

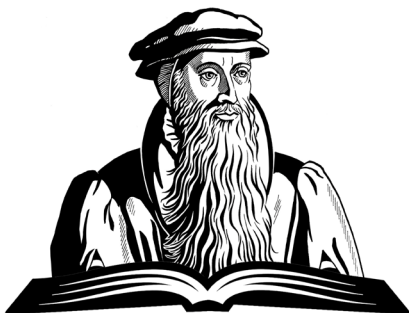
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Robert D. McCurley, ThM

Module 3:
**ANTHROPOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF MAN**

Lecture 1
INTRODUCTION



The John Knox Institute
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Module 3 ~ The Doctrine of Man

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Module 3 ~ Lecture 1

Introduction

We're given an historic account, taken from the Highlands of Scotland. This is the northern section of the nation of Scotland. There was a godly Presbyterian minister there, and he had hired a Highland maid to serve in the kitchen of the manse, where the minister lived with his family. And they assembled for worship on that first day when the kitchen maid had come to work for them, and in family worship, he asked her the question, "How many commandments are there?" And she was unable to give him a clear answer. And upon further investigation, he discovered that she knew very little about the truth of God's Word. And so he sought to explain that to her. And in his parting counsel, he encouraged her to pray every day these words: "Oh Lord, show me myself." Show me myself. Well it happened, in God's providence, that things took place that caused her to have to leave the manse, and so he lost touch with her. And a period of time, months, had passed, and when he was visiting in his parish, he came to a home where there was a sick boy. And he discovered, upon visiting that home, that his sister was this Highlands kitchen maid that had previously worked for him. And she came to him, and said to the minister, "Oh, minister, I have been desperate in my condition! Ever since I was with you, I have been praying every day, Oh, Lord, show me myself." And she was under an overwhelming sense of a conviction of sin, of her lostness, and her need for a Savior. And the minister said to her, "Well, then, dear lass, I would encourage you now to begin praying every day, Oh, Lord, show my thyself." Oh Lord, show me thyself. And took that counsel and went about praying that. And we're told that, after a space of time, that she was actually brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospel, that she came to know the Lord, and to be a true believer. And you notice in that brief account, that she came to both a true knowledge of herself, and a true knowledge of God. And as we'll see, these two things are connected in the Scriptures.

This series of seven modules, or courses, takes us through an introductory study of Systematic Theology. In the opening lectures of the first module, we provided an overview of the scope and purpose of these seven courses. The first module covered First Principles—we had ten lectures on the Doctrine of Scripture. And the second module covered twelve lectures on the Doctrine of God. Those first two modules provide the basic principles or axioms for all that follows in our study of Systematic Theology. Everything else is built upon them and flows from them. God, as the principle Being, is the foundation of all knowledge, and we started by first treating Scripture, because we know the Doctrine of God in Systematic Theology comes from His self-revelation in Scripture, through Christ, by the Spirit. The scope of this third module is to explore what the Bible teaches about man. And what we learn from Scripture about God leads us to a right understanding of man.

Well, men are tireless in their pursuit of understanding themselves. Their origin, their make-

up, their identity, their purpose, and destiny, and so on. But true knowledge of man is not found within himself. It is discovered in what God reveals in Scripture. So if you wish to gain a deeper understanding of man, these lectures aim to benefit you. The lectures in this third module, on the Doctrine of Man, are introductory, not exhaustive, and they are intended to furnish you with a foundation that you can build upon in your further studies. As you'll recall, from the first module, theology, broadly defined, has to do with the study of the knowledge of God, and all that He has revealed for us to believe and do. We noted that it is the doctrine of living unto God through Christ, thus addressing both our thinking and our living. The Doctrine of Man, therefore, is an indispensable component to Systematic Theology. We will learn, for example, about man's nature. Man, made as the image of God, his freedom of will, original sin, man's total depravity, as well as God's relating to man by way of covenant. But in this first lecture, we'll consider a general introduction to the doctrine. And so, as with all of our other lectures, we'll be following the same pattern, and we'll begin by considering a passage of Scripture to open up our consideration of the Doctrine of Man.

