

## **STUDY 7.                    Humanity (Man)**

Four main points

1.     Created
2.     Nature
3.     Depravity
4.     Destiny

### **1.     Created**

Reading:

Gen. 1:26-27; Acts 17:26; Jas. 3:9-10  
KTT 113-120  
H & W 68-70; 71-74

### **2.     Nature**

Reading:

Gen. 2:7; Mt. 10:28; Heb. 4:14; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 15:22  
KTT 120-128  
H & W 70-71; 73

### **3.     Depravity**

Reading:

Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; Job 14:1, 4; Jn. 3:6; Rom. 3:23; Rom. 5:12-21  
KTT 128–148  
H & W 82-83 (if possible 74-81 but very difficult)

### **4.     Destiny**

Reading:

John 3:16; Heb. 9:27; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 1:3-14; Rev. 21:8  
KTT 149–159  
H & W 90-93 (if possible 84-94 but very difficult)

## 1. Created

It is not possible to understand 'humanity' in isolation from God. In common with other living beings God created mankind but mankind is the pinnacle of his creative work. God created the first man 'Adam' (meaning literally 'ground' – 'earthling') from the earth. The unique quality of mankind is to be created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) but what it actually means to be made in the image of God is complex. We often use image to mean 'looks the same'. As God is invisible, to be made in the image of God clearly does not mean 'looks the same'. Clues to understanding this can be gained by considering those things that distinguish mankind from other creatures. Human beings have personality, the capacity for abstract thought and the very important gift of sensible speech. These give rise to immense potential. Human beings have a notion of morality, conscience and thoughts of right and wrong. Adam was given dominion over creation and responsibility. Potential and responsibility are coupled in humanity. At its best humanity is marked by culture, creativity, relationships and society. However, when marred, each of these shows some of the worst aspects of mankind. Abuse of human responsibility has led to some of the greatest tragedies in the world. Some of these are more obvious than others. Wars and violence are a clear departure from the purposes of God, but so is using the resources of the earth selfishly and irresponsibly, the so-called 'environmental issues' that are in the news at present.

Mankind was created to be in an intimate relationship with God, and has a spiritual dimension. God created Adam in a state of innocence, trusting and open in his fellowship with God. This relationship was nonetheless based on free choices. It was the exercise of these free choices that caused death to enter into the human experience. Adam was not created incapable of death but death does not seem to be God's intention for man.

Though the traditional teaching uses the generic term 'man' to mean all human beings (i.e. not excluding women) the modern emphasis is for language to be inclusive and therefore it is better to use 'mankind', 'humankind' and 'humanity' when possible. It is important also to note what the Bible text says: 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). The male and female relationship is at least a part of what 'the image of God' means. At the heart of our understanding of God and humanity is a loving relationship – expressed in the Trinity and reflected in humanity. 'The truest picture of what it means to be human will be found in the context of man and woman together' (Elwell and Beitzel).

## 2. Nature

Popular thought divides the human being up into body, soul and spirit. The Bible also uses the terms 'body', 'soul' and 'spirit'. The distinction between 'soul' and 'spirit' is blurred and it is hard to define the difference. Several passages place the soul alongside the spirit. Soul probably suggests physical existence, whereas spirit may imply the higher or 'spiritual' side of life. There has been some debate in the past about whether a human being is composed of two or three parts. This can, however, give rise to some dangerous unbiblical teaching. The world of the New Testament was an environment in which the language and the concepts of the Greek philosophers needed to be used. The relationship between the Old and New Testament is at this point very complex and needs to be held together carefully.

Hebrew thought did not carry within the scope of its ideas the duality of body and soul which owes a lot to Greek philosophy, particularly that of Plato (4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). In the Old Testament, 'soul' means that which is vital to human life in the broadest sense. In a narrower sense, 'soul' denoted a human being with various emotions and inner power. In Hebrew thinking, blood was the seat of life for when blood was shed death ensued (Gen. 9:4-6). The terms 'body' and 'soul' are, in a sense, convenient pegs on which to hang our thoughts. However, it is impossible to separate body and soul in a real way. In the Bible 'soul' is often synonymous with life itself and passages that use the expressing 'my soul' are just another perhaps more emphatic way of saying 'I'.

Adam, along with the beasts, was created from the dust of the earth. The breath of God animated him (Gen. 2:7). The real distinction is not between body and soul but between body and life. In Hebrew thought the essence of life '*nephesh*' was a misty vapour in the blood. A human being neither has a soul nor has a body, for the person is a unity. The two factors of the dust of the ground and the breath of life from God unite in a single, harmonious result. A human being without the breath of life is not a person but a corpse; and the breath of life without a body is not a person either. God formed 'man' and gave him the breath of life – then he became a living being.

