

Anthropology & Hamartiology: Man and Sin

by Greg Herrick

This sermon explores the biblical doctrine of man and sin, discussing the creation of man, the image of God, the fall of man, and the doctrine of sin.

Scripture: Genesis 2:7

Topics: "Human Nature", "Original Sin"

Description

Greg Herrick delves into the study of man from a Biblical perspective, exploring anthropology as the study of man primarily from Scripture, covering topics such as the creation of man, man in the image of God, the constitutional nature of man, the fall of man, and the doctrine of sin. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the origin, nature, transmission, effects, and punishment of sin, highlighting the need for repentance, confession, and the restoration of the image of God in believers through Christ.

Transcript

The term "anthropology" comes from two Greek words, namely, anthro, meaning "man" and logos meaning "word, matter, or thing." We use the word "anthropology" to refer to the study of man and a Biblical anthropology is the study of man as understood primarily from Scripture. Thus it often involves discussion of the particular creation of man, man in the "image of God," the constitutional nature of man, and man after the fall. Other areas of concern include human dignity, freedom, depravity, culture, and society. "Hamartiology," on the other hand, comes from two Greek terms as well, namely, hamartia meaning "sin" and logos. Thus it concerns the biblical doctrine of sin including its origin, nature, transmission, effects, and judgment.

The Creation of Man

There are several points that can be made from the Genesis narrative regarding the creation of man (Gen 1-2). These ideas are expanded upon and developed in the rest of Scripture. First, the origin of man is not in naturalistic evolution, but in the mind of God. Man was not an afterthought of some kind, or the result of blind evolutionary forces, but was created according to the purpose, plan, and good pleasure of God. In Genesis 1:26 God says "let us make man...." Second, man has a certain place as the pinnacle of creation. We are made in the "image" of God. Nothing else, including the angels, is said to be made in the image of God. Thus we are, in this sense, unique in the created order, with the result that we are both privileged and responsible (cf. Gen 3). Both men and women together reflect the image of God. More about this in a minute. Third, we bear a special relationship to God. In our original creation, coming from the hand of God,

we were holy, upright, and perfect and there was no hostility between God and us. Fourth, we have a certain role in creation. We were created to rule over God's created earth, that is, to have dominion over it. Fifth, man was created in what appears as an instantaneous act of God, bringing together material aspects and "the breath of life." We will talk about this in a minute as well, but suffice it to say here that we were not taken from some previously existing animal. According to Genesis 2:7, our creation gives rise to the dual nature of our experience as we relate in both a heavenward (spiritual) and earthward (material) direction.²⁵

Man in the Image of God

The "image of God"--the referent for which we hold to be the same as the "likeness of God"--is a difficult expression to understand precisely. There have been many attempts to reduce it to various aspects of man's being or relate it in some way to the functions he carries out in the world. Thus some have said that it refers to certain particular qualities in man such as his rational nature, morality, or religious capacity. Others, such as the Mormons, have claimed that the image of God is physical. Still others have suggested that the image is more relational in nature, and refers to man's experience of being in relationship with God, other people, and creation. Some have collapsed the meaning of image into man's God given function to have dominion over the earth. Thus, on this last reckoning, "image" refers to man's ability to rule (cf. Gen 1:26; Psalms 8:5-6).

Each of these views has a contribution to make, though it is doubtful whether the relational or functional view really answers the question as to what the image actually is (not does). Functional views describe certain realities which flow from being created in God's image, but do not in themselves describe that image. The substantive view, long held throughout the history of the church, is the best view overall, but it is perhaps too narrow to restrict it to "knowledge," righteousness, "holiness," "morality" or our ability for rational thought, etc. It is rather all of these and anything else that makes us like God, maintaining, of course, the necessary and Biblical Creator-creature distinctions (contra Mormonism).

