

Lesson Plan – Doctrine of Humanity

One session of a larger series called "It's All Greek to Me."

Theological Concept: Doctrine of humanity/*imago dei*
Age group: Adults
Group size: 5 - 10
Time: 45 min

Learning Goals

1. Identify key concepts from the Reformed doctrine of humanity
2. Engage learners in application of the doctrine to their own lives.

Resources

- *Christian Doctrine* by Shirley Guthrie
- *Presbyterian Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* by Donald McKim
- *Faith Seeking Understanding* by Daniel Migliore

Materials

- Pens/pencils
- Slips of paper
- Bibles

Session Outline

Gathering

- Initial question (3 min) – What do you think of when I say “doctrine of humanity”?

Exploration

- Making a list (10 min) – Using scenario from the start of Chapter 10 in *Christian Doctrine*:
 - Suppose you were a long way from home, got involved in a conversation with a total stranger whom you instinctively liked, and they asked “Who are you, anyways?” Make a list of 10 things you would say about yourself.
 - Go through it and underline the most important facts/characteristics.
 - Do the most important things come first? Last? What is the significance of their place on the list?
 - How many items on the list identify your public and private image of yourself in terms of personal relationships (married, single, parents, children, friends, etc)? How many items are not relational (intellectual or physical)?
 - Which categories are emphasized and which are left out: politics, economics, religion, physiology, culture, psychology? What is the significance of your emphases or omissions?

- Are there contradictions on your list – items that express not so much who you are as you wish you were, think you ought to be, or what other people to think you are?
 - Which of the items would you say are essential to your basic humanity? Which are incidental? Which are destructive of your basic humanity?
 - Conclusion: most of us tend to think of a few areas of our lives and ignore the others – which means we have a limited understanding of ourselves – plus, the more factors we take into consideration, the harder it is to know who we really are.
- Further discussion (25 min) – The task of Christian theology is to interpret everything we know – or think we know – about ourselves from other sources (like science) in light of what the will and work of the God we come to know in scripture tells us about the meaning and purpose of our lives (Guthrie, 194).
 1. Created as whole persons.
 2. Created in the image of God.
 - What does it mean that we are created as whole persons? God is concerned with our lives in their totality (McKim, 38). *Have each person pull up one of the scriptures cited to read when we discuss that particular point.*
 - Expressed in the command to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, mind (Luke 10:27) – God wants a comprehensive commitment of our whole person
 - Similarly, God cares about all areas of our existence – OT reveals God cares about justice (Isaiah 61:8), righteousness (Micah 6:8), hunger (Psalms 107:9), sleep (Psalms 3:5), words (Proverbs 12:6)
 - Does the idea that God cares about the totality of our lives fit with your own experience of God? Does it challenge you?
 - Can we understand anything about God from this? What do you think this teaches us about us/humanity?
 - If we mirror God in our lives, we will have similar concerns for the lives of others (McKim, 39).
 - Humans are created in the image of God.
 - Common ways of understanding this are listed (Migliore 140-141). *What is your reaction to each?*
 - Physical resemblance to God
 - Dominion over the earth (worldview where all relationships are in hierarchical patterns; often used to legitimize exploitation of nature and oppressive -isms/patriarchy)
 - Human freedom (self-determination; self-creators and creators of culture we superimpose upon order of nature)
 - *To determine for ourselves what seems to be true, let's go back to scripture. Read Genesis 1:24-31 and Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25*

- What do we learn about humanity from these two accounts of creation? [particularly identify that God made humans to be in covenant/relationship with them]
- Explore the meaning of the male/female dualism – points to relationship/co-humanity signified by co-existence as male/female.
- What does Jesus teach us about being made in God’s image?
 - Jesus was unique because of the way he lived: completely for God and in obedience to God.
 - To be truly human in the image of God is not any capacity we possess within ourselves but is realized in relatedness, community, fellowship with others outside of ourselves (Guthrie, 198).
- “It is only when we risk life together precisely with those who are *not* like us, *not* our kind of people, that we discover who we ourselves are and what it means to be human beings created in the image of the Creator who chose to be with and for us creatures, and created *us* for community with others who are different from us” (Guthrie, 204).
What do you think about that?
 - What are ways human beings can relate to one another?
 - And yet in order to relate to one another, we must first be able to affirm the unique identities of one another. True individuality and true community cannot be separated.
- What are some practical applications of saying that we are created in the “image of God”?

Closing

- Going back to the list (3 min) – Take a look at the list you made at the beginning of our discussion. Would you make any changes to it now?
- Close in prayer (1 min)