

Theological Equipping Class

Anthropology

June 1, 2025

What is anthropology?

Secular vs. Christian

How anthropology relates to theology proper, hamartiology, Christology, ecclesiology...

“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.” (John Calvin, Institutes)

“We must now speak of the creation of man: not only because among all God’s works here is the noblest and most remarkable example of his justice, wisdom, and goodness; but because, as we said at the beginning, we cannot have a clear and complete knowledge of God unless it is accompanied by a corresponding knowledge of ourselves.” (John Calvin, Institutes)

“Since the human is the highest of God’s earthly creatures, the study of humanity brings to completion our understanding of God’s work, and, in a sense, of God himself, since we do learn something about the Creator by seeing what he has created.” (Millard Erickson)

Why *man*?

1. Scripture speaks of humanity in general using the masculine in particular.
 - *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* (Genesis 1:27)
 - *This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created.* (Genesis 5:1-2)
 - NT: Anthropos (man) | son
 - “the practice of using the same term to refer (1) to male human beings and (2) to the human race generally is a practice that originated with God himself, and we should not find it objectionable or insensitive.” (Wayne Grudem)
2. A theological rationale – male federal headship
 - *For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.* (Romans 5:17)

What is Man?

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:3-4)

What you think man is will determine what you think is wrong with mankind, if anything, and what needs to be done to make it right.

- are humans primarily physical, rational, or emotional?
- Mere machines
- Sexual beings
- Economic beings
- Mere animals

THE defining question of the day (Carl Trueman, *Rise & Triumph of the Modern Self* & related works)

- When does a person acquire the imago dei and therefore sanctity and rights?
- Are gender & sexuality distinct things?
- What is marriage?
- What is the cultural mandate and the enduring call to work and rest?
- Is our identity to be found in our race?
- What is politics?

“a human being is a creature of God, made in the image of God” (Millard Erickson)

Creator

Creation

Created for God's glory

- *everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:7)*
- *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)*
- *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)*
- What is the chief end of man? “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

“the image of God is what makes humans human” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology)

“Human beings are wonderful because they are made in God's image.” (Francis Schaeffer)

The Image of God (Latin: *imago dei*)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Genesis 1:26)

Image vs. likeness?

On analogies: similarity and dissimilarity

- *When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. (Genesis 5:3)*

Similarity & dissimilarity, transcendence & immanence, communicable & incommunicable

"The analogy between God and ourselves will always have disanalogy with it." (John Frame)

What is the analogy? What is the image?

Common method: Venn Diagram

1. Determine as many attributes of God as you can from Scripture
2. determine all the various attributes of man that distinguish him from the rest of creation
3. determine which of attributes are on both lists
4. deem one or more of those shared attributes to be the *imago dei*

What is it?

- A. Intellectual ability (*homo sapiens*: the thinking being)
- B. Volitional ability
- C. Morality
- D. Gender
- E. Dominion

Functional, substantial, relational views

Substantial: something in the substance or essence of humanity (rationality, language, etc.)

Relational: man's ability to relate to God vertically or to each other socially and horizontally

- "the image is not something a human is or does. Rather, the image is related to the fact that God willed into existence a being that, like himself, can be a partner." (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*)

Functional: something one does (worship, exercise dominion, make moral decisions)

What is it? Either/or OR both/and

Example of the atonement:

is it penal substitution, ransom, Christus victor, or moral example? Yes!

Is the imago dei substantial, relational, or functional? Yes.

“There has been extensive debate in the Christian church about the image of God in humanity. Some sought it essentially in human rationality, others in dominion over creation, others in freedom of the will or moral qualities such as love or justice.” (Herman Bavinck)

“The whole person is the image of the whole deity.” (Herman Bavinck)

“this image extends to the whole person. Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God.” (Bavinck)

“The whole human being is image and likeness of God, in soul and body, in all human faculties, powers, and gifts. Nothing in humanity is excluded from God’s image; it stretches as far as our humanity does and constitutes our humanness. The human is not the divine self but is nevertheless a finite creaturely impression of the divine.” (Bavinck)

“a human being does not bear or have the image of God but that he or she is the image of God” (Herman Bavinck)

THE Reformed perspective

- The image of God consisted in “those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all other living creatures” (Calvin)
- “the likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man’s nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures” (John Calvin, Institutes)
- “every way in which man is like God is part of his being in the image or likeness of God” (Wayne Grudem)
- “the image of God embraces everything that is human” (John Frame)
- “One of the chief questions that anyone can ask is: “Who am I?” The Bible answers that we are living creatures made by God to bear his own image. The stamp of God is seen in our moral and spiritual nature, in our shared love within community, in our dominion on God’s behalf, and especially in our calling to communion with God in knowledge and righteousness.” (Richard Phillips)
- “What the full meaning of man’s God-likeness is cannot be determined until all that man and God are is known. Man as man — a complex, physical/spiritual being — in his wholeness, not his parts, is like God. It is not enough to say he reasons, nor is it enough to say he is addressed, for Satan, too, reasons and is addressed. Our definition of the *imago Dei* must be broad because the only sure statements we have about the *imago* are broad. The definition I offer is this: The *imago Dei* is *that in man which constitutes him as him-whom-God-loves.*” (John Piper)

