

S T U D Y G U I D E



# A Shattered Image

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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# Man: The Supreme Paradox

## MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Dr. Sproul affirms Calvin's paradoxical notion that in order to know God we must know ourselves, and vice versa. Contrary to this idea stands modern attempts to understand human nature, without reference to God. This has resulted in a crisis in the modern philosophical study of man. Current approaches to attempt to define man through only one characteristic of his being. Yet no characteristic, by itself, adequately explains who we are as human beings. In this lesson, Dr. Sproul surveys contemporary models of man in order to better understand our cultural setting.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to summarize the history of the study of the nature of man
2. To be able to define several contemporary models of human nature
3. To understand that all the contemporary models are, at best, incomplete portrayals of man

## QUOTATIONS

*Since [modern, secularistic] views of man consider one aspect of the human being to be ultimate, apart from any dependence on or responsibility to God the Creator, each of these anthropologies is guilty of idolatry; of worshiping an aspect of creation in the place of God. If, as the Bible teaches, the most important thing about man is that he is inescapably related to God, we must judge as deficient any anthropology which denies that relatedness.*

—Anthony Hoekema

## LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The focus of this series is the critical question, "What is man?"
  1. The psalmist (Ps. 8) asks, in light of God's glory, "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"

2. John Calvin asserted that we cannot know God until we know man.
  3. Thus, knowing God and knowing man are reciprocal, for we are made “in the image of God.”
- B. Most modern understandings of man are without reference to God.
1. The most common definition of a human being is *homo sapiens*.
    - a. *Sapientia* is the Latin word for “wisdom.”
    - b. Hence, our distinctive trait, according to many, is our intelligence.
  2. Blaise Pascal stated that man is the supreme paradox of all creation.
    - a. Man’s grandeur consists of his ability to contemplate his future.
    - b. His misery consists of his ability to project onto his imagination a better life than he has now; hence, he becomes aware of his shortcomings.
- C. There are four historical phases in the philosophical study of man; the current phase is in crisis.
1. The overriding concern of the first phase (the ancient Greeks) had to do with metaphysics, i.e., where man came from beyond his physical existence.
  2. In phase two, the focus shifted to the question of epistemology, i.e., how we define what it means to be human.
  3. The third phase considered man in his historical context, focusing on man’s relationship to society.
  4. The fourth and modern phase concentrates on anthropology (the study of man) and asks the question, “What does it mean for us to exist as ‘human beings?’”
- D. There is an astonishing variety of views among thinkers regarding how best to define what it means to be human.
1. Modern man is defined in terms of biology and zoology, e.g., “the naked ape.”
  2. Plato described man as “a featherless biped.”
  3. Karl Marx called man *homo faber*, “man the maker.”
  4. Modern existentialism finds man’s uniqueness in being *homo volens*, which focuses on man’s ability to choose.
    - a. Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Urbmensch* is one who lives according to his own choices, independent of the masses.
    - b. Jean-Paul Sartre’s conclusion is that “man is a useless passion.”
  5. Sigmund Freud’s chief concern was that man’s sexuality underlies and drives the choices he makes.
  6. Man as *homo religiosus*, i.e., one who is incurably religious, is another evaluation of man’s defining trait.
  7. John Calvin called man *fabricum idolarum*, an “idol-maker.”
  8. The concluding observation is that all these traits are facets of our humanity, no one of which fully explains who we are.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The most common definition of a human being is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. *Homo volens*
  - b. *Homo religiosus*
  - c. *Homo faber*
  - d. *Homo sapiens*
  
2. *Sapientia* is the Latin word for:
  - a. Man
  - b. Wisdom
  - c. Will
  - d. Religious
  
3. Which branch of philosophy asks how we know what we know?
  - a. Epistemology
  - b. Metaphysics
  - c. Rationalism
  - d. Ontology
  
4. Anthropology is the study of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Mammals
  - b. Man
  - c. The person of Christ
  - d. Culture
  
5. Who described man as a “featherless biped”?
  - a. Marx
  - b. Sartre
  - c. Plato
  - d. Pascal
  
6. Which philosopher originated the concept of the *Urbmensch*—one who lives according to his own choices, independent of the masses?
  - a. Heidegger
  - b. Sartre
  - c. Kierkegaard
  - d. Nietzsche
  
8. \_\_\_\_\_ called man *fabricum idolarum*, an idol maker.
  - a. Calvin
  - b. Luther
  - c. Pascal
  - d. Freud

## BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Psalm 139:23. If only God can search the heart and examine the mind, how can we begin to understand the nature of man?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–17. How do we account for the author’s observation of mankind that God has “put eternity in their hearts”? How does this view compare with some of the non-Christian views of man surveyed by R.C.?
3. Of the views R.C., described, which is comparable to the observations Solomon makes in Ecclesiastes 3:18–22? What is Solomon’s conclusion in verse 22?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 2:17–26. How can a man find satisfaction in his work (v. 24) if he’s constantly frustrated by the prospect of what will become of that work (vv. 17–20)?
5. What does Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 tell us about man in relation to his pursuit of pleasure?
6. Lord Acton said, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Does Ecclesiastes 8:2–15 confirm or refute that statement?
7. What does Ecclesiastes 8:16–9:12 have to say about the purpose and destiny of man?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Blaise Pascal consider man to be the supreme paradox? Was he right in his assessment? What did he consider to be man’s uniqueness?
2. Is man an animal? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the practical implications of how we define humanity?
4. What does it mean to be treated with dignity? Why is this such an important question today?

