

## KNOW THE TRUTH

### Lesson 5 - Humanity and Sin (1 of 2)

Outline is drawn from pages 119-137 of *Know the Truth - A Handbook of Christian Belief* by Bruce Milne.

#### KEY CONCEPTS FROM CHAPTER 9 - ESSENTIAL HUMAN NATURE

- I. The perennial question
  - A. In this time of uncertainty, the ultimate anthropological questions still await an answer. **What** are we? **Where** did we come from? What is the **meaning** of our life? Is there any final significance in the age-long human struggle? And what of the future: where are we going? (p. 120)
    1. Secular anthropologies have signally failed to come up with answers, and by their very bankruptcy have thrown into relief the relevance of the Christian answer. For 'humanity never achieves a clear knowledge of itself unless it has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize itself' (Calvin). We can understand ourselves only in the light of God and his purpose for humankind, i.e. in the light of divine revelation. (p. 120)
    2. For Scripture, humankind is inescapably the **creature** of God (cf. Gen. 1:26; 2:7f., 21f.; Ps. 8:2; Acts 17:26, 28; etc.).
- II. Humanity in relation to God
  - A. The Origin of Life
  - B. The Origin of Humanity
    1. The question of human **origins** has aroused lively and sometimes bitter controversy over the past two hundred years. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) in particular brought to a head the simmering clash between biological and religious accounts. (p. 121)
    2. The contentious issue has been the relationship between these passages of Scripture and the **theory** of evolution. (p. 121)
      - a) Four broad approaches to this theory:
        - (1) **Evolutionism** concedes to evolutionary theory a comprehensive account of human origins and dismisses any reference to the activity of a Creator.
        - (2) **Direct creationism** believes that humankind originated as described in Genesis 2:7f.; Adam was made from dust and Eve from his rib by acts of special divine creation. (p. 122)
        - (3) **Progressive creationism** holds that Genesis 1 records in broad outline successive creative acts of God; the universe is brought through its various stages from the initial ex nihilo act (Gen. 1:1) to the appearance of humankind (Gen. 1:27), which is viewed as a distinct new stage of divine creation.
        - (4) **Theistic evolution** accepts the theory of evolution as a general explanation of how God worked in creating the world and producing life within it. With reference to the emergence of humankind, however, some further factor is posited whereby a particular anthropoid was separated and raised to a new level of awareness and to a relationship with God. (p. 122)
    3. In evaluating these approaches we must take account of the following points:

- a) Nothing should call into question creation 'out of **nothing**'. (p. 123)
  - b) Dogmatism is inappropriate here unless we can show that Scripture **necessarily** requires a particular interpretation. (p. 123)
  - c) Humans are distinguished from all other **animals** by their transcendent nature. (p. 123)
  - d) The effect of the evolutionary interpretation for many people has been to reduce the sense of divine **purpose** in creation and replace it with an apparently arbitrary process driven by the inherent ability of particular species to adapt to and overcome the challenges of their environment. (p. 123)
  - e) An allied question concerns the antiquity of humanity. This question is raised by the genealogies in Genesis which relate Adam to Abraham and Israel (Gen. 5:1–32; 11:10–27) and led Archbishop Ussher in the seventeenth century to date creation at 4004 BC. The genealogies of Genesis, however, have been shown not to be **strict** father-son relationships. They are compressions of generations and may even at points refer to dynasties, which in turn may be a key to the extraordinary ages attributed to the antediluvians. (pp. 123-124)
  - f) Much depends in the end on how we **interpret** Genesis 1 – 3. Is this religious myth? Is this straightforward historical, even 'scientific', description? (p. 124)
  - g) Finally, we must ensure that discussions of these issues do not rob us of the great central biblical realities, i.e. that humankind is the **creature** of God, set in God's world, uniquely related to him and holding special **responsibility** for the created order. (p. 124)
- C. The Image of God
- 1. Humankind is said to be created 'in the **image** of God' (Gen. 1:26). (p. 124)
  - 2. Creation in the image of God distinguishes humankind from all other life forms. (p. 125)
  - 3. What does it **mean** to be created in the image of God?
  - 4. There is a **variety** of views on how the image has been affected by the fall. (p. 125)
    - a) The Bible... does not actually refer to a total **loss** of the image of God, and indeed at several points uses the phrase, in a general way, of fallen humanity (cf. Gen. 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas 3:9). Calvin, therefore, spoke of 'relics' of the image of God in fallen humanity, which, while affording no basis for humanity's justification, still distinguishes it from the brute creation and accounts for the undoubted gifts and achievements of non-Christians. (p. 125)
    - b) The full biblical perspective, however, embraces also the joyous recognition of the grace of God in Christ through whom the image of God will be fully **restored** in all who believe. (p. 125)
- III. Humanity in Relation to Itself: The Nature of Humanity
- A. The Bible distinguishes several **aspects** in humanity's nature: spirit (Heb. *rûaḥ*, Gk. *pneuma*), soul (Heb. *nepeš*, Gk. *psychē*), body (only in the NT, Gk. *sōma*), flesh (Heb. *bāšar*, Gk. *sarx*).
  - B. Dichotomy, trichotomy, or unity?
    - 1. Does the human person consist of distinguishable '**parts**', specifically a body and a soul, or a body, soul and spirit, or is the human person essentially a

single psycho-physical unity able to be identified by reference to different human aspects in different contexts, as a 'body' when referring to our tangible aspect, as a 'soul' or 'spirit' when referring to our inwardly conscious mental processes and awareness? (p. 126)

