



What is Man?

The answers to many of our “important questions” depend on the answer to *this* question: What is man?¹ (What are human beings?)²

Different Concepts of Man

Religion/ Philosophy	The Human Being ³	Life Pattern
Naturalism	A highly evolved animal, resulting from purely naturalistic causes (random mutation and natural selection) since there is no Creator/Designer God.	Linear unto physical death, followed by nonexistence.
Hinduism	Consists of the “real man” or conscious, immortal soul (<i>Atman</i>) joined with the physical body. The <i>Atman</i> is continuous with the Ultimate Reality (<i>Brahman</i>); thus divine.	Cyclical until liberated. At physical death, the soul transmigrates to another physical body to be reborn (reincarnated). Final liberation results in indistinguishable union with <i>Brahman</i> (the “Universal Soul”)
Buddhism	Comprised of five aggregates (material form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness). There is no permanent entity (true soul, self or ego). Mahayana Buddhism speaks of the personhood of man relative to the divine Buddha.	Cyclical until liberated. At physical death, reincarnated (disassembling & reassembling of the aggregates rather than transmigration of a continuous soul). Liberation results in realization of nonexistence, though <i>Mahayana Buddhism</i> speaks of continued existence in a sort of heaven (Buddha land or Pure land).
Islam	A special creation of God (thus distinct from God). Made to be a servant or slave of God (Allah), and to represent him. Basically good.	Linear unto physical death, followed by “life after death” in either paradise or hell.
Christianity	A special creation of God (thus distinct from God). Made to know and glorify God. A unity of body and spirit. Created good, but has become basically bad (compared to God’s holy standard).	Linear unto physical death, followed by “life after death” in either heaven or hell. “ <i>people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment</i> ” (Hebrews 9:27)

The Origin of Mankind

- Our view of mankind is dependent on our view of mankind’s origin.
Read [Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7](#).⁴



¹ Here, ‘man’ means ‘human being,’ not just *male* human being. Likewise, ‘mankind’ means ‘human race.’

² In our first lesson, people asked these questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? What is the purpose of life? How are humans different from other creatures? Where am I going after death? The answers to these questions depend on the answer to this question ‘What is man?’

³ These descriptions are based on the orthodox, ‘philosophical’ representations of the religions, and may not reflect the understandings of many of the religions’ adherents.

⁴ Genesis 1:1-24 reveals God’s creation of the entire universe. After God created the other living creatures (creatures of the waters, air, and land), he created man.

1. According to the Bible, what is the origin of mankind?⁵



2. How is mankind different from the other living creatures?

- Mankind (male and female) is made in the _____ of _____.⁶
- Mankind is made _____ over the earth.⁷

❑ Among all living creatures on earth, only humans have the capacity for relationship with God. Humans are unique in their moral consciousness and responsibility. See footnote 6.

The Constitution of Man

❑ In the Christian worldview, human nature is made up of both the material and non-material – the body and the soul/spirit.⁸ The soul/spirit continues to exist after the physical body dies.⁹ However, since human beings are bodily creatures, the soul/spirit and body are reunited in a future resurrection at the time of Christ's second coming, prior to the final judgment.¹⁰

The Significance of Mankind

❑ While humans are a very small part of God's creation (physically), they are significant (important, full of meaning)! Read Psalm 8:1-6.¹¹

⁵ Genesis 1:26 says, 'Let us make mankind...' The Bible consistently describes God as One. Scholars differ on their interpretation of the plural here, but it likely refers to the plurality within the Godhead, though not fully revealed until the New Testament. The one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

⁶ The 'image of God' is commonly described as the reflection of God's communicable attributes (those qualities of God for which at least a partial counterpart can be found in his human creations). This includes spiritual life; moral consciousness; ability to think abstractly, appreciate beauty; creativity; capacity to relate to God and other humans, and to represent God. In the context of Genesis 1:26, the emphasis is man's responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth, as God's vice-regents (cp. Psalm 8). Human beings are special, and given a status and role superior to all other visible creation. The biblical concept of man is perfectly consistent with man's propensity for knowledge, discovery, invention, progress, development, beauty, art, etc. For a scientific perspective on the uniqueness of man, see the *Reasons to Believe* website under 'Human Origins' (<http://www.reasons.org/explore/topic/human-origins>).

⁷ '...that they may rule over [the earth].' It should be emphasized that human authority is derived from the authority of God, so we are directly responsible to Him. We are caretakers of God's earth, which means we must not abuse it.

⁸ Some Christians distinguish between the soul and spirit, and believe man is made up of three parts (trichotomy). In my view, soul and spirit are substantially the same (*Isaiah 26:9; Luke 1:46-47*). Regardless of our description of the non-material aspect of man, the emphasis here is that man is a *unity* consisting of both material and non-material aspects. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to examine the various views.

