a congregation believes about human nature determines what it believes about sin, salvation, ethics, and the church. Test this claim concretely. If a congregation's operative anthropology is therapeutic, if it assumes that human beings are fundamentally good but wounded by circumstances, what specific distortions would you expect to find in its preaching, its counseling, its evangelism, and its understanding of sanctification?

- The lesson insists that the Creator-creature distinction is the "architectonic principle" upon which all biblical anthropology is built. What does this mean in practice for the way we answer the great anthropological questions of our age, gender identity, the beginning of human life, the nature of marriage, the ethics of technology? How does the Creator-creature distinction function as a governing hermeneutical principle for engaging these questions?
- The author of Hebrews reads Psalm 8 through the lens of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:5–9), identifying the full realization of Psalm 8's vision of human glory and dominion in the glorified humanity of the risen Lord. What does this Christological reading of Psalm 8 imply about the relationship between Anthropology and Christology? How does it suggest that the doctrine of humanity cannot be properly understood apart from the doctrine of Christ?
- The lesson describes the Reformation as recovering a "radical" doctrine of humanity. Why did the Reformers believe this recovery was not pessimistic but liberating? How does the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, rightly understood, actually produce a higher and more confident anthropology than the alternatives?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson asserts that the church that lacks a rigorous, scripturally grounded doctrine of humanity will find itself perpetually reactive and outflanked by secular ideologies. Evaluate your own ministry or spiritual formation against this claim. In what specific areas, counseling, preaching, discipleship, apologetics, engagement with cultural questions, have you felt the absence of a theologically adequate account of what human beings are?
- Psalm 8:4 asks: "What is man that You take thought of him?" The question is one of astonished humility before the disproportion between human creaturely smallness and divine personal attention. When did you last feel this astonishment? What spiritual disciplines, what biblical texts, and what devotional practices are most effective in cultivating this sense of creaturely wonder in your own life?
- The lesson argues that the imago Dei is the foundation of all Christian ethics, that every moral question ultimately returns to the question of what it means to treat an image-bearer of God rightly. Apply this principle to a specific ethical issue you currently face in your ministry or personal life. How does the category of imago Dei reframe the issue? What does it demand of you specifically?
- Paul's declaration in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works", grounds vocation and calling in the doctrine of the new creation. How does this text reframe your understanding of your own daily work? What would it mean, practically and concretely, to live each day with the conscious awareness that you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for works that He prepared beforehand?
- This is the first lesson of twenty-six on the doctrine of humanity. What specific expectation, concern, or question do you bring to this series? Is there an area of anthropological teaching about which you feel most uncertain, most pastorally confused, or most in need of clear biblical instruction? Commit that area to prayer, and plan to revisit your answer when you reach Lesson 26.

Prayer Focus

Open this first lesson of the Anthropology series with a reading of Psalm 8 in full, the text that stands over the entire series as its hermeneutical key and its doxological summons. Read it not as a proof-text to be deployed in a theological argument but as the prayer it is: a creature's astonished, worshipful, and wondering reflection on the inexplicable grace of a God who turns toward what He has made with personal, purposeful, and infinitely condescending care. The question with which the Psalm returns us at its close, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!", is the prayer with which this entire series should begin: not a request for more information about humanity, but an act of worship offered by creatures who are learning, lesson by lesson, to know themselves rightly by knowing their Creator more truly.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration. Begin with the Father, who created the entire human race in His image and for His glory, who formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, who did not abandon the image He had made when it was shattered by sin but determined from before the foundation of the world to restore it through a redemption more glorious than its original creation. Move to the Son, the Last Adam, the true image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), who became what we are, taking on real human flesh, a real human soul, a real human history, so that we might become what He is: renewed in the image of God in righteousness and holiness and truth (Ephesians 4:24). Conclude with the Spirit, who regenerates the fallen human nature, renews the corrupted image, and is presently at work in every believer, conforming each one progressively to the likeness of the Son (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Pray together for the duration of this series in three specific directions. First, for illumination: that the Spirit who inspired these Scriptures would open every mind and heart to receive their teaching about humanity not with detached academic interest but with the humility of those who are themselves the subject of the doctrine under study. We are not studying humanity from the outside; we are studying what we are, and therefore what God has done for us in Christ. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12, NASB 1995). Second, for courage: that the Lord would give this community the theological and pastoral courage to receive what Scripture teaches about humanity without softening it to accommodate the anthropological assumptions of the surrounding culture, and to commend it with winsome clarity to a world that is desperate for an account of human dignity, purpose, and identity that can actually bear the weight it is asked to carry. Third, for Christocentric focus: that this study of humanity would never degenerate into a study of humanity for its own sake, but would always be what the doctrine of humanity is designed to be, a preparation for the doctrine of redemption, a deepening of our understanding of what the Son of God became in the Incarnation, and an intensification of our gratitude for the grace that has reclaimed, in Christ, what sin destroyed in Adam.

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."

1 Corinthians 15:22, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Psalm 8:3–9; Genesis 1:26–28; 2:7; Romans 5:12–21; Ephesians 2:1–10; Colossians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45–49

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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