

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 1, Importance of the Doctrine of Humanity

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. Session 1, Importance of the Doctrine of Humanity.

Welcome to the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin with biblicalelearning.org. Let's pray even before we do anything else.

Gracious Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for revealing yourself to us. Thank you for sending your son to be our savior and your spirit into our hearts that we might know and love and serve him.

Bless us, we pray. Encourage us. Teach us.

Lead us in the way everlasting, we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. I'm Robert Peterson.

I taught for 35 years in two evangelical seminaries of a reformed persuasion but certainly evangelical and the second one, evangelical and reformed. I'm retired. I spend four hours a week day researching, editing, and writing, which spoils me.

I love teaching adult study school. I teach with a ministry called RITE, Reformed International Theological Education, several times a year via Zoom in Ukraine. I'm also a theological advisor for Child Evangelism Fellowship, and I love doing these lectures.

This time, the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin overview. After an introduction on the doctrine of humanity or theological anthropology, it's a technical term, we'll talk about the origin of human beings, affirming that we are special creations of God made in his image, and the image of God is our big topic for the doctrine of humanity, a very important one, and we'll look at it from multiple perspectives to try to get a real handle on what that means. Then, constitutional makeup.

Are human beings so unitary as modern science would tell us that there's no such thing as an inseparable soul, or are we two parts, as the church historically has said, with a separate immaterial part, sometimes called spirit, sometimes called soul, usually simply personal pronouns are used in the Bible, or are we three parts where soul and spirit are not only distinguished but are ontologically distinguished as different parts or constituents of the human being? To anticipate my conclusions, I'll reluctantly say we are two parts, but the way we were made is unitary. We are now united in body and soul, and after the resurrection of the dead, we will be united

forever. Then we'll talk about the doctrine of sin, Lord willing, starting with a biblical description, which is quite complicated because the doctrine of sin is pretty complicated.

Then, we'll pay attention to a neglected theme today, which is original sin. In the doctrine of original sin, we learn of the fall of our first father, Adam, actually Adam and Eve, but the original sin has to do especially with Adam's sin being counted against the human race in Genesis 3. The Old Testament gives the results of it, but we have to wait until the New Testament, especially Romans 5:12 through 19, or 21, to have an explanation of how Adam's sin affects us all. Then, briefly treat some of the effects of the fall, especially the matter of whether unsaved human beings are able or unable to make a move toward God to save themselves.

The doctrine of humanity, I want to give credit to Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* from which I get good information concerning the importance of this doctrine and then a number of images that really help us contrast. We could call them secular or natural images, with the biblical portrayal which is man and woman made with their genders in the image of God. Erickson wrote his Christian theology book, my goodness here, oh 40 years ago and at the time he could have been recognized as the dean of evangelical theologians because before that we had Charles Hodge's systematic theology, Lewis Berkhoff's Dutch-American systematic theology, Harmon Bovinck's great Dutch systematic theology was not translated into English until maybe 15 years ago, so Erickson came on the scene and it was new, he was clear, he had good education including post-doctoral work with the famous German theologian Wolfhard Pannenberg and Erickson wrote a very clear, helpful book, solidly evangelical to describe his own theology, he would be a moderate or four-point Calvinist, he is Baptist but always kind and fair toward others, pre-millennial but post-tribulational, not charismatic but not anti, a very solid brother, not especially skilled in historical theology although he uses it and not especially an active detailed exegete but he works with the bible carefully, anyway I used his systematic theology in my first 10 years of teaching before moving to a more reformed and evangelical school where I used Berkhoff the next 25. The importance of the doctrine of humanity.

The doctrines of scripture and of the Christian faith, therefore, are interrelated. In a sense, every doctrine is the most important doctrine when it is the one under discussion, and it's like my favorite book of the bible is the one I'm having devotions in right now, and I'm just amazed at both Testaments and the wonders of, I'll stop, I won't start mentioning names, but wow, anyway the matter goes further than that, not only is the one we're studying, the doctrine we're studying right now very important but in different ways, different ones are very, very important. The doctrine of scripture, of course, is the most important doctrine epistemologically; it is our doctrinal framework for all the rest.

Where do we learn the doctrine of God and humanity and sin and Christ and redemption and the holy spirit in the church and last thanks from holy scripture. I am committed to the reformation understanding of sola scriptura, scripture alone, which does not mean technically the bible is the only authority we use because if we think about it, we all use reason, I hope when we read the bible, we are in some kind of a tradition, to be traditionless is to make oneself vulnerable to repeating the errors of the past, although there's a danger of being overly traditional, I understand, and we all appeal to experience as well, if we're honest and perceptive, so sola scriptura doesn't rule out appeals to tradition, reason, and experience, but it means in my own understanding to practice sola scriptura is to deliberately and consistently elevate the word of God over our traditions, reason, experience, and any other source of authority that we have. Do I claim to do it perfectly? No, but it is my goal.