The Constitutional Nature of Man

The question has come up in theology as to the constitutional nature of man. Most naturalists would argue that man is monistic, that is, that he is purely physical and that he has no soul or immaterial substance to his being. There are many conservative theologians who would also argue along similar lines, though they nonetheless regard man as a special creation of God with a special destiny (at least for the saved). But, there are several good, scriptural reasons for rejecting the monist account of human constitution. First, since God is a person and he does not have a body, but is spirit, we can safely argue that possessing a body is not the *sine qua non* of being a person. That is, "personhood" can exist apart from embodiment. Further, God could be considered a paradigm case of personhood and if this is so, then only those beings that bear a similarity (i.e., possess the attributes, not just functions) to the paradigm case can be considered persons. Second, the OT term *nephesh*, while it can refer to a body or parts of a body, nonetheless often identifies a person after death. It therefore refers to the soul/person which has departed a body, is still conscious, and as the immaterial aspect of a person may return to the body if God so wills (Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21-22). Third, the OT portrays man as created of both material and immaterial substances (Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37:6, 8-10, 14). Fourth, Jesus continued to exist after his death and before his resurrection which seems to imply that there was some immaterial aspect to his (human) being. Fifth, human beings are regarded as living spirits in the disembodied state (Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 6:9-11 [souls]). Sixth, the future resurrection of all people indicates that there is an intermediate state as departed souls

await this resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive (Matt 22:37). Moses and Elijah are alive as well (Matt 17:1-13). The story of Lazarus and the rich man seems to imply conscious life after physical death (Luke 16:19-31). Finally, Jesus made a clear distinction between the soul and body in Matthew 10:28: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." All these observations are most easily understood on the basis of a substances dualism in man (i.e., he is both material and immaterial).²⁶ We, therefore move on to talk about the two primary understandings of the immaterial aspect of man.

Many Christian theologians have argued for a trichotomous view of man, that he is body, soul, and spirit, where each term refers to separate substances. This view has often been advanced on the basis of passages such as 1 Thess 5:23, Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Cor 14:14. The major problem with this view, and the reason it is not well received any longer, is the almost universal recognition that the Bible uses "soul" and "spirit" interchangeably (Luke 1:46-47; John 12:27; 13:21). Further, Mark 12:30 lists four aspects of man: heart, soul, mind, strength. Are we to regard each of these as constituting a different substance? That is not Jesus' point, nor is it Paul's in 1 Thess 5:23. The point in 1 Thess 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 is not to inform Christians as to the precise substances which make up their immaterial nature, but rather that sanctification is to encompass the whole person. Thus it is tenuous at best to infer from these two texts specific details about our immaterial nature.

Taking all the Biblical evidence into consideration, it appears that the best view is some form of dichotomy. In any view of man, however, two things need to be held in tension: (1) that he is a composite being with both complex material as well as complex immaterial aspects; (2) that he is portrayed in Scripture as a unified being, so that what he does with his body involves his spirit and the motions his spirit engages in involve his body. In fact, both appear to be involved in everything we do. This view of man relates him well to his Creator in heaven and his commission here on earth. It also reads the Biblical data in a manner a little more consistent with the use of terms in Scripture (where two or more terms can refer to the same immaterial substance).

Finally, given our current culture, it is necessary to point out that when we argue for an immaterial aspect to man's being, using terms like soul and spirit, we are not saying as many in the New Age movement(s) have claimed, that we all possess "god" in us. What we are saying is that there is more to us than just matter; we are also spiritually oriented beings, created in God's image (but not that we are "gods" in any sense).

The Fall of Man and the Image of God

Genesis 3 describes for us one of the most diabolical and saddest points in our very early history. Adam had been commanded by God not eat from the fruit of the tree which was in the middle of the garden. The command was concise, yet clear, and the consequence of disobedience was lucidly and emphatically delineated: "you shall most certainly die" (Gen 2:16-17). But with the entrance of the Serpent, who we now realize was Satan himself (2 Cor 11:3), came the entrance of deceit and trickery. He was more crafty than all the wild animals the Lord God had made, and he said to the woman... (Gen 3:1). Well, you know the rest of the story: We ate the forbidden fruit, died spiritually (something the Devil forgot [neglected?] to mention), were judged by God immediately (Gen 3:6-19), death through murder came almost instantaneously (Gen 4), and eventually we died physically (cf. "and then he died," Gen 5). From our first parents we receive both the guilt of sin as well as a corrupt nature (Rom 5:12-21).

The image of God, as a result of the fall, is effaced but not erased. The Noahic covenant, instituting a measure of authority among men for dealing with murder (Gen 9:6-7), the command to procreate, and prohibitions against such things as favoritism (James 3:9), are all based on the existence of the "image of God" in man, even after the fall; all these commands are related to the image of God in a post fall context.