The body is important and to be respected. The weakness and mortality of the body are evidence of sin. Both the mind and the body need to be renewed. Coming alive to God by the Holy Spirit anticipates the renewal through death and resurrection. Traditional Christianity does not teach that the body is temporary and the soul is eternal, but that beyond death there is resurrection life.

### 3. Depravity

In the Bible Adam is seen as the natural head of the human race. Sin is a combination of unbelief and disobedience. As all are 'in Adam' the sin of Adam affects the whole human race. Paul wrote that sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to the whole of humanity because everyone sinned (Rom 5:12). This did not mean simply that all people sin and die but rather that the guilt and penalty of Adam's sin was directly imputed to his descendants, so that all succumb to death. This has led to the doctrine of 'original sin'. In short this means that every human being has a persistent tendency to go against God's will. All are subject to the law of sin (which has a bias or a pull away from God). Whether sin is hereditary or learned makes very little difference in practice but like most things it is a combination of both factors.

Two ancient theologians, Augustine and Pelagius disagreed about the consequences of the fall. Augustine taught that as a consequence of the fall, every person born into the world has a bias to sin because of an inherited fallen nature. Martin Luther, John Calvin and other Reformers used the term 'total depravity' to express the teaching that sin corrupts the entire human nature. Total depravity does not mean that human beings or individuals are as bad as they possibly can be, neither does it mean that they have lost the image of God, but that they are spoiled in every part by sin and are unable to be acceptable before a holy and righteous God. The pattern is something like: unbelief, disobedience, guilt, condemnation, separation and death.

Three understandings of sin are useful. The root of all sin is unbelief and this has consequences. Firstly, sin is falling short of the target (Rom. 3:23). Secondly, it is straying from the path (trespassing) and, thirdly, it is disobeying God's commandments.

The fall of Adam from his position of communion with God has affected the whole human race. Reconciliation with God is necessary but this is only possible by his grace. It is the human experience that though men and women would like to love and serve God and do what is right that they find themselves unable to achieve even their own modest targets. Even in the supposed exercise of human freewill people often choose what it is hurtful to God, others and themselves.

The relationship between God and humankind and individual human beings is inter-linked. Therefore one broken relationship breaks the whole.

#### 4. Destiny

The relationship between divine sovereignty and human freewill is a mystery. It is human nature to want a clear scheme of things but this is often impossible. The modern trend is to side-step these issues. Some regard the whole notion of divine judgment as somewhat primitive while others seem to teach that all are forgiven because Christ has died for all 'universalism'. Neither of these is an orthodox Christian view. No Christian denomination officially accepts them.

The major schools of thought are that taught by Augustine, later refined by the French theologian Jean (John) Calvin (1509-64), popularly called 'Calvinism' and that taught by Dutch theologian Jakob Hermanszoon (1560-1609) commonly known by his Latinised name 'Arminius' and popularly called 'Arminianism'. Calvinism stresses divine sovereignty and is the view adopted by the 39 Articles of the Church of England; the Baptist Confessions of Faith; the Reformed Churches (URC, FIEC, Presbyterian). Calvinism teaches salvation for God's elect but perdition for the 'non-elect' or reprobate. A danger is to become fatalistic.

In response to Calvinistic teaching, Arminius taught of a 'prevenient' or 'preventing' grace that is sufficient for belief despite human corruption. Along with the Reformation scholars, Arminius insisted on 'free grace' because it is obtained through God's redemption in Christ, not through human effort. The Calvinist Synod of Dort (1618-19) rejected the articles of the Remonstrants (1610) and defined the five points of Calvinism (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints).

John Wesley, the early Methodists, and the wider Wesleyan-Arminian family (which includes the Salvation Army, Holiness Churches and many of the Pentecostal Churches), embraced the Arminian understanding. Wesley favoured and refined the Arminian scheme, stressing human freewill and the necessity for a personal response to God's grace. The danger is that it can make the human response rather than divine grace the ground for salvation (i.e. semi-pelagianism). Critics of Arminianism accuse it of being universalism dressed-up because it insists that Christ died for all (if only in a potential fashion). Though the Arminianism of the Wesleys comes through strongly in their hymns there is a subtlety with phrases such as 'Thy sovereign grace to all extends'.

The difference between death as a spiritual state and physical death is not always clear in the Bible. What are we to make of eternal death? Immortality does not simply mean survival. It points to a quality as well as a quantity of life.