

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18, Original Sin, Calvinism, Strengths and Weaknesses of Pelagianism, Arminianism and Calvinism

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 18, Original Sin, Calvinism, Strengths and Weaknesses of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism.

We continue our lectures, and I was reminded of an illustration used by the evangelist, theologian, and abolitionist Charles Finney, whose theology I do not share in many ways, concerning the effects of sin on human beings.

This helps situate evangelical Arminianism. That's what made me think of it, and even the best Roman Catholicism for us as we think of these things through. Finney ministered in the so-called burnt-out district of western New York State, Niagara Falls area, and he himself used this illustration of a person in the Niagara River, heading for the falls, in trouble. Because if he goes over the falls, he's a goner.

In the illustration, God is somebody on the land offering to help him. And Finney distinguished between four positions. Pelagianism, on the one hand, was a monergistic position.

On the other hand, Augustinianism was a monergistic position. The monergism of Pelagianism said the guy in trouble in the water wasn't really in trouble; he could just swim out. He had the ability on his own to save himself, to rescue himself.

That is a monergism of human beings alone. God is not needed. On the other side of the ledger of the scientific classification, we have another monergism, Augustinianism.

In this case, the fellow is unconscious. There's no way he can help himself, but God takes the initiative, jumps in, grabs him, pulls him out, gives him CPR, and saves his life. Gives him, whatever you call that.

What do you call that? Anyway, he resuscitates the guy. Monergistic, divine monergism, human monergism. Human monergism, Pelagianism.

Divine monergism, Augustinianism, and its grandson, Calvinism. So we could call this the Augustinian-Calvinian position. It is called that.

This is the Pelagian position. As I said before, it's not nice to call your Roman Catholic or Armenian friends, even Pelagians, not nice at all. Finney himself, astonishingly to me, identified his own view with semi-Pelagianism.

By the way, if you want to see this illustration set forth in writing, Michael Williams and I co-authored a book called *Why I Am Not an Arminian*. Oh, it's a funny one, I should say, in fairness. It is part of a companion volume to *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, written by Jerry Walls and a colleague, Joseph Dongell, at the time of Asbury Seminary.

Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell. Walls a philosopher, Dongell a New Testament scholar. Williams and I were systematic theologians.

Williams with historical expertise. My emphasis was more exegetical. *Why I'm not a Calvinist*, they proposed to InterVarsity first.

InterVarsity came to Covenant Seminary and asked us if we would write a companion volume, a response. And we said, sure. And we wanted to write *Why I Am a Calvinist*.

And they said, it can't be that. It's got to be *Why I'm Not*. So, our book was called *Why I'm Not an Arminian*.

My students said you wrote *Why I'm a Calvinist* anyway. In any case, this illustration comes from that book, and it really comes ultimately from Finney himself. Semi-Pelagianism says, the guy is in trouble, all right.

And it is, God is on the land, and God's able to help. But human beings must take the initiative. If he doesn't call out to God and say, hey, save me, he will not be saved.

God's willing, but our making the first move is necessary. This is semi-Pelagian, not a monergistic, free, human free will, absolute free will. This is a synergism, God and human beings working together.

The guy in trouble calls out, and God rescues him. Semi-Augustinianism, likewise, is a synergism. But this time, unlike the human synergism of semi-Pelagianism, it is a divine synergism of semi-Augustinianism.

In this case, God already calls out from the beach. And to that call, we must respond, or God will not save us. You say, doesn't Augustinianism say we have to respond? Yes, of course it does.

But it says the prevenient, efficacious grace of God enables our response and our faith response to God. This whole thing was put forward in Williams in my book, *Why*

I'm Not an Arminian, to be fair to our Arminian brothers and sisters. Because their best theology is semi-Augustinian, not Pelagian, and not even semi-Pelagian.

Although some of my Arminian friends have said some of their fellows are indeed semi-Pelagian. But that's not the best Arminianism, and our goal in that book was not to defeat the worst opponent, if you will, we can call fellow Christians opponents, but to defeat the best one. Furthermore, Roman Catholicism condemned Pelagianism and even semi-Pelagianism, and arrived at the Council of Orange and afterward at a position that is fairly called semi-Augustinian.

