

WEEK 1 | INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING ANTHROPOLOGY

“What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4). That was David’s question to the Lord. As he looked out at the night sky, David was struck by the awesomeness of God’s creation. The vastness of the cosmos, the brilliance of the sun and moon—all of it was overwhelming to him (8:3). Only God could have created something so enormous, so magnificent as the universe we see when we look to the stars.

What truly affected David’s heart, however, was not the world God had created, but the special care and love God extended towards a seemingly insignificant part of His vast creation: mankind. “What is man that you are mindful of him?” he asks. Why man? What is man? What is so special about us? The heart of David’s query is what this course seeks to answer.

I. TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES

Anthropology is unique because in it the student studies themselves, providing opportunity for personal growth and reflection. A robust, Biblical anthropology enables a person to truly understand themselves from God’s vantage point, answering many of the big questions of life. Where do we come from? What is our purpose? What, if anything, makes us significant and valuable? The answers to these questions have significant implications for how we live our lives and understand our place in the universe.

Though these questions may seem nebulous and impractical—and best left to the naval-gazing philosopher with too much time on his hands—in actuality, how we answer these questions has great import on our day-to-day existence. How we understand ourselves, our significance, and our purpose forms a critical part of the prism through which we view all of life and through which we filter actions and decisions. In other words, anthropology is a critical part of any worldview and will be the color the lens we use to view reality. It is important we get the answers to these questions right so that we can live rightly in this world.

As David’s Psalm quoted above (and the narrative of creation given in Genesis 1-2) makes clear, mankind is important to God. Mankind relates to God in a way no other creature does. For that reason alone, how Scripture depicts mankind should be important to us as well and should spur us on to study the abundant material Scripture offers on this subject.

II. TO UNDERSTAND GOD’S PLAN FOR CREATION

Mankind is central to the Biblical storyline. God made man in His image (Genesis 1:26-28). It was man who fell into sin and plunged creation into chaos (Genesis 3:1-19). It was man God set out to save as the first fruits of His redemptive work (Hebrews 2:16; Romans 8:19-23), a redemption He accomplished by sending His Son into the world as a man (John 1:14; Hebrew 2:17). It is mankind who will rule with Christ when he comes into his kingdom (2 Timothy 2:12). As Louis Berkhof writes, “Man is represented as standing at the apex of all the created orders. He is crowned as king of the lower creation, and is given dominion over all inferior creatures.”¹ We cannot understand the story of redemption without understanding the significance of man in God’s purposes for creation.

This becomes especially clear when we study history. The story *of* this creation is really the story of God’s interaction with man *in* this creation. It’s not that the rest of the material world is inconsequential; it’s just that man has been given a place of preeminence in God’s world. Thus, the twists and turns of history largely depend on the actions and decisions of men and women. Paul even acknowledges that the creation itself longs to “obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). There is no redemption of creation apart from the redemption of mankind.

III. TO PROTECT AGAINST ERROR

Anthropology is the study of man, a field of inquiry that is by no means limited to theology. Virtually every secular university will have a series of classes focusing on the big questions about mankind. Societies universal develop and disseminate anthropologies through government, culture and, often, religion. No matter when or where one is, there exists a predominant view of man that dominates the moment in which they live.

For Christians, this means we are always contending with faulty views of mankind. If we are to avoid the pitfalls of our cultural moment, we must be clear on what Scripture says regarding every aspect of life, including what man is and what it means to be human. Filling our minds with anthropological truth according to Scripture will enable us to view humanity—both as a species and as individuals—rightly. It will also enable us to spot error and reject erroneous views of mankind when they spring from our cultural milieu.

In Romans 12:2 Paul exhorts believers to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” We are always in danger of being lured and swayed by culture into believing lies; we must combat them with truth as God’s Spirit uses His Word to transform our minds and conform our thinking in submission to the Lordship of Christ. The outcome of this is the ability to “discern what the will of God is” (12:2b). Right thinking leads to right action. If we are to live rightly and treat others rightly, we must think about them rightly first.

IV. TO ENGAGE WITH CULTURE

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 183.

The pervasiveness of faulty anthropology in our society has become increasingly clear over the past few years. Social issues like homosexuality, transgenderism, same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and environmentalism all hinge on one's anthropology. The climate of our culture has made it virtually impossible to avoid developing an opinion and taking a stance on these important issues. As Christians, people who love the truth, we more than anyone should care about viewing these issues rightly and standing for truth. Thus, it is imperative we develop a Biblical anthropology that allows us to think through these issues, enabling us to engage with a culture and be a light in the darkness.

