

# **Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin,**

## **Session 2, Images of Humanity**

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 2, Images of Humanity.

Welcome back to our lectures on humanity and sin. Specifically, we're still pursuing an introduction to the doctrine of anthropology, and we're thinking about now images of humanity, most of which are not biblical, but it's valuable for us to understand how the world views human beings as a machine, number one. One of these perspectives is what humans are able to do.

The employer, for example, is interested in a human being's strength and energy, as well as the skills or capabilities possessed. On this basis, the employer rents the employee for a certain number of hours a day. Humans are sometimes regarded as machines, which is particularly evident when automation results in a worker being displaced from a job.

A robot, being more accurate and consistent, often performs the work better. Moreover, it requires less attention, does not demand pay increases, and does not lose time because of illness. The chief concern of those who have this conception of humans will be to satisfy the needs of the person or machine that will keep it functioning effectively.

The health of the workers is of interest, not because of possible personal distress, but in terms of working efficiency. If the work can be done better by a machine or by the introduction of more advanced techniques, there'll be no hesitation in adopting such measures. For the work is the primary goal and concern.

In addition, the worker is paid the minimum necessary to get the task accomplished. Business Week. The robot invasion begins to worry labor.

Business Week, March 29. 1982 already. This view also creeps into the church to a degree.

Persons may be valued according to what they can do. Churches may often reflect this in their choice of pastors, wanting someone who can perform a given ministry, ministerial, or ministerial task effectively and efficiently. There may be a special concern to enlist members who can get the church's work accomplished.

Potential converts may be viewed primarily as giving units who can help finance the programs of the church. One pastor referred to visitation of the elderly and shut-ins,

members of his congregation as junk calls. Makes me angry because such people cannot contribute to the much to the work of the church.

Shame on such a pastor. In all these instances, the conception of a human being as a machine is present. People are valued for what they can do rather than what can be done for them, which is what ministry is.

In this approach, persons are basically regarded as things, as means to ends rather than as ends in themselves. They are a value as long as they are useful. They may be moved around like chess pieces as some large corporations do with their management personnel, manipulating them if necessary to accomplish their intended function.

An animal is another view of human beings. Another view sees that humans primarily are members of the animal kingdom and derive from some of its higher forms. Humans have come into being through the same sort of process as all other animals and will have a similar end.

There is no qualitative difference between humans and the other animals. The only difference is one of degree, a somewhat different but not necessarily superior physical structure, a larger cranial capacity, a more highly trained stimulus response mechanism. This view of humanity is perhaps most fully developed in behavioristic psychology.

Here, human motivation is understood in terms of biological drives. Knowledge of humans is gained not through introspection but by experimentation on animals. Human behavior can be affected by processes similar to those used on animals.

Just as Pavlov's dog learned to salivate when a bell was rung, human beings can also be conditioned to react in certain ways. Positive reinforcement, rewards, and less desirably negative reinforcement, punishment, are the means of control and training. On behavioristic psychology, see for example Paul Young, *Motivation of Behavior, the Fundamental Determinants of Human and Animal Activity*, 1936.

A sexual being, Sigmund Freud regarded sexuality as the key to human nature. In a world in which sex was not openly discussed or even mentioned in polite societies and society, Freud developed a whole theory of personality around human sexuality. His model of human personality was tripartite.

There is the id, an essentially amoral part, neither moral nor immoral, a seething cauldron of drives and desires. Derived from the id, the ego is the conscious component of the personality, the more public part of the individual. Here, the forces that, from the id, modify somewhat, seek gratification.

The superego is a censor or control of the drives and emotions of the person. The internalization of parental restraint and regulation, or at least the erection of the child's activities. The great driving force or source of energy is the libido, a basically sexual force that seeks gratification in any possible way and place.

Basically all human behavior is to be understood as modification and direction of this plastic sexual energy. This energy may be sublimated into other types of behavior and directed toward other goals, but is still the prime determinant of human activity. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1933.