We read in Psalm 8, verses 4 to 6: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Well, what do we learn from these few verses? Well, first of all, these questions about man arise out of the consideration of God and His works. Notice that the Psalm opens and closes with the same words. It says, "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" David raises his thoughts to contemplate the glory of God. Verse 1 continues: "who hast set thy glory above the heavens." There is an order here. He begins with God, and then considers man. Because in order to truly understand man, we must first have a knowledge of God.

Secondly, having thought about who God is, he then considers what God does—His works. In verse 3, we read: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained." David is reflecting on the wonder of God in His work of creation. His eyes are lifted upward to consider the vast expanse of the heavens, with their innumerable stars—stars he cannot number, and a universe so massive that he cannot comprehend it. And all of this constitutes merely the work of God's fingers, as it were, which He has ordained.

Thirdly, with these elevated thoughts of God and His work of creation, David then asks the question, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" In light of the transcendent glory of God, and in light of the vastness of God's created universe, David stands amazed at how small and insignificant man seems by way of contrast. In a parallel passage, Psalm 144, verses 3 and 4, we read: "LORD, what is man that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him! Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away."

Fourthly, it is not just that God takes notice of man. David says, in verse 4: "and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" God stoops to meet with man, to enter into relationship with man, to draw near to man, and this is a wonder of wonders. The eternal Creator, who is above the highest heavens, condescends to bring finite creatures into relationship with Himself. David is humbled and amazed at these realities.

Fifthly, having confessed his lowliness and unworthiness, David turns to speak about the dignity and place of privilege that God confers on man. In verse 5, he says: "For thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." God has raised man, as a lowly creature, to a position of glory and honor. God created man as the image of God, which

we'll be considering in detail, in a future lecture. Man is lower than the angels, in terms of created power, but he is crowned with glory and honor that, in other ways, excels the angels.

Lastly, David speaks of the role and responsibility that God gave to man in the earth. Verse 6 continues, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." Well, as you recognize, this harkens back to the Garden of Eden, and the commission given to man, in Genesis 1, verses 26 and 28. The Lord has given to man stewardship, and authority, and rule under God, and over the livestock, the beasts, the fowl, and the fish—the rest of the created order. This service of God is also a place of privilege that belongs to man. So when we sing Psalm 8, we are faced with both body man's humility and man's dignity. And a Biblical understanding of the Doctrine of Man leads us to see, believe, and embrace both of these realities—man's humility, and man's dignity.

Well, secondly, we'll consider a doctrinal exposition of this introductory material. John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer, opened his most famous work, which is called, or entitled, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He opened with these words: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." So these two, the knowledge of God and ourselves, are intertwined. On the one hand, as Calvin writes, "The knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find Him." Seeing ourselves drives us to God. But on the other hand, without the knowledge of God, there is no true knowledge of self. Again, Calvin says, "It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself, unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating Him, to scrutinizing himself." Well, this is precisely what we saw earlier in Psalm 8.

Secondly, nothing, therefore, is more important than coming to know God in Christ, and to see His glory. So, all that we learned in the second module, on the Doctrine of God, is essential to a right consideration of what we learn about the Doctrine of Man. Man's fallen, sinful inclination is to take glory to himself, to exalt himself in pride. Jeremiah 9, verses 23 and 24, says: "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." Well, Paul picks up this same theme and says, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." You'll that both in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 31, and 2 Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 17.

Thirdly, the salvation of sinful men is not found within themselves, nor confined to a knowledge of themselves. Natural and false religion says, "Know thyself, save thyself," whereas, Christ said, in John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." A true knowledge of ourselves is indispensable, but not as an end in itself. Seeing our sinful selves, our lostness, must lead us to a saving knowledge of God in Christ.