Summary Thoughts on the Imago Dei

1. The image of God is universal
2. The image was corrupted, but not lost
 - “the Bible’s depiction of the human race is that it today is actually in an abnormal condition. The real human is not what we now find in human society, but the being that came from the hand of God, unspoiled by sin and the fall. In a very real sense, the only true human beings were Adam and Eve before the fall, and Jesus.” (Millard Erickson, Christian Theology)
 - “God image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him [Adam], yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.” (John Calvin)
 - “even though we grant that God’s image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity.” (Calvin, Institutes)
 - *Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.* (Genesis 9:6)
 - *With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.* (James 3:9)
3. the image is not limited to one particular thing, but is holistic
4. the image means that we are like God, but not God
5. the image means that we are not mere animals
6. the image which was corrupted in the fall is being renewed in Christ and will one day be fully recreated
 - *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* (Colossians 3:10)
 - *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (2 Corinthians 3:18)
 - *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* (Romans 8:29)
 - *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.* (1 Corinthians 15:49)
 - *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* (Romans 8:29)
 - Christ Himself is the image of God. He is the perfect representation of God:
 - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* (Colossians 1:15)
 - *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...* (Hebrews 1:3)
 - *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* (2 Corinthians 4:4)

An Image in a Garden: A King and a Kingdom

I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. (Ecclesiastes 2:4–6)

Implications of the Imago Dei

1. We belong to God.
2. We should pattern ourselves after the perfect image, the Son.
3. We should respect others made in the image of God.
4. We can better mirror the image by being conformed to the image of Christ.

Monism, Dichotomy and Trichotomy

- Are humans basically bodies or souls? Can those be separated or are they inseparable? Is there a difference between the human soul and the human spirit?

Monism: mankind is a radical unity

- Nothing but a body
- Nothing but a soul
- Problem: dealing with death and intermediate state
 - *And 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. (Matthew 10:28)*
 - *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)*

Dichotomy vs. Trichotomy

“All Christians agree that God created us as a material (or physical) and immaterial (or spiritual) unity. But not all agree on the nature of the immaterial. Some argue that the immaterial dimension in human nature is divided into two distinct and separate faculties: soul and spirit. They are thus called Trichotomists: the three “parts” or “faculties” being the body, the soul, and the spirit. Others believe that the immaterial dimension cannot be so easily subdivided in this way. The soul, spirit, heart, mind, will, and affections are but different expressions for the variety of functions of the singular spiritual aspect of human nature. They are thus called Dichotomists.” (Sam Storms)

Trichotomy

- Pop theology
 - *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*
 - *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

Arguments against Trichotomy

- “Soul and spirit in Scripture repeatedly occur in parallelism and interchangeably.” (Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics)
 - *And 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. (Matthew 10:28)*
 - *and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. (1 Corinthians 7:34)*
 - *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. (James 2:26)*
 - *Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. (John 12:27)*
 - *After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” (John 13:21)*
 - *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.. (Hebrews 12:23)*
 - *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. (Revelation 6:9)*
 - *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)*
 - *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... (Luke 1:46–47)*
- Things that trichotomists say that one does, the other is often described as doing.
- Soul and spirit are not the only terms used to describe man’s inward constitution.
 - *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)*

- Trichotomy is sometimes stressed in ways that lead to other errors.
 - Apollinarianism
 - anti-intellectualism
 - Pagan philosophical roots
 - “The tripartite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy, which conceived of the relation of the body and the spirit of man to each other after the analogy of the mutual relation between the material universe and God. It was thought that, just as the latter could enter into communion with each other only by means of a third substance or an intermediate being, so the former could enter into mutual vital relationships only by means of a third or intermediate element, namely, the soul.” (Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology)
 - “Rejected by virtually all major theologians in all streams of the Christian tradition as a speculative Greek philosophical notion rather than a Biblical conception, trichotomy is very likely the reigning notion of human nature in American Evangelical circles today. With few exceptions, the Christian church has affirmed, with one voice, that human nature is two-fold. (Kim Riddlebarger)
- What are we? embodied souls or ensouled bodies.
- Why is this important?
 - Thinking rightly
 - Understanding horror of death
 - Ministering to the whole person

What are we? Who are we? What distinguishes us from God and from the rest of creation?

- “a human being is a creature of God, made in the image of God” (Millard Erickson)