According to Freud's view, serious maladjustment can result from the way this sexual energy is handled. Because the id drives and strives for complete and unhampered gratification, a situation that would make society impossible, society imposes limitations on this struggle for gratification and the aggressiveness that frequently accompanies it. These limitations may then produce frustration.

Serious maladjustments also occur when a person's sexual development is arrested at one of the early stages of the process. These theories of Freud rest on the concept that all human behavior basically derives from sexual motivation and energy. While the theoretical scheme developed by Freud has not won very extensive assent, thankfully, his basic supposition is widely accepted.

In a rather crude fashion, the playboy philosophy assumes that a human is primarily a sexual being, and sex is the most significant human experience. Much of today's advertising seems to espouse this idea as well, almost as if nothing can be sold without a sexual overtone. The preoccupation with sex suggests that, in practice, the view that humans are essentially sexual beings is widely held in our society.

I once heard a lecture by the outstanding Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman on the Song of Solomon, and he started by saying, although the world many times overly sexualizes life, sometimes conservative Christians under do it. And he said this book of the Bible is mainly about the intimate relationship between husband and wife. And he handled it, in fact he has a commentary, a scholarly commentary on the Song of Solomon as well.

While the theoretical scheme, or just did that, excuse me, sometimes Christianity, with its ethical codes, and particularly evangelical Christianity, is criticized for being too judgmental concerning sex. Joseph Fletcher was among those who voiced this criticism. Joseph Fletcher wrote *Moral Responsibility* in 1967.

But is Christian ethics unduly judgmental, or is it simply making a reasonable response to the excessive role of sex in our society? C.S. Lewis observed that a considerable portion of the activity within our society is based on an inordinate preoccupation with human sexuality. And I quote from *Mere Christianity* of C.S.

Lewis, "you can get a large audience together for a striptease act, that is to watch a girl undress on the stage." Now, suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theater; he makes this point; he's arguing to absurdity, but it is good to simply bring a covered plate.

I'm sorry, he's tickling my funny bone. You go to a country where large crowds are gathered by simply bringing a covered plate on the stage and slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon. Would you not think that in that country, something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think that something was basically weird about that? And would not those from another time period, a past time period that is, think there was something weird about the state of the sexual instinct among us? Close quote.

An economic being. Another view is that economic forces are what really affect and motivate the human being. In a sense, this view is an extension of the view that the human is primarily a member of the animal kingdom.

It focuses on the material dimension of life and its needs. Adequate food, clothing, and housing are the most significant needs of human beings. When persons have the economic resources to provide these in adequate measure for themselves and their dependents, they are satisfied or have thereby attained their destiny.

The ideology that has most completely and most consistently developed this understanding of humanity is, of course, communism, or dialectical materialism, as it is more accurately labeled. This ideology sees economic forces as moving history through progressive stages. First came slavery.

In this stage, the masters of society own all the wealth, which includes other human beings. Then came feudalism, where the lord-servant relationship was the model. Then came capitalism, where the ruling class owned the means of production and hired others to work for them.

In liberal capitalism, there is still private ownership of the farms and factories, but the government imposes certain limitations on the owners, thus making the laborer's bargaining position easier. Eventually, the time will come when there will be no private ownership of the means of production, according to communist ideology. They'll be owned entirely by the state.

The economic gap between the classes will disappear, and with it, there will be conflict between them. In this classless society, evil will wither away. Talk about fool's gold.

Yikes. In the final stages of the dialectic, the motto of communism will be realized, quote, from each according to his abilities to each according to his needs, close quote. Sheesh.

I laugh, or I cry. Material and economic forces will have driven history to its ultimate goal. The roots of this, of course, are the writings of Karl Marx.

If dialectical materialism is the most complete formulation of this philosophy, it is not the only one. By the way, Karl Marx's *Capital* 1936 is a great source of information. On a popular level, the concept that humans are motivated primarily by economic forces seems to be the philosophy of a large percentage of American politicians, and unfortunately, it may be correct.