#### C. The Unity of the Person

1. Today the dichotomy/trichotomy issue has been largely superseded by an emphasis on the **unity** of the person. According to this approach I do not consist of composite 'parts', whether two or three; I am a psychosomatic unity. (p. 127)
2. Thus the alternative debated has become that of dualism as against a Christian form of **monism**. (p. 127)
3. It is important to note at a practical level that those espousing a 'holistic dualist' model dare not, on that basis, become insensitive to the danger traditionally inherent to this way of understanding human nature, viz. its appearing to **reduce** the value of the material, physical aspects of existence. When biblical wholeness becomes diluted, 'spiritual' concerns tend to trump 'material' concerns. (pp. 129-130)

#### D. The Origin of The Soul

1. Three Views:
  - a) **Pre-existence** (p. 130)
  - b) **Creationism** (p. 130)
  - c) **Traducianism** (p. 130)
    - (1) This third view teaches that the soul is inherited from the human progenitors along with the body, there being no further act of soul-creation by God. (p. 130)
2. Today, the greater awareness of the Bible's sense of the unity of the human person has for many reduced the intensity of the debate, as soul and body are seen rather as differing ways of referring to the **essential** human person. (p. 130)

#### IV. Persons in relation to their neighbors

##### A. A Social Animal

1. 'Man was formed to be a **social** animal' (Calvin). (p. 131)

##### B. Man and Woman

1. In addition to affirming the essential corporateness of human life under God, Adam and Eve's relationship expresses the divine propriety of the gender **distinction** – humanity as the creature of God exists in the distinction and partnership of male and female. The recognition of this and the exploration of its implications bring us to what some observers believe is the anthropological issue of our time. (p. 131)
2. We can broadly distinguish two foci in what Scripture says about the **relationship** between men and women. (p. 132)
  - a) Woman and man are essentially and irreducibly **equal** in dignity, value and status. (p. 132)
  - b) Man and woman are in some respects **complementary** to each other. (p. 132)

##### C. Human Sexuality

1. A further and critical feature of the man–woman relationship is its expression in sexual **union**. In this act of profoundest, loving, mutual self-giving, the man and woman enter into a genital union whereby male sperm and female

ovum can unite within the womb to form the wonder of a living human embryo; an embryonic person who will, some nine months later, emerge from the womb as a unique, newborn individual. The Bible sees the sexual relationship as a supreme gift of God, the good Creator, and as both a profound vehicle of mutual love and pleasure, and the means to human procreation (Eph. 5:25–33; 1 Cor. 7:3–4; Song, passim). (p. 133)

- a) The Bible sets this uniquely privileged expression of gender union exclusively within the bounds of a marriage **covenant**. (p. 133)
- b) The identity of the two partners is **specific** – 'a man' who has left father and mother (i.e. who has formed a new family unit through marriage) and 'his wife'.
- c) Much discussion has been evoked in the recent period over the question of whether the married sexual partners necessarily require to be of different **gender**. (p. 134)

#### V. Humanity in relation to the created order

- A. Unless we are able to reverse the trends of environmental destruction which have held sway during previous centuries, this planet will simply cease to be a viable home for humanity. Three factors contribute principally to the present crisis: population **growth**, resource **depletion** and **runaway** technology. (p. 134)
- B. At the very outset of its account of human life, the Bible draws attention to our **relationship** to the natural order (cf. Gen. 1:29; 2:19). Humanity is set in a garden and is surrounded by the other species (Gen. 2:7–20). (p. 135)
- C. God, however, remains Lord and the focus of humanity's primary responsibility. This is another way of saying that the environment and the other species, though important, are not on a **level** with God. (p. 135)
- D. Thus the Bible rules out all **pantheism** (the view that God is in all things, and so all things have to be revered to the point of worship). (p. 135)
- E. Although not to be worshipped, however, nature needs to be **respected**.
- F. Our God-given relation to the world is expressed in two words.
  1. The first is **dominion**. (p. 135)
  2. The dominion, therefore, must never be mentioned in separation from the other equally biblical term, **stewardship**. (p. 135)

#### VI. Humanity in relation to time

- A. The world in which we live and exercise dominion and stewardship is **temporal** as well as spatial. We are 'given time' by God in which to fulfil this stewardship and to enjoy communion with our Maker (Gen. 3:8f.). (p. 136)