So, the doctrine of scripture is the most important for epistemological purposes. Had God not revealed himself to us and preserved that revelation in scripture, we would not know of our need and of his solution to that need. The doctrine of God is the most important doctrine ontologically from the perspective of the theory of being since God is the ultimate reality, the source, and sustainer of all that is.

I lament that there are tremendous errors today, even in evangelical theology, by abuses of the doctrine of the love of God. It keeps cropping up. Almost no evangelicals hold to universalism, the view that everybody's saved, but I can show you writings that say, of course, everyone will be gathered into the love of God in the end because God is love, or exponents of annihilationism argue the same way.

Surely, God will not torment people forever in hell because God is love. Therefore, after people have paid the price, the penalty for their sin, they will be exterminated, which some tell us is the worst possible judgment. No, it isn't.

They'd be put out of their misery if that were true, and it isn't true. Although God is love, we shouldn't use that wonderful biblical teaching to oppose other equally biblical teachings. Or how about this one? I'm just astonished and saddened that the chance after-death theology continues to draw evangelical adherents.

I'm the external reader for a PhD brother at Dallas Seminary, working with the notion of what happens to those who haven't heard, and I haven't worked in that area for 15 years, but in that time, more and more bona fide evangelicals are saying, it seems to me contrary to any scriptural evidence, I know the tricky verse in 1 Peter 3 and then 1 Peter 4 refers back to it, but my goodness. Hebrews 9, it's appointed unto human beings once to die, and after that comes the judgment. John 8, twice Jesus says, if you do not believe I am he, you will die in your sin.

If you do not believe I am he, the promised one, you will die in your sins. There's not a chance after death. It's a false hope that is perpetuated in the name of the love of God.

Once again, it is not really promoting God's love. And I'll stop, but yes, God is love, but before 1 John says twice in chapter 4 God is love, it says in chapter 1 right out of the box, God is light, which means he is holy. It probably has a double meaning and is truthful, but certainly, in the context, at least he is light.

There's no darkness in him at all. He's entirely truthful, but especially he is holy and will not brook rivalries, rivals, and he will and must punish sin. The doctrine of Christ is the most important doctrine in terms of our redemption because without his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, there would be no basis, and there would be no salvation.

The doctrine of salvation is the most important existentially, Erickson reminds us, for it deals with the actual alteration of our lives, our existence. The church is the most important doctrine relationally since it treats believers in the Christian community. Eschatology is the most important doctrine in history, for it tells us about our eternal destiny.

There are several reasons why the doctrine of humanity is especially important. This doctrine is important because of its relationship to other major Christian doctrines. Since human beings are the highest of God's earthly creatures, the study of humanity brings to completion our understanding of God's work, and in the sense of God himself, since we do learn something about the creator by seeing what he has created.

Later on, I'll share an intriguing idea by Robert C. Newman, retired professor of the New Testament, concerning our being made in God's image in a creative way and biblical way that'll help us see that very point. Only humans are said in the Bible to have been made by God in his own image and likeness, Genesis 1:26-27, which we'll look at in detail later. Thus, a direct clue to the nature of God ought to emerge from the study of humans and from the roles that we play, ordained by God, which mirror his roles.

That's where that image-mirroring idea comes in. The doctrine of humanity also sheds great light on our understanding of the person of Christ since the Bible teaches that the second person of the Trinity, the eternal son, took on genuine human nature. This fact means to understand the nature of Christ, it is necessary to understand the nature of humanity.

We must make certain we distinguish essential humanity as it came from the hand of God, from existential or empirical humanity, as we now find it post-fall in actual

existence. This theological method works in both directions. The study of the human nature of Jesus will give us a more complete understanding of what humanity was really intended to be because if we look in the mirror, unfortunately, we get a distorted view of what humanity ought to be.

Further, the doctrine of humanity is also the gate to the study of yet other doctrines with which the connection is not so obvious. If God had not created humans, there would presumably have been no incarnation, no atonement, and no need for regeneration or justification. There would have been no church.

This means that extraordinary care must be taken to formulate correctly our understanding of humanity. What humans are understood to be will color our perception of what is needed to be done for them, how it was done, and their ultimate destiny. Thus, the effort expended on this doctrine is worthwhile, for here, the issues are overt and consequently can be dealt with openly and consciously.

Extra effort expended on the doctrine of humanity will, therefore, be especially worthwhile. The doctrine of humanity has an unusual status. Here, the student of theology is also its object.