Presumably, they reflect what their polls tell them are the real concerns of most of their constituents. These economic forces are at work influencing such matters as population trends and others. Consider as an example that it's not primarily climate, at least not directly, that influences where most people live.

Rather, it is resources, the availability of jobs, a pawn of the universe. Among certain existentialists, particularly, but also in a broader segment of society, we find the idea that humans are at the mercy of forces in the world that control their destiny but have no real concern for them. They are seen as blind forces, forces of chance in many cases.

Excuse me. Sometimes, they are seen as personal forces. But even then, they are forces over which individuals have no influence, such as political superpowers.

This is basically a pessimistic view that pictures people as being crushed by a world that's either hostile or, at best, indifferent to their welfare and needs. The result is a sense of helplessness, of futility. Bertrand Russell expresses eloquently this feeling of, quote, unyielding despair.

And I quote him. And as Erickson quotes him from his writing, *Mysticism, and Logic*, 1929, quote, that man is the product of causes which have no provision of the end they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms, that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave, that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are designed to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. Belief in the powerless is man's life. On him and all his race, the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark.

Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on in its relentless way. For man condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day. Proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate for a moment his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone a weary but unyielding atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned, despite the trampling march of unconscious power." Yuck.

Boy, do we need to study the last things and the hope that Christ brings to his people. That is hopelessness. That is a suicide waiting to happen.

The existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre has developed this theme of absurdity and despair in several of his writings. One of these, *The Wall*, tells the story of a member of a revolutionary group who has been captured. He's to be executed unless he discloses the whereabouts of the leader of the group Gries, G-R-I-E-S.

He knows that Greece is hiding in a cellar, but he's determined not to reveal this information. As he awaits his death, he reflects upon life, his girlfriend, and his values. He concludes he really does not care whether he lives or dies.

Finally, as a joke, he tells the guards that Greece is hiding in the cemetery. They go off to seek him. When they return, the hero is freed.

For unknown to him, Greece had left his hiding place to go to the cemetery and had been captured there. The life of the hero, a life he no longer wants, has been spared because of an ironic twist of fate. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Wall* in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Kaufman, a famous, brilliant atheistic philosopher at Harvard, 1956.

Albert Camus has also captured this general idea in his reworking of the classical myth of Sisyphus. This is a tongue twister. Sisyphus had died and gone to the netherworld.

He had, however, been sent back to earth. When recalled to the netherworld, he refused to return, for he thoroughly enjoyed the pleasures of life. As punishment, he was brought back and sentenced to push a large rock up to the top of a hill.

When he got it there, however, it rolled back down. He trudged his way to the bottom of the hill and again pushed the rock to the top, only to have it roll back down. He was doomed to repeat this process endlessly.

For all his efforts, there was no permanent result. Albert Camus, the myth of Sisyphus, is in that same book, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre. Boy, what an exciting read.

Ah, goodness. Whether immersed in fearful thoughts about death, the forthcoming natural extinction of the planet, or nuclear destruction, or merely in the struggle against those who control the political and economic power, all those who hold a human being are basically a pawn at the mercy of the universe are gripped by a similar sense of helplessness and resignation. No kidding.

A free being. The approach that emphasizes human freedom sees the human will as the essence of personality. This basic approach is often evident in conservative political and social views.

Here, freedom from restraint is the most important issue, for it permits humans to realize their essential nature. The role of government is simply to ensure a stable environment in which such freedom can be exercised. Beyond that, a laissez-faire approach is to be followed.

Excessive regulation is to be avoided, as is paternalism, which provides for all one's needs and excludes the possibility of failure. Failure with freedom is better than security from want but with no real choice. Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*, a Personal Statement, 1980.