Fourthly, in Genesis 1 and 2, we learn that man was made in the image of God, for communion with God. He enjoyed that place of privilege, of living in God's favorable presence, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; but sin brought disruption to that nearness to God, and a distortion of man's true knowledge of God, and of himself. Fallen man is blind to the light, ignorant of the truth, and spiritually dead to the things of God. First Corinthians 2, verse 14, says, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The problem is that man is self-deceived. And by definition, self-deception means that they are unaware of their condition. All of man's hubris and boasting about his knowledge and about modern progress are foolishness, due

to his ignorance of his true condition, and of who God is. First Corinthians 3, verse 18, says, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.”

Fifthly, the light of the gospel shines into man’s innate darkness, bringing the blinding brightness of the reality about man’s perilous condition. It declares the glory of God, as Creator, Judge, Sovereign, and the all-powerful Deliverer, who is able to save sinners to the uttermost. In revealing God, it also shows man himself—his depravity, his deadness, and his desperate dependence upon Christ’s saving mercies. Isaiah experienced this—you’ll read about it in Isaiah 6. He has this vision, and he sees the glory of the Lord, and His train filling the temple. And that sight of God leads him to say, “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” He goes on to say, “for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Knowledge of God showed him who he was, and it was necessary for an angel to take a coal from the altar of sacrifice—that picture of atonement, prefiguring Christ’s atoning work, and to place that coal upon his lips, in order that he might be cleansed.

Sixthly, and lastly, man’s primary purpose of existence is not found within himself. The Westminster Shorter Catechism opens, in its first question and answer, by saying that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.” His chief end, his primary purpose. So you cannot understand man, detached from God. Man’s origin, and identity, and meaning, and purpose, and destiny are all connected to God—understanding who God is, as the Creator, the Governor, the Judge, and the Redeemer of His elect people.

Well, thirdly, we should consider this introductory material polemically. First of all, we have to recognize that knowledge of man is not found within himself, so the notion that many people have is that we don’t need the Bible, and we don’t need things from God, that we can, left to ourselves, figure out ourselves through the study of ourselves. But that would be leaving man to the darkness that is within himself. He would be groping about in the dark, unable to see or understand anything about himself. We learn that to see clearly, we must see objectively. We have to see from outside ourselves. You know, when we’re studying something, even in the created world, we’re looking from the outside upon the habitat of a creature, their eating habits, where they live, what they do, how they communicate, and so on, and so forth. Well, we’re able to see objectively by seeing ourselves through the lens of Scripture, through God’s revelation outside of us, and what He tells us about ourselves. So, to see clearly, we must see objectively.

But also, to see truly, we must see what God sees, and what God says. And so, we need to be brought under the light of the knowledge of God, in order to see, What does God say about us? How does He describe us? Because He is truth itself, and therefore, and therefore, we must receive the truth from Him. Too often men have a too high a view of themselves. Natural man is always seeking to dethrone God, seeking to put man in the place of God. And so people will speak about being the master of their own destiny, and so on. Well, this is, quite frankly, foolishness—it’s silliness. It’s absolutely ridiculous to think that man is somehow able to occupy the place of controlling everything in himself and around himself in this world, and has, within the scope of his very limited understanding, a knowledge of things. No, we must humble ourselves, submit ourselves to the Lord, and receive from Him His own gracious Word. Let God be God in all things.

We also have to confront the limits of science. In our day, there is a great misnomer, that science is the be-all and end-all of knowledge. And so people think that you can apply the scientific method to all areas of knowledge, including knowing man. And, on one hand, there’s some usefulness, because when it comes to understanding man’s body, science has much to contribute. We’re looking

at man biologically, we're using empirical data, observation, experimentation to learn about bones, and joints, and sinews, to learn about cells, and the chemical makeup of the body, blood, and how all of the different pieces and functions fit together—that's helpful. But science is limited to that. Science can tell us nothing about man's soul. And so science is limited in its ability to inform us about the whole man. Nor can science tell us about man's origin, or man's purpose, or man's true identity, or man's destiny. And so we need to confront this misguided idea of thinking of science as the source of knowledge—the sole source of knowledge in understanding man. It has something to contribute, but it's very limited in what it contributes to our understanding of the nature of man. To understand the whole man, we are dependent upon the revelation that God gives us in His Word.