This sets anthropology apart from doctrines like theology proper, doctrine of God, and Christology, although not from doctrines like soteriology, which, of course, is concerned with the salvation of humans. Our anthropology will determine how we understand ourselves and consequently how we do theology, or even what theology is, to the degree that it is thought of as a human activity, which it certainly is. The doctrine of humanity is a point where the biblical revelation and human concerns converge.

Theology is here treating an object that everyone, or at least virtually everyone, admits exists. Modern Westerners may not have any certainty as to whether there is a God, whether there really was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, or whether the miracles attributed to him actually occurred. They have little or no question, however, about their own reality, for this is an existential fact with which they live day by day.

And unless they've been influenced by some, in some way, by Eastern modes of thought, it is probably the one fact that is the most certain in their minds. This means that the subject of humanity is a starting point for dialogue. If one begins a discussion with a non-believer about what the Bible says or what God is like, the listener's attention may be lost almost before it is gained.

Many people today are skeptical about anything that purports to transcend sense experience. In addition, the modern mind often tends toward humanism, making humans and human standards the highest object of value and concern. This is often

manifested in an anti-authoritarianism that rejects the idea of a God who claims the right to tell one what to do, or an authoritative book prescribing belief and behavior.

But modern humans are concerned about themselves, what is happening to them, and where they are going. They may not think much about their understanding of humanity; they may rather passively accept their values from the general opinion of the time, but they are interested in and concerned about their welfare and place in life. Thus, while the conversation will not end with humanity, it's an apt place to begin some of the time.

Because humans in every culture are aware of themselves, their problems, and their needs on both an individual and collective basis, much is said and asked about humanity. Hence, this is a fruitful place for beginning a discussion with non-believers. But the discussion will not end there, for the questions raised by a non-believer's self-understanding will lead to answers that go some distance from the starting point of the discussion.

For example, the questions raised will lead to the explication of humans' relationship with God, which will, in turn, require an explication of God's nature. Thus, although the discussion may eventually range far afield, it will have begun where the person's interest lies. Thus, the doctrine of humanity is one point where it is sometimes possible to get a foothold in the mind of the modern secular post-person or the post-modern secular person.

It at least begins with topics that are on the mind of the person on the street. The doctrine of humanity, third, is particularly significant in our day because of the large amount of attention given to humanity by the various intellectual disciplines. The number of disciplines that make human nature or human behavior the primary object of their attention continues to grow at a rapid pace.

New departments focusing on previously unexplored areas of behavioral science come into being regularly at universities. New cross-disciplinary studies are arising. Even business schools, which formerly concentrated on economic and organizational problems, are increasingly addressing the human factor and finding that it often is the most important.

Medical schools are becoming more conscious that doctors do not treat symptoms or illnesses or bodies but human beings. Accordingly, doctors must be aware of the personal dimensions of the practitioner-patient relationship. And, of course, the traditional behavioral sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science continue to investigate human creatures.

There's a heightened interest in human problems. Ethical issues dominate discussions, particularly among the young, whatever their primary issue be. Racial

relationships in the 50s, the Vietnam War in the 60s, the environment in the 70s, continuing today, a nuclear arms race in the 80s, and crime in the 90s.

And now, in the first quarter of the 21st century, matters of the identity of human beings, sexuality, and so forth are everywhere. The questions are raised: what should we do? What is the right? And are sometimes answered with rather dogmatic: who are we? Dogmatic statements are questions that start one on a course that may well lead to the answer of a transcendent God who's the basis of moral norms. Would that it were so.

It should be noted here that political debate, often quite vigorous in nature, deals with issues that are at root ethical, although that is sometimes hidden. Is material prosperity more important than a good education? Is economic security to be valued more than freedom of choice? These are issues that really pose the question, what is human nature? What is the good for human beings? Whereas our previous point, dealing with humanity as a starting point for discussion with unbelievers, is valuable. Now, we're thinking more in terms of the collective self-concern of society, which is a more intellectual matter.

Because of the increasing number of academic disciplines focusing on humanity, Christian theology is at an opportune position to enter into dialogue with other perspectives and methodologies. Just as in a highly personal discussion with an individual, it is also vital in academic dialogue that we have a thorough and accurate understanding of human beings from the standpoint of biblical theology, as well as a familiarity with how they're viewed from perspectives other than that of theology. We must know how humans are perceived by these other approaches and how these views compare and contrast with the theological.

For the doctrine of humanity is important because of the present crisis in human self-understanding. When Erickson worked those words, he had no idea of where we would be today and the confusion of young people concerning sexual identity. It is shocking to me, and it is very sad that people are adrift without a compass, the very compass that Christian theology could provide.

