
Man and Morality

(Capital Hill Baptist Church resource with modifications)

Vocabulary:

Anthropology: the study of man

Ethics: rules of behavior based on ideas about what is morally right and wrong

Christian view of man: we are created, in the image of God, we are fallen/sinful, we only can be renewed by faith in Christ and the power and the Holy Spirit.

Modern View

A. Enlightenment view of man: Man is distinct because he has the capacity for reason. We can know God by way of our having and using our reason. Goodness and meaning flows from our reason.

B. Romanticism view of man: Man is distinct by way of his inner communion with the divine by some inner capacity to know the order of the universe and find communion with God (our heart guides us).

Post Modern View of Man: Man is distinct because of our ability to create meaning for our selves. Suspicious of reason (logic, reason). Characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism or relativism.

**Who Are We and What Are We Supposed to Do? –
Anthropology and Ethics**

Our class today focuses on two main questions:

- 1) Who are we? and**
- 2) What are we supposed to do?**

The first question takes us into the study of man, which is called anthropology.

The second question takes us into the realm of morality, or ethics. So, in this class we are first going to cover the Christian, Modern, and Postmodern view of Man and then next week we're going to do the same with the question of ethics and morality.

PART ONE: ANTHROPOLOGY(study of man)

I. The Christian View of Man

There are three main components in the Christian view of man:

1. We are created in the image of a personal God.
2. We are fallen and sinful: the image of God in us is distorted.
3. We can only be renewed in God's image by God's grace, through faith in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, Genesis 1:26-27 teaches that all men are created in God's image: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology points out that the image of God in us should not be identified with one specific characteristic, such as our reason, will, or creativity. Rather, being in the image of God simply means we are *like* God and represent him. Being in the image of God means we are to demonstrate to the world what he is like (be his hands and feet).

There are some clear implications of this view of mankind:

1. There is purpose and meaning to human life (to glorify God).
2. We can know God.
3. We are distinct among creation.
4. We are capable of moral goodness and creativity in our labor.
5. Every human has inborn—and equal—spiritual worth.

First, if we as Christians believe that the purpose of human life is to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” we believe that there is purpose to human life. As Paul says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10). This seems obvious, but it is worth pointing out so that the contrast with postmodernism stands out more clearly.

Second, humanity can know God, another obvious point that I make for later contrast. Let me spend more time on the other implications of the Biblical view of mankind.

Third, humanity is distinct among creation. God singles out man for special treatment among all creation. No other creature is said to be made in God's image. There are other signs in Scripture that we are unique and have a special status in creation.

· **Ecclesiastes 3:11 says “God has set eternity in the hearts of men.” Though we are not eternal creatures, we can yearn for the eternal and come to enjoy everlasting life.**

· **Psalm 8:5 says “You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.” God said this about no other creature. We are special that through Christ we can be crowned with honor.**

Fourth, human beings have spiritual worth. Humanity has spiritual and moral worth. God values us—and therefore, we are valuable. As the sovereign of the universe, what God values, is valuable; what he says, is true. God gives us our moral and spiritual worth.

This principle is the foundation of a Christian understanding of political rights and civil liberties, leading to a Christian understanding of everything from life and liberty, to abortion and suicide, euthanasia, and just war. In the absence of a belief that human beings are creatures made specially by God in His image, it is difficult, and maybe impossible, to maintain these rights. (Without this it would be easy to fall into the false notion that some people are outcasts).

Fifth, we are capable of meaningful labor. God has blessed man with the ability to do meaningful work. God's command to mankind to cultivate the earth is sometimes called the Cultural Mandate and it is the basis for the Christian understanding that labor is meaningful and can be done to the glory of God.

- **Genesis 1:28-29 says “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (ultimately Jesus is the one who has dominion and us through him).**
- **Ecclesiastes 5:18 says “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot.”**

Part of what it means to be human is to be a worker. The theology of work deserve its own core seminar. The main point for us is that God has enabled us to reflect his image in creating, shaping, and bringing order to creation, much as He created and brought order out of nothing. This should be a source of joy and contentment in our lives, that God has given us a part to play in His creation during this life.

Scripture teaches that we are made in the image of God, but it also teaches that we are fallen and sinful, and that the image of God is distorted in us because of sin.

- **Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**
- **Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All people are sinful, and sin has devastating consequences in our thoughts, our words, our actions, our relationships, our work, and the entire fabric of our society.**

Because we are sinful, we are not born into communion with a holy God, and cannot earn or divine our way into communion with God. Our intellects, our wills, our conscience—everything about us is fallen. Terribly, we can come to use some of our greatest gifts in the service of evil: human beings have proven very creative and dedicated in coming up with new ways to harm each other.

The idea that we are evil and fallen stands in direct contrast to elevating emotion or reason. For many, it is among the most offensive traits of Christianity to our culture.