⁹ See Matthew 10:28. Also see 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:21-24, which indicate a disembodied existence after physical death. This is called the 'intermediate state' – an existence between physical death and resurrection.

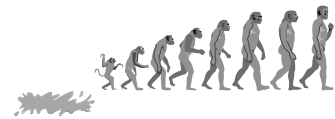
¹⁰ See Daniel 12:2; John 5:25, 28-29; Acts 24:14-15. In the Christian worldview, salvation is *not* the spirit's release from a bodily prison, but rather renewal of the whole man – both body and soul/spirit. The continuity/discontinuity of the body through death and resurrection is a difficult subject. See 1 Corinthians 15 for biblical perspective.

¹¹ Verse 5: 'angels' ('*elohim*') – the precise meaning in this context is uncertain; thus the different translations – 'angels' (NIV, NKJV); 'heavenly beings' (ESV); 'God' (NLT, NASB). Whatever the case, it is a high position! 'glory' (*kabod*) is most often used to describe the glory of God, but because of mankind's relationship to the Creator, and their role assigned by God, humans may share in God's glory.

3. Considering Psalm 8:3-6 and Genesis 1:26-28, *why* are human beings significant? What is the basis of mankind's significance?¹²

The Purpose of Mankind

- ❑ God is the Designer and Creator of man. Thus God is the Purpose-Giver for mankind.
 - 4. The Bible says, "God created man." But others say that God does not exist and human beings "evolved" from more simplistic life forms (ultimately from non-living chemicals) through purely naturalistic processes. Does this make any difference concerning meaning and purpose? Explain.¹³



- ❑ After creating the first humans, God assigned them particular roles and responsibilities.
 - 📖 "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (*Genesis 1:28, NIV; cp. 1:26*).
 - 📖 "The LORD God took [Adam] and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (*Genesis 2:15, NIV*).
- ❑ God told the first humans to reproduce, inhabit the earth, and rule over it. They were given the responsibility of managing and using the resources of the earth to accomplish God's good purposes. Today, mankind still has that responsibility. But there is more!
- ❑ God created humans as relational beings – for relationship with God, and relationship with others. God created human beings "in his own image" to reflect him.
 - 📖 "From one man [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us" (*Acts 17:26-27, NIV*).
 - 📖 Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (*Matthew 22:37-39, NIV*).
 - 📖 "...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (*1 Corinthians 10:31*)¹⁴

¹² True human significance is based on God's plan and purpose for his human creations.

¹³ If there is no Creator, then meaning, purpose and significance are based in humanity. However, humans are mere specks in the universe, who exist by chance. As Darwinist George Gaylord Simpson once said, 'Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.' (George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, revised edition [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967], p. 345.)

¹⁴ To 'glorify God' is 'to live our lives in a way that makes [God] look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that he really is.' (John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* [Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003], 32.)

5. God created humans to know him and reflect him. How should this affect our sense of purpose, values, ambitions and goals? What kinds of things should we be doing?¹⁵



“What is the chief and highest end of man?”

Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever”

(Westminster Larger Catechism)

The Failure of Mankind

- ❑ After God created the first man and woman, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*Genesis 1:31*). However, it is obvious that our world today is *not* “very good.”
 - 📖 “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...” (*Romans 1:25, NIV*).
 - 📖 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*).
- ❑ Because of sin,¹⁶ man’s relationship with God has been broken, and the *image of God* in man has been severely damaged. Thus man needs restoration and renewal. Man needs salvation. How can we be restored and renewed? How can we be saved? These are important questions that will be addressed in the next lessons.



Reflection/Application

- How would *you* answer the questions “What is man?” and “What is mankind’s significance (meaning, importance)?” What is the *basis* for your answers? Compare your answers to the Bible’s answers. Are you truly satisfied with your answers? Why or why not?
- Christian, do you *daily* consider your purpose and role as God’s image-bearer? What changes are needed in *your* life to better reflect God in a world that desperately needs to know Him?

¹⁵ To know and reflect God, we need a personal relationship with Him, in which He can teach us and change us. This relationship is realized through faith in Jesus Christ. We need God-centered lives instead of self-centered lives. We should seek to know Him and make Him known. Practical actions include Bible study, prayer, fellowship, service, and dedication to live according to His will in all of our activities and relationships.

¹⁶ In the Old Testament, the most common Hebrew root for ‘sin’ is *ht*, which generally conveys the idea of missing the mark, or deviating from the goal. The most common New Testament word for ‘sin’ is *ἁμαρτία* (*harmartia*) which has a meaning similar to the Hebrew *ht*. Other Hebrew and Greek words are used to specifically denote unfaithfulness, rebellion, deliberate wrongdoing, wickedness, error, violation of God’s law, etc. Thus the biblical concept of sin cannot be limited to the meaning of one of these words. I have defined sin as ‘any attitude or action that is opposed to the authority and moral will of God.’ Also, ‘sin is that condition and activity of human beings that is offensive to God, their Creator’ (*The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 946).