The image of God, while severely distorted in the fall, is nonetheless being renewed progressively for those who are "in Christ" (in terms of "knowledge" in Col. 3:10). Finally, when the saints reside in heaven, the image of God will be completely restored in them. In short, God has chosen us to be holy in his sight and to be conformed totally to the image of His Son (Eph 1:3-4; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49), who is said to be "the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15).

The Doctrine of Sin

A brief review of the fall of man leads us naturally into a discussion of the essential nature of sin, as well as its origin, transmission, effects, and punishment.

Many theologians rightly define sin as any want of conformity--in nature, disposition, or act--to the moral law of God. Again, this is an accurate definition as far as it goes (cf. 1 John 3:4), and perhaps better than referring to sin as experiencing personal finiteness, existential angst, desire to control others, selfishness, or sexual immorality. The one shortcoming, however, is that it does not really capture the heinous, aggressive, and vile nature of sin as such. Biblically portrayed, sin is more than a "want of conformity." Sin is "out and out" rebellion, an insidious plot to personally subdue God and his just rule over our lives. It is a foolish attempt at a coup d'état--an attempt to extinguish not only His commands to duty, and his wise prohibitions, but also to nullify his presence and to extinguish knowledge of him--and all this with each and every blow.

Thus sin is spiritual/ethical in nature and has at its core the idea of autonomy and rebellion. It is ethical in nature, not ontological in that it is not an essential privation of some kind. Even after the fall, man still has all the faculties with which he was created, but his moral nature is twisted by sin. There are many key terms in the Old Testament which nuance the idea of sin in some way. These include *chata* ("to miss the mark," Exod 20:20; 522x); (2) *ra* ("evil" or "ruin," Gen 38:7 444x), and (3) *taah* ("going astray," Num 15:22). In the New Testament there are several terms as well. Some of the more frequently used and important ones include: (1) *hamartano* ("to miss the mark," Rom 5:12; 225+ times); *kakos* ("disease" or "moral filth,"); (3) *poneros* ("moral evil," Heb 3:12); (4) *anomos* ("lawlessness," 1 John 3:4).

The origin of sin in the cosmos is to be found in the disobedience of Satan and certain angels. Though there is debate about Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-19, there are some theologians who argue that one or both of these passages hint at the fall of Satan. In any case, when Satan arrives on the scene in Genesis 3 (cf. 2 Cor 11:3), he is already fallen and sinful. But as far as the entrance of sin into the human race is concerned, this occurred at the fall of man, also described in Genesis 3. Sin entered the human race through our first parents' disobedience, as Paul makes clear in Romans 5:12ff.

There ought to be no doubt among Christians regarding the scriptural teaching that all men are sinful, though it is obviously true that not all men have expressed or will express their sinfulness to the same degree. But how did our first parents pass on sin to us? If it is true that sin entered the human race through the sin of Adam, how was it communicated to his offspring and thus to the race as a whole, given that we all descended from the one man (cf. Acts 17:26)?

Some have argued that there is no direct connection between the sin of Adam and Eve and the sin of the each member of the human race; rather, each person, perhaps following the example of Adam, has willfully chosen, on their own, to sin and violate God's will. But this interpretation, while perhaps agreeing, at least formally, with the idea that "all have sinned" (Rom 5:12), does not do justice to Paul's teaching in the whole of Romans 5:12-21. For it is said there, at least five times, that sin entered the human race through one man (transgression) and that the entire race was affected--not by sinning themselves, but rather through the sin of Adam.

Thus, there is a direct connection between the sin of Adam and the fallenness of the entire race. Some say this direct connection is realistic while others argue along legal lines. The first group argues that the race as a whole was present seminally in Adam and thus sinned when he sinned. This seems to do justice to the "all sinned" of Romans 5:12 and has some support from the Abraham/Levi/Melchizedek parallel in Hebrews 7:10, but the meaning of "all sinned" ought to be determined more in keeping with the primary thrust of Romans 5:12-21 where the sin of Adam seems to be the direct cause of our sin; no mediate mechanism appears to be in view in Romans 5:12-21.

Perhaps the best view is to understand Adam as the federal head of the race and as such his sin was imputed (i.e., charged to our account) to us with the result that we too are legally guilty. This seems to make the most sense out of the direct connections expressed in Romans 5:12-21. Again, over five times the phrase (or something similar) "for just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners," appears in the paragraph.

