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R. C. SPROUL

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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## Chapter One

# The Supreme Paradox

When I was in high school, my biology teacher told me that my value as a person was \$24.37. He was adding up the value of all the minerals in the body—zinc, copper, potassium, etc. Today, thanks to inflation, that total would be around \$160. That’s still a paltry sum. But it is one way to take the measure of a man.

Other attempts to define man have tried to understand him as simply one variety of primate. Desmond Morris once had a best-seller titled *The Naked Ape*, in which he said there



## Are People Basically Good?

are some eighty-nine kinds of primates—chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas, baboons, monkeys—but there’s one that is distinguished from the rest. It is distinguished not so much by its intelligence but by the fact that it’s naked. Man is distinct by the fact that he has to manufacture artificial clothes to cover his nakedness. Evidently, man is the only one of these eighty-some varieties of primate that has a problem with nakedness—and therefore he has a problem with guilt. Man is the only creature in all of creation that has artificial garments, and the Scriptures tell us that this is not to keep us warm but to cover our shame.

Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher said, “Man is the supreme paradox of all creation.” Man is the creature possessing the highest grandeur in all of the created universe; at the same time, he is the creature that endures the most abject misery of all creatures in the universe. Pascal said man’s grandeur is located in his unique ability to contemplate his own existence. Man alone can think of the future and speculate upon or imagine a better life than he currently enjoys or could ever bring to pass, and this is the source of his misery.

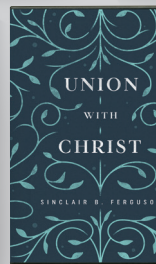
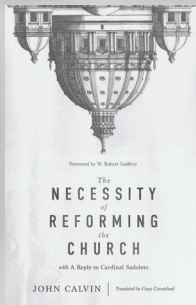
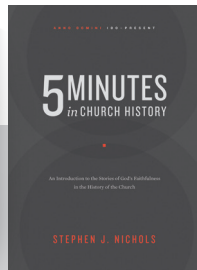
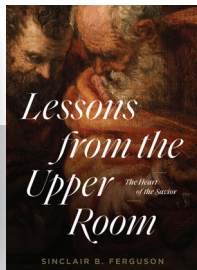
As humans contemplate their existence, they always come around to this basic question: What is man? This

question has far-reaching implications, and the answer one gives has a profound impact on how one lives. One theologian has said that how human beings understand their own existence determines how they think, how they behave, and the type of culture that they produce; thus, the culture that we live in is a product of our understanding of what it means to be human. In this book, we will explore what Scripture says about the nature of man, including such related topics as the image of God and the reality of sin.

In our day, most attempts to understand what it means to be human do not begin with Scripture but rather proceed from a worldly perspective. The most common definition for a human being—or for what it means to be human—is the scientific name *Homo sapiens*, meaning “wise man.” This term, in distinguishing man from all other creatures in the animal kingdom, does so in terms of intelligence or wisdom. In almost every era of Western civilization, philosophers and theologians have zeroed in on man’s thinking capacity as the unique element of his identity.

In the early centuries of Greek philosophical inquiry, the overarching concern was in the dimension called *metaphysics*, meaning that which is above or beyond the physical world. Thales, Parmenides, Anaximander, Anaxagoras,

We want to see men and women  
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of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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