Romantics especially passionately oppose the idea that we might not be able to reach God, that he might be inaccessible, that there might be something wrong with our nature.

Enlightenment types are insulted at the thought that there is anything insufficient about our intellect. But our capacity for evil is also the easiest doctrine to prove. Just mention any chapter from history, from 9/11 to the Holocaust, and you have proved your point.

Christians believe that we can only be renewed in God's image by God's grace, through faith in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

The only way we can be reconciled to God, be renewed in the image of God, and progressively overcome the effects of sin is by God's grace, through the gospel, by the power of the spirit. This means that we believe all merely human efforts at self-improvement are ultimately futile.

This then, is how Christians view man and his relationship to God and Creation. It's obviously very different than the view of man we see today pervading our culture.

II. Next we'll consider the Modern view of Man

As before, we will explore two facets of modernism: the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

First, the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers held that Man is distinct because he has the capacity for reason, not because we are made in the image of God. Enlightenment thinkers who continued to believe in God tended to view mankind as in communion with God by way of having reason and using reason. Enlightenment thinkers agreed with Christians that mankind is distinct and that we can know God. They also held that we are capable of goodness and meaningful labor—but they believed the goodness and meaning flowed from our reason, not from our being in the image of God.

There are problems with this view of man.

First, can you think of human beings without the capacity for reason? What about infants, the mentally handicapped, or those who suffer from Alzheimer's or whose age has dimmed their minds? What about the unborn?

The Enlightenment worldview has no grounds to call these people human beings at all. Some horrible conclusions follow: cruelly, it implies that those who cannot think cannot know God; that if you are not smart enough, you do not have spiritual worth.

The implications of the Enlightenment's view of man are enormous. There are no grounds in the Enlightenment worldview for according those categories of people political rights. (there are no grounds for fighting for the rights of people they deem not smart enough)

This is the origin of modern racism and eugenics (way of improving genetics by selective breeding-especially humans-creating super humans).

Whole nations came to look down on other nations that they deemed less “reasonable”: for example, Britain and France and others came to believe they had a greater right to rule than other nations.

Taken to its extreme, it resulted in extending the rule over foreign countries , fanatical nationalism, irrational fear of foreigners, improving genetics by selective breeding, and authoritative rule in government.

It is understandable that the Enlightenment would give birth to such evil, because—and here is its key problem—in its worldview it ignores the problem of sin. Enlightenment thinkers, in holding that we can know God through our reason, saw no moral or spiritual obstacle to knowing Him—only intellectual obstacles. They came to see mankind as inherently good or at least infinitely perfectible, and thus developed a blind spot for the human capacity for evil. There is in Enlightenment thought a naïveté about human’s capacity for evil that unrelentingly blossoms into prideful, arrogance, and a will to power.

Jurassic Park: You have spend so much energy wondering if you could do it, you did not stop to think should we do it?

The second modern view is Romanticism. Romantics are tricky. They tended to view mankind as distinct in the world by virtue of his inner communion with the divine, by some inner capacity to know the order of the universe and find communion with God.

But at the same time they also see him as an integral part of nature. Human nature is part of the whole of Nature; we fit in with some seamless cosmic web of stuff.

We are accustomed to thinking of emotions as a spiritual phenomenon, something that we should take direction from; something that we should heed and that has authority. We've got it exactly backwards. We do have something inside us that we should heed and take direction from; it is the Holy Spirit, not the emotions. The Romantic idea of man combines the two because the Romantic believes the spirit of man is the Spirit of God. This was spelled out in impenetrable detail in the philosophy of Hegel in the 1830s, but it is repeated in most of our Romantic pop culture. We hear this every time we hear “just follow your heart,” “what does your heart tell you?” and “don't deny your heart.”

Thus the romantic view of man is similar to the enlightenment view in that both reject any radical notion of sin and view man as the solution, not the problem.

Application – Cultural Discernment:

One major thing we need to take away from both the Modern views of man is that they are both at once too high and too low. As to “too high,” we’ve just been discussing how modernism views man as either supremely rational and capable of attaining amazing progress and perfection, or as intuitively in tune with the divine within himself and within nature.

Both of these views are radically mistaken because they ignore sin and thus paint far too rosy a picture of human nature.

On the other hand, both views of humanity are too low in that neither of them grounds the dignity of man in the image of God. Both Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers have too *low* a view of man. They locate the good in man in some specific faculty such as his reason or his emotions or intuition, which of means that those whose faculties are more developed are inherently more valuable than others. (Some advanced people are better than others).

As Christians, we want to reject this kind of thinking by recognizing that our creation in the image of God is what gives us dignity, and thus *all* people have dignity and worth.

And on the other hand, the Bible's realistic assessment of humanity is *far* more negative than either of these streams of thought, because it teaches that sin has corrupted every aspect of who we are.

Are there any questions?

Pray