Now the idea that there exists a legal, not just biological, relationship between a man and his posterity is not unheard of in scripture. Some refer to it as corporate solidarity. Perhaps the best known example illustrating this concept is the sin of Achan (Joshua 7). His sin of stealing "the city's riches" is counted as the sin of the nation of Israel (Jos 7:1, 11) and indeed his entire family was punished. In a similar way (but it is strictly speaking not identical), we often see today how the sin of one person directly affects others. When a person hijacks an airplane with 130 people on board and then crashes it, all on board suffer because of the decision of one person.²⁷ The decisions of one person often have a "representative" character.

Now, some have objected to this doctrine on the grounds that we are blamed for something we did not do. This can be responded to in several ways, but in the end it must be realized that all men, including you and me, are sinners and will be judged for our willful and personal rebellion. Was it fair that Christ died for us so that we might escape God's wrath? Is it fair that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us when we simply believe in His Son? If the issue were really one of fairness, viewed humanly, who of us could stand in His presence?

But not only are we in a state of guilt before God, we also received at birth a sinful nature and so we are polluted by sin as well--hence our willful and personal rebellion. And it isn't that some parts of us are fallen, but rather that our whole person, every part of us, is fallen and enslaved to sin. This also is a result of Adam's sin. We prove the fact that we have a sinful nature each and every day (cf. Gal 5:19-21). Denial of sin, neurosis, estrangement from loved ones, enemies in the work force, inability to love and receive love from others, lying, stealing, cheating, as well as a host of other sins beset us daily. We were born, i.e., we are by nature children of wrath (cf. Eph 2:1-3).

The Christian and Sin

The question often comes up as to the effects of sin on the life of the Christian. Sometimes the question is posed most acutely as "Does a Christian lose their salvation when (not if) he sins? We cannot go into this in great detail here, but will cover it more thoroughly under soteriology. Suffice it to say here, however, that a Christian's sin is just as sinful as that of a non-Christian. Sin is sin, no matter who commits it; it is both an offense to and violation of God's holiness. But the Christian stands in a posture of being justified once and for all (Rom 5:1). His standing or position before the Lord is immutable but his personal fellowship with the Lord and His people will be disrupted by sin, sometimes severely. At some point the Lord will probably chasten him, and in certain cases, ultimately shorten his life because of sin (1 Cor 11:30; Heb 12:1-13). When the Christian does sin, however, he is to immediately confess it to the Lord, and repent from it, knowing that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:9). And, in many circumstances he will need to confess his sin to another offended person and make restitution. Failure to confess known sin leads to spiritual and moral hardening and delusion regarding one's true condition (Heb 3:12-13).

The Punishment for Sin

The first and primary reason God punishes sin is in order to prove himself righteous and just. This, of course, he did most fully in the cross (Rom 3:21-26; 9:19-23). A second reason God punishes sin is to bring back an erring son or deter others from sinning.

Spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death are all punishments for sin, as are certain sufferings in this life. But beyond question, eternal death is the gravest punishment for sin imaginable. In this case, God makes it impossible for the sinner who dies apart from the saving mercies of Christ to ever be reconciled with Him. Torment will be their eternal lot; they will be eternally separated from God, "shut out of the Lord's presence forever," as Paul says (2 Thess 1:8-9; cf. also Matt 25:41, 46).

Sin always has consequences for both the present life as well as the next. The Christian cannot escape certain consequences of sin in this life or judgment for sin in the next, but this judgment does not revoke his salvation. He will still be with the Lord forever, but it does affect the nature of his reward (1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Romans 14:10-12).

25 I am not here arguing for some kind of Platonic or Gnostic dualism, or anything like it. I am simply saying, as C. S. Lewis had occasion to say, that we were made to live in two worlds simultaneously.

26 For further discussion on this issue, consult Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 472, 474, 483; J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature & The Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 17-47; Erickson, *Theology*, 519-39. For a defense of the monist position, see J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London: SPCK, 1952), and the relevant articles in Warren S. Brown, Nancy Murphy and H. Newton Maloney, eds. *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998).

27 I am not saying that the others on the aircraft are guilty of hijacking (in the same sense that we are counted guilty because of Adam's sin). My only point is to show that the poor decisions of one person often adversely affect the many.

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