According to those who hold this view, basic human needs are information that will enable intelligent choice. In terms of the three requirements for action, knowing what should be done, willingness to know, willingness to do what knows should be done, and the ability to do what one wills to do, the only real problem lies with the first factor. For once, one has enough information to make an intelligent choice regarding what should be done, which, of course, takes personal goals and abilities into account; there's nothing internal, nor provided government ensures a proper environment, external, to prevent that person from taking that action.

This view maintains that humans have the ability to choose and that they must do so. To be fully human, one must accept the responsibility of self-determination. All attempts to disavow responsibility for oneself are improper.

A common excuse is genetic conditioning. "I can't control my behavior, it's in my genes, I inherited it from my father, close quote. Another is psychological conditioning. I was raised that way, I can't help being the way I am." Or social conditioning; as I grew up, I didn't have a chance; there was no opportunity to get an education, close quote. All these excuses are examples of what existentialism calls inauthentic existence, unwillingness to accept responsibility for oneself.

This failure to exercise one's freedom is a denial of the fundamental dimension of human nature and, thus, a denial of one's humanity. Similarly, any effort to deprive others of their free choice is wrong, whether that be through slavery, a totalitarian government, an excessively regulative democracy, or a manipulative social style. William Ernest Henley's poem, *Invictus*, powerfully embodies this philosophy that a human is, in essence, a free being.

"Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul. It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." The social final perspective is that an individual human is fundamentally a member of society.

Membership in and interaction with a group of persons is what really distinguishes humanity. Someone who does not interact with other social beings is less than fully human. There's a sense in which one is not truly human unless one is functioning within a social group, not fulfilling the human end or telos.

This view sometimes includes the idea that human beings do not really have a nature. The person is a set of relationships in which he or she is involved. That is to say, the essence of humanness is not in some substance or fixed definable nature, but rather in the relationships and network of connections one has with others.

Through the fostering of these relationships, the individual can become fully human. The church can help a person realize his or her destiny by providing and encouraging positive and constructive social relationships. That's true, and yet that is not what human essence, the essence of human nature, is.

Thus, we conclude this lecture with the Christian view of humanity. We have seen a variety of conceptions of the nature of humanity, none of them satisfactory as a view by which to live. Some, such as the view of the human as an animal, may serve well enough as an abstract theory, but even the biologist does not think of his or her newborn child as simply another mammal.

Others' views fail because even when what, from their perspective, are the fundamental human needs, for example, economic or sexual needs, are met, there is still a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. Some views, such as the mechanistic idea, are depersonalizing and, therefore, frustrating. One can consider these to be satisfactory understandings of humanity only by disregarding aspects of one's personal experience.

The Christian view, by contrast, is an alternative compatible with all of our experiences. The Christian view of humanity is that a human being is a creature of



God, to be understood as having originated not through a chance process of evolution but through a conscious, purposeful act of God. The reason for human existence lies in the intention of the supreme being.

I should have mentioned the bibliography for the human as a social creature, Thomas Oden, *The Intensive Group Experience*, 1972. Tom Oden is famous for his conversion to evangelical Christianity and a very bright mind given over to liberal matters and concerns with very good writings, became a very bright mind given over to biblical, although from an evangelical Methodist perspective, the biblical and conservative Christian concerns that did a lot of good to a lot of people. He chose the name for his project over against Neo-Orthodoxy, he called his Paleo-Orthodoxy, intent not to invent anything new, but to revel in the teachings of the fathers, medievals, reformers, and the Puritans and so forth.

Second, concerning the Christian view of humankind, the image of God is intrinsic and indispensable to humanity. While we will explore this in a future lecture, now we observe that whatever sets humans apart from the rest of creation, they alone are capable of having a conscious, personal relationship with the Creator, and of responding to Him, knowing God, understanding what He desires of them, loving, worshipping, serving their Maker, and finding their purpose and great delight in those ends. These responses most completely fulfill the Maker's intention for human beings.

