

The Greatness and Miserableness of Man

[Herman Bavinck](#)

From: Our Reasonable Faith. Herman Bavinck. Baker Book House. 1956. Pages 22-23.

The conclusion, therefore, is that of Augustine, who said that the heart of man was created for God and that it cannot find rest until it rests in his Father's heart. Hence all men are really seeking after God, as Augustine also declared, but they do not all seek Him in the right way, nor at the right place. They seek Him down below, and He is up above. They seek Him on the earth, and He is in heaven. They seek Him afar, and He is nearby. They seek Him in money, in property, in fame, in power, and in passion; and He is to be found in the high and the holy places, and with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa. 57:15). But they do seek Him, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him (Acts 17:27). They seek Him and at the same time they flee Him. They have no interest in a knowledge of His ways, and yet they cannot do without Him. They feel themselves attracted to God and at the same time repelled by Him.

In this, as Pascal so profoundly pointed out, consists the greatness and the miserableness of man. He longs for truth and is false by nature. He yearns for rest and throws himself from one diversion upon another. He pants for a permanent and eternal bliss and seizes on the pleasures of a moment. He seeks for God and loses himself in the creature. He is a born son of the house and he feeds on the husks of the swine in a strange land. He forsakes the fountain of living waters and hews out broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13). He is as a hungry man who dreams that he is eating, and when he awakes finds that his soul is empty; and he is like a thirsty man who dreams that he is drinking, and when he awakes finds that he is faint and that his soul has appetite (Isa. 29:8).

Science cannot explain this contradiction in man. It reckons only with his greatness and not with his misery, or only with his misery and not with his greatness. It exalts him too high, or it depresses him too far, for science does not know of his Divine origin, nor of his profound fall. But the Scriptures know of both, and they shed their light over man and over mankind; and the contradictions are reconciled, the mists are cleared, and the hidden things are revealed. Man is an enigma whose solution can be found only in God.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [Reformed Perspectives Magazine Forum](#).

Subscribe to Reformed Perspectives Magazine

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [Reformed Perspectives Magazine](#), please select this [link](#).