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MAN IN 10 STEPS²

What follows is a brief, helpful roadmap of the progress of Biblical anthropology. Keeping this roadmap in mind will help the student orient themselves throughout the course, keeping the forest in view when in the midst of the trees:

1. The kingdom mandate—under the federal headship of Adam, man is created as king and son to fill, rule, and subdue the earth for God's glory (Gen 1:26-28). He is also created to be in three relationships—with God, other people, and creation.
 - Man is supposed to rule as king on behalf of the King.
 - Man's destiny is tied to this earth
 - Vs. 28 "subdue" = *kabash*, not a violent rule, but a domination of the earth
2. Man disobeys God and fails the kingdom mandate to rule and subdue the creation; he becomes spiritually dead to God and damages his relationships with other people and nature (Gen 3).
3. God promises a coming seed of the woman, a man who will destroy Satan and reverse the curse (Gen 3:15).
 - Messianic text; messianic hope affirmed (see below)
4. The people of God anticipate this coming man who will be a Savior (see Gen 4:1 and 5:28-29).
5. Man's right to rule and subdue the earth is affirmed even in a fallen world (Ps 8:4-8).
 - Vs. 1, 9 form an inclusion extoling the greatness of God as the Psalm examines the position of man
 - Vs. 5-8 give a commentary on Genesis 1:26-28

² Reproduced from Michael Vlach, "Theology 3 Course Notes," Fall 2017.

- Note the kingly language used of man
 - Affirms the kingdom mandate continues, did not end with the fall
6. Jesus as ultimate man and last Adam gives samples of dominion over the earth with His first coming (Gospels—Jesus’ healing and nature miracles are glimpses of the coming restoration of all things).
 - 1 Cor. 15:45 – Jesus as “the last Adam.”
 7. Writer of Hebrews affirms man’s right to rule the world but affirms that this does not happen yet (Heb 2:5-8).
 - This passage refers to both man AND Christ as mankind’s corporate head; its application to Christ does not exclude man, who is represented by Christ.
 - Gen. 1:26-18 → Psalm 8 → Heb. 2:5-8
 8. Jesus, the ultimate man and last Adam returns to earth and binds Satan and reigns over all in the millennial kingdom and fulfills the rule and subdue mandate (Rev 20:1-3; 1 Cor 15:24-28).
 - 3 phases: Christ the firstfruits → then those at his second coming → then the end (*epeita – eita* construction).
 - Christ has a successful kingdom reign, and then he hands the kingdom over to the father (Rev. 20 = 1000 year kingdom, Rev. 21 eternal state)
 - In vs. 27, Psalms makes a Christological statement on the basis of Psalm 8:6
 - Vs. 28 Jesus succeeds in a successful kingdom reign where man failed, and thus hands over the kingdom to God, at which point the eternal state begins. Jesus fulfills Psalm 8 and Gen. 1
 9. Those who identify with Jesus also rule and reign in the millennial kingdom as a result of their identification with the last Adam (Rev 5:10; 20:4-5). (The federal head of mankind allows other men to succeed with Him.)
 10. When the mandates to multiply, rule, and subdue are completely fulfilled by Jesus and the saints in the millennium, the kingdom then transfers to the Father’s kingdom of the Eternal State (1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 20-21). Mission accomplished! As a result of the ultimate man, Jesus, the earth has been successfully ruled over and subdued, Satan has

been defeated, and the curse has been forever removed. Man is in proper relationship with God, other people, and creation. Man's task is a success because of Jesus!

- Rev. 22:3-5, God's people are both "slaves" of God and "reign" as kings

INTRODUCTION TO HAMARTIOLOGY

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING HAMARTIOLOGY

G.K. Chesterton once wrote,

Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin -- a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or no man could be washed in miraculous waters, there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted washing. But certain religious leaders in London, not mere materialists, have begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt. Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved. Some followers of the Reverend R. J. Campbell, in their almost too fastidious spirituality, admit divine sinlessness, which they cannot see even in their dreams. But they essentially deny human sin, which they can see in the street. The strongest saints and the strongest sceptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument.

Chesterton, responding to the rejection of original sin in his theological environment, makes a poignant and powerful statement: no matter how one might or classify it, no one can deny the presence of sin and moral evil. It is a universal reality, transcending class, culture, and geography. No matter where you go or when you go, you find sinners committing sin.

Despite this obvious reality, confusion exists as to what sin is, where it comes from, and what (if any) its consequences are. It is imperative that Christians have a clear understanding of the Bible's teaching about sin for a number of reasons:

I. TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES

There is a reason that hamartiology and anthropology are paired in most systematic theology tracks: they both are concerned with humanity and its nature. Since the fall, it is impossible to understand humanity apart from the reality and effects of sin on humanity, both corporately and individually.