The human also has an eternal dimension. The finite point of beginning in time was creation by an eternal God, who gave humans an eternal future. Thus, when we ask what is good for humans, we must not only ask in terms of temporal welfare or physical comfort but also another, and in many senses, more important, dimension, which must be fulfilled.

Consequently, we do no favor to humans when we shelter them from thinking about the issues of eternal destiny. Yet, humans, to be sure, as a part of the physical creation and the animal kingdom, have the same needs as other members of those groups. Our physical welfare is important.

We are also unified beings. Thus, pain or hunger affects our ability to focus on the spiritual life. And we are social beings, placed within society to function in relationships.

We need others, and they need us. We cannot discover our real meaning by regarding ourselves and our own happiness as the highest of all values, nor find happiness, fulfillment, or satisfaction by seeking it directly. Ironically, this is true.

Our value has been conferred on us by a higher source, and we are fulfilled only when serving and loving that higher being, the Lord God Almighty. It is then that

satisfaction comes as a byproduct of commitment to God. St. Augustine, I'm trying to remember his terminology, distinguishing it, delighting in it, and using it.

And he said we do not use God. We delight in God. And if we do that, then we use all the things he has given us, including our abilities and the features of our world, to delight in him.

But to attempt to use God is idolatrous, and it's a total misunderstanding of who he is and who we are in his sight. It is then that we realize the truth of Jesus' statement, quote, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.

Mark 8:35. Many of the questions being asked directly or implicitly by contemporary culture are answered by the Christian view of humanity. In addition, this view gives the individual a sense of identity.

The image of a human as a machine leads to the feeling that we are insignificant cogs, unnoticed and unimportant. The Bible, however, indicates that everyone is valuable and is known to God. Every hair on our head is numbered.

Matthew 10:28 through 31. Jesus conferred great significance and value to human beings. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Rather, fear him, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. A reference not to the devil, but to God himself. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.

But even the hairs of your head are numbered. We are valuable to God. Fear not. Therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

Beautiful rhetoric from the mouth of our Lord. Jesus spoke of the shepherd who, although he had 99 sheep safely in the fold, went and sought the one that was missing. Luke 15:3 through 7. So, Jesus told them this parable: what man of you having a hundred sheep, if he's lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country, not even just a pen, and go after the one that is lost until he finds it.

When he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so I tell you, there'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Joy in heaven, yes, joy for God himself. We are of great value to our maker, our sustainer, and our redeemer who has the consummation as his goal for history and

for the lives of his people. Each human being is regarded by God as the lost sheep if you will.

We are contending here that the Christian view of humans is more pertinent to them than is any competing view. This image of humanity accounts for the full range of human phenomena more completely and with less distortion than any other view. This view, more than any other approach to life, enables us to function in ways that are deeply satisfying in the long run.

I'm going to close this section of our notes on Introduction to Humanity with Psalm 8, which is so beautiful. It's a creation psalm. It celebrates Adam and Eve's blessed positioning in God's world.

But let us not forget the bookends, the inclusio that surrounds the statement of human significance and worth and role. Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic your name is on all the earth. Yes, it's a creation psalm.

But first of all, it's a psalm giving glory to God for his highest creature, Adam and Eve, and the human race that came from them. You have set your glory above the heavens. That's awfully high.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes to still the enemy and the avenger. God goes macro. His glory is above the heavens.

Then he goes micro. Little babies glorify him by the squeals and noises that they make. Macro again.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars that you have set in place. Micro again. What is the man that you're mindful of, and what is the son of man in parallel with a man that you care for?

Yet you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. Our creator made our first parents and us, by extension, crowned with glory and honor in his image, like him in important ways. They weren't made just capable of knowing God.

They were made knowing God. You have given him human beings as created dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Psalm eight ends as it begins. Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth? What is the human? Yes, that's the most important question to which the

biblical revelation gives the best answer. That is to which we will set and turn our attention next time as we consider the doctrine of humanity specifically.

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