Lastly, we need to confront every inclination to detach the knowledge of man from the knowledge of God. So any pursuit of knowing man, understanding man, his various components, that is, in any way, not connected to the knowledge of God, will lead to a dead end. It will be futile and fruitless. The knowledge of man is grounded in the knowledge of who God is—the One who created man, who has designed man, who has given man purpose, and who has condescended to interface and interact with man.

Fourthly, under this overarching outline of our lecture, we can now draw some practical applications to ourselves. First of all, we see very clearly that man was made for communion with God. Man was made for communion with God. And so anything less than that results in a complete loss. If we do not recognize that, in the beginning, God created man in order to have communion with him, if we do not understand the consequences of the fall, the loss of communion with God, and the sin and misery that comes as a consequence, we will have very little to work with, in our studies. No, we need to see that the aim is for man to walk in communion—the creature with the Creator Himself. Now, for those who have been brought into a state of grace, those who are born-again, and who have been converted, brought to faith and repentance, that shapes your whole perspective on life. That in this world, your number one priority is to seek and to preserve that communion with God, through the ordinances that He's given to us, in His Word, in prayer, and so on. And so we are to keep up this priority of drawing near to the Lord, and of seeking to walk with Him, in union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, the knowledge of man leads to a need for a saving knowledge of God. And so, coming to see man—understanding the fall, original sin, man's total depravity, the implications on his will, and so on—seeing the alienation that exists between God and man, therefore seeing man truly, leads us to the priority for a saving knowledge of God Himself. To be brought to know God through the Lord Jesus Christ, as a Redeemer and as a Savior, and as the One who reconciles His own people unto the Lord, and secures for them, through His atoning sacrifice, the forgiveness of their sins.

Thirdly, we see that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever, referring to the Shorter Catechism, question #1. And so, the number one priority, and the number one pursuit that we are to have in life, in this world, is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. So whether we eat or drink, we're to do it to the glory of God—so the smallest things in life. Yes, it's true that we seek the glory of God in His worship, both public and private, but we're also to seek to bring Him glory in every detail of all of our life. And that communion that we were speaking about leads the believer into the enjoyment of God as well. This is participating in what will ultimately be the believer's final destiny, because we will glorify God best and most, when taken to glory, and brought in the end to the consummation of the ages, resurrection of the body, and dwelling with God forever. There, we will, for eternity, glorify and enjoy Him, and we are to be busy about that here and now.

Fourthly, and lastly, man is to be seen as a worshiper. The Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Those are the words that Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, in John, chapter 4. Man is a worshiper. I mean, that's why, if you want to understand man, that's why you'll see, when man is without the knowledge of the triune God of the Bible, and without a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, they still worship. They'll worship sticks and stones, or golden objects. They'll worship the stars in heaven, or the earth. They'll worship themselves. But they've been made to worship. In their depravity, they seek all of these idolatrous outlets. But man has been made by God to worship the living and true God, and to do so through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our chief occupation is worship. It will be our chief occupation for eternity, and it is our privilege here, as well. Psalm 16, verse 8, says, "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Verse 11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Man is to be seen—if he is to be seen rightly, he is to be seen as a worshiper, and called to worship the living and true God.

Well, in conclusion, in this introductory lecture, we've established from the Scriptures the importance of the Doctrine of Man, within Biblical Christianity, and for the believer's thinking, practice, and experience. In the remainder of the lectures throughout this third module on Systematic Theology, we will be delving into a more detailed consideration of what God has revealed about man. And as we do, we will be led with David, in Psalm 8, to sing, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"