## APPLICATION

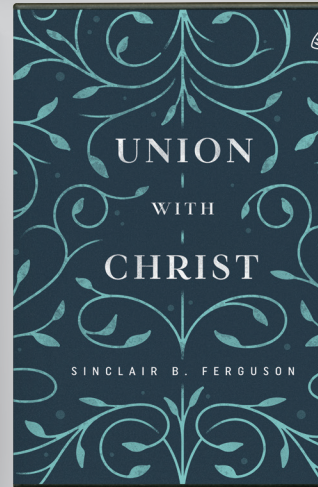
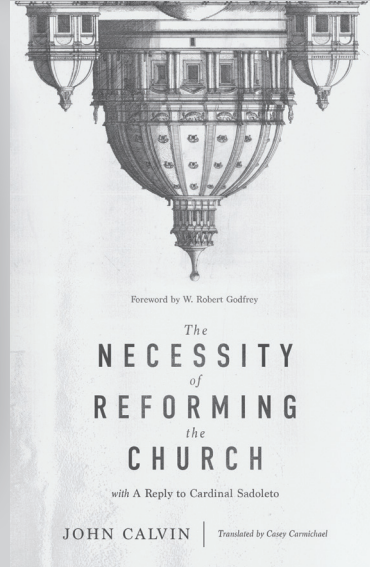
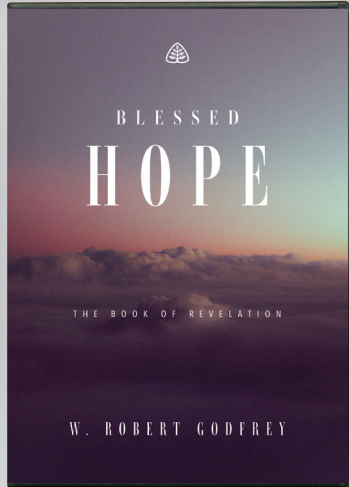
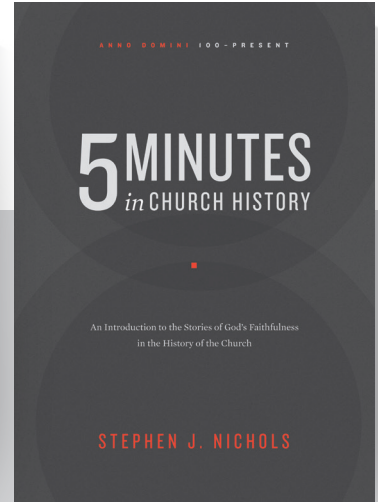
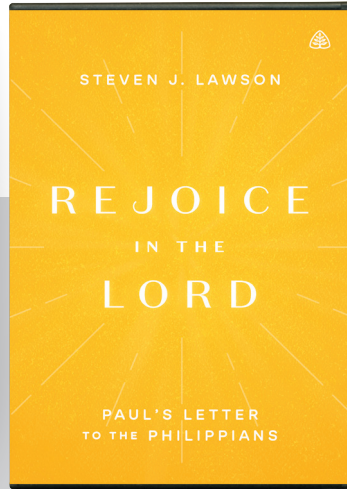
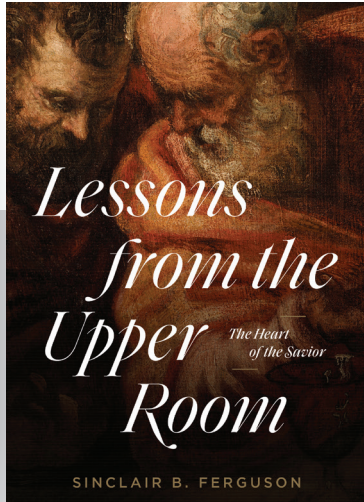
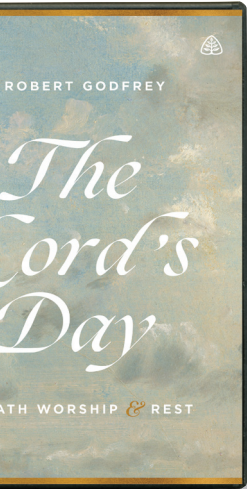
1. Psalm 8:4 asks, “What is man that You are mindful of him?” What does God say about your value to Him in this verse? Why does God value you?
2. When asked, “Who are you?” or “What do you do?” what is your usual response? Does what you do give you your sense of value?
3. During the next week, note how often people around you demonstrate a low view of humanity. How will you strive to maintain a higher personal view?

## SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY

Machen, J. Gresham. *The Christian View of Man*



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