Not only is there a general interest in the question, but what is the human? There's also confusion regarding the answer to various recent events, and developments cast doubt on many of the answers formerly given to the question. One development is the struggle of young people to discover who they are. The quest for identity has always been a part of normal maturation, of forming one's independent outlook on life, values, and goals.

Recently, however, it seems to have taken on larger dimensions. For one thing, many parents do not really instill values in their children or advocate values they themselves do not manifest in their lifestyles. Friends of ours that we encouraged to

send their children to Sunday school said, oh no, no, no, husband and wife come from different religious backgrounds, and we want our children to grow up neutral and choose for themselves when they're adults.

And my comment, as sweetly as I could give it, not with a judgmental spirit, is you are training your children to be agnostics. There is no such thing as moral or theological neutrality in the raising of children. Either you have commitments, or you don't, and whether you like it or not, you will transmit those commitments to your offspring.

The traditional sources of values, the church, university, and the state, have become suspect and, in some cases, hostile to traditional Judeo-Christian values. Who am I? What is life? Where is the world going? A second development contributing to the crisis of self-understanding is the loss of historical roots. In many cases, history has become a lost field of knowledge regarded as impractical or irrelevant.

Since Erickson wrote it, it's been attacked and deliberately rejected. And that's such a sad thing. We don't need to copy history, but we surely understand who we are and our place in the world and in time by having some knowledge of history.

People and even whole nations are losing touch with who they are. Traditions have been cast aside, but traditions can teach us a great deal about who we are. The ultimate question is, where did the human race come from? Christianity answers that question and thus gives us a sure sense of identity.

We are creatures of God. We stand over against our maker. We are answerable to him.

We find our highest meaning in him. We are made in his image and likeness, and he made us from the very beginning for fellowship with himself. The entire human race owes its beginning and its continued existence to the will and work of God, who was created because of love.

The final development leading to the crisis in human self-understanding relates to traumatic occurrences in national life. What is our country or our world doing? Political assassinations, terrorism, wars, and every week, there's another shooting in a school in the United States of America. These are very sad things indeed.

The contradiction in the human race is deep and profound. On the one hand, we are capable of incredible accomplishments, including space travel and huge leaps in communication, information processing, and medicine, but we seem unable to control ourselves. Morally neutral technology is employed to positive ends, but also evil ends.

Crime increases, as do class and racial tension and strife. Humans, on the one hand, seem to think that they're almost gods reaching for the stars. On the other hand, they seem to be devils capable of cruelty that is not found in the animal kingdom.

The self-understanding of the human is indeed at a crisis point, calling for intensive investigation and careful reflection. Five, this doctrine also affects how we minister to others. Our conception of human beings and their destiny will greatly affect how we deal with them and what we seek to do for them.

If we think of humans as primarily physical beings, then the most important consideration, and perhaps virtually the only one, will be the satisfaction of physical drives in the most effective fashion. If we think of them as primarily rational beings, then our ministry will appeal chiefly to their intellects and will present carefully prepared arguments and expositions and reasoned justifications of actions and ideas. Our basic premise will be that the way to obtain desirable action for those with whom we deal is to persuade them that it is the best course to follow.

And how many times have we heard politicians say that education is what we need to do? It's true, but it is insufficient. We actually need a revival of the gospel and of people who know and love the Lord, who will give themselves to education and to loving their fellow human beings and so forth. If we see humans as primarily emotional beings, our appeal to them will be basically in terms of emotional considerations.

If we see them as essentially sexual beings, then making sure they have achieved satisfactory sexual adjustment will take priority in our ministries. In terms of both the ends we pursue, and the way we seek to attain them, our conception of humans is crucial to our work with and for them. Images of humanity.

The foregoing considerations should convince us that the doctrine of humanity is a particularly opportune one for us to study and utilize in our dialogue with the non-Christian world. To identify the questions contemporary culture is asking, however, we need to look more closely at some of the more prevalent current conceptions of humanity because so many different disciplines deal with human nature. There are many different images.

Human beings are machines. Human beings are animals. I'm going to come back and work with these in detail.

Human beings are sexual beings. Boy, today is that amazing. Amazingly blurred and distorted and confused.

Human beings are economic buildings and beings selling one's soul to the company. Existentialism views human beings as pawns of the universe with little meaning. Free

beings is another way to view human beings, often evident in political and social views.

Social beings is another option. A person is viewed as a set of relationships in which he or she is involved. The Christian view of humanity, of course, touches base with all of these but is not to be identified or equated with any one of them.

Images of humanity. How about we take that up next time? Next time, we'll do that. Having thought about the importance of the doctrine of humanity, we'll work together through these images of human beings in our next lecture.

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