One of the products of the Enlightenment period was a new anthropology, a belief that mankind was inherently good, that sin was a product of one's environment—nurture rather than nature. Further, much of what previously might have been called sin was actually just due to society's ignorance. Progress in education, science, and technology is believed to aid in overcoming this ignorance, enabling people to act out their inherent "goodness" for the betterment of society. We see this kind of thinking today, where increasingly individual actions are blamed on their position in society, so that they are absolved of any personal guilt. This is paired with the concomitant belief that if we could only elevate their position in society, they would behave differently.

What this shows is a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature—primarily the presence of a sin nature. Scripture clearly teaches that we are born sinners (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3) and we demonstrate this nature by volitionally sinning (Romans 3:23). This is universally true of every human being since the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3 (1 Kings 8:46; 1 John 1:8). Thus, we cannot truly understand ourselves until we come to terms with the reality of sin in us and its effects on us.

II. TO UNDERSTAND OUR WORLD

One of the most difficult objections Christians face from skeptics is the problem of evil. As David Hume, citing Epicurus, wrote in 1779, "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" In essence, Hume claimed that the presence of evil in this world was incompatible with the reality of the omnipotent and omnibenevolent God described in Scripture. His conclusion was that this God did not exist, because evil did.

In fact, the Bible gives a clear explanation for the presence of evil in the world: sin. When sin entered the world, it not only affected mankind but the creation itself, so that there is both moral and natural evil (things like hurricanes, forest fires, etc.) in the created world. Though it doesn't necessarily make the presence of evil palatable, the Bible makes clear that the world is the way that it is because mankind sinned and rebelled against God. We cannot understand this world if we do not understand sin.

III. TO UNDERSTAND OUR CULTURE

Contemporary American culture is, in a word, shocking. The values that have been normalized and are now actively celebrated would have been unthinkable to any previous generation, yet we have seen a rapid moral decline over the past decade, a decline that gives no indication of abating. Now, even things as heinous as pedophilia and gender reconstructive surgeries on minors are being peddled as morally acceptable.

How can we understand this world that we live in? Certainly, sociologists and cultural commentators have taken their turns attempting to analyze how we got where we are. Books like

Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* have ably demonstrated the historical roots of our cultural moment. Ultimately, God's word is alone authoritative in its ability to help us understand what we see. The Biblical doctrine of total depravity explains why all declines inevitably decline morally; the noetic effects of sin help us understand how otherwise seemingly normal, rational people are unable to rightly assess moral issues. We need to have a robust, Biblical hamartiology if we are going to understand and engage with our culture.

A THEOLOGY OF SIN FROM GENESIS 1-11³

1. The potential for sin existed with test of Gen 2:15-17.
2. A fallen creature enters to tempt God's image bearers (Gen 3:1).
3. Adam and Eve failed their responsibility to God and the kingdom mandate (Gen 3).
4. A curse upon man and creation occurred (Gen 3).
5. Murder occurs with the first brothers (Gen 4).
6. A genealogy of death happens because of sin (Gen 5).
7. God's evaluation of man is that he is wicked all the time (Gen 6:5, 11-13).
8. God destroys a sinful world with a global flood (Gen 7-8).
9. God promises not to destroy sinful man so His kingdom/salvation plan can play out via the Noahic Covenant (Gen 8:20-9:17).
10. Noah's sin shows He is not the promised deliverer (Gen 9:18-29).
11. Even after flood mankind continues to rebel against God as evidenced by the Tower of Babel event (Gen 11:1-9).

The foundational chapters of Genesis 1-11 reveal that sin is a major problem for mankind. Even the global flood did not remove it since sin dwells in the hearts of men. The search for a Deliverer and Savior continues. God's plan for deliverance will start to take shape through Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant with the events of Genesis 12.

³ Reproduced from Michael Vlach, "Theology 3 Course Notes," Fall 2017.

PROPOSED COURSE OUTLINE⁴

Week 1: Introduction: Why Study Anthropology and Hamartiology?

Week 2: The Creation of Man

Week 3: The Constitution of Man

Week 4: Gender & Sexuality

Week 5: Race & Ethnicity

Week 6: Human Personhood

Week 7: Defining Sin

Week 8: The Origin of Sin

Week 9: The Transmission of Sin

Week 10: The Extent of Sin

Week 11: The Consequences of Sin

⁴ Subject to change.