Not a full-blown Augustinianism, which Luther and Calvin recovered at the time of the Reformation, although Luther's descendants didn't always hew to it as accurately as carefully as Calvinists did. Views of original sin, Calvinism. This view holds that God imputes to humankind both a corrupted nature and guilt.

Remember, Arminianism said, well, Pelagianism said, God imputes neither. We're all our own Adam, if you will; we're born without original sin. Arminianism says no, no, no, we're born sinners.

That is corrupt but not guilty. Calvinism, on the contrary, says both guilt and corruption accrue to our spiritual bank accounts before birth. Calvinism is thus distinct from Pelagianism, which denies the imputation of corruption and guilt.

It differs from Arminianism, which holds to the imputation of a corrupted nature but rejects the imputation of guilt and culpability to man. Calvinists have agreed up to this point. They separate into two sub-positions over the question of the connection between Adam's sin and our sinfulness.

These positions are the representative view and the natural headship view. Representative view. Adam was a representative of the human race.

God planned for Adam to act on behalf of the race. We were all on probation in the person of the first man, our federal head. The representative view is also called federal headship.

The natural headship view is also called realism. Federal headship, natural headship. Representative view, realism.

Those terms will become clear as we work our way through. We were all on probation in the person of the first man, Adam, our federal head, and that's why this view is called federal headship. When Adam sinned, his guilt and corruption were imputed to all of his descendants.

Christ accepted, of course. Erikson teaches, Miller Erikson in Christian theology, that federal headship is generally related to the creationist view of the origin of the soul, but with great respect for him, certainly my teacher by his writings, I do not see any necessary connection between him adopting a particular view of the origin of the soul and a particular view of one of the two Calvinist positions on original sin. Lewis Berkoff, John Murray, and S. Lewis Johnson are advocates of this view.

They claim that the representative view, federal headship, best accords with the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5. This view is further divided into immediate and immediate imputation. I don't know if I mentioned why we theologians love this kind of thing. The answer is because it's so complicated, you need us, and it keeps us employed.

In any case, foolishness aside, I would agree with the representative view. Natural headship view. This view is also sometimes called realism, and you'll see why in a moment, or realistic headship.

I hear, quote, Erikson, who advocates this view, quote, this approach is related to the traditionist view of the origin of the soul, according to which we receive our souls by transmission from our parents, just as we do our physical natures. So we were present in germinal or seed form in our ancestors, in a very real sense, hence realism, in a very real sense, we were there with Adam. We were in his seed.

His action was not merely that of one isolated individual but of the entire human race. The entire human race stood in Adam in seed form within him. Although we were not there individually, we were nonetheless there.

The human race sinned as a whole. Thus, I'm still quoting Erikson. Thus, there's nothing unfair or improper about our receiving a corrupted nature and guilt from Adam. Remember those words, for we are receiving the just results of our sin because we were really there in Adam's loins.

This is the view of Augustine, he says, Erikson says. Erikson, Christian Theology, second edition, 635, 636. If you have a subsequent edition, I can't even keep track of them. Use the index to find the right place.

So, the Calvinist views of original sin divide into two, and the first one subdivides into two more. There is federal headship and realistic headship. There's representationalism, there's realism.

They both hold that Adam, they both hold the imputation and that Adam is our head, but is he our federal head, our representative? Is he our natural head? By the way, matters are complicated by the fact that he is our natural head. There's no

question that we come from Adam. The question is, is that the best way to explain original sin? Notice that Erikson said, it's not unfair or improper.

The big criticism against representationalism, against federal headship, is, Adam made me do it; it's unfair. How can we be condemned for the sin of the one man? Evaluation of the views of original sin. The same views, although when we get to Calvinism, we'll work with another subset.

Pelagianism, strengths. I'm reaching here. It is true that Adam was a bad example for the rest of the human race.

It's also true Pelagianism is monergistic. There's not even any need for God or grace. Weaknesses.

Paul says five times in Romans 5:12 to 19, that the one sin of Adam was the cause of all dying. Do you really expect me to believe it's merely because of his bad example? I don't believe it. Verse 15, the many died by the trespass or transgression of the one man.

Verse 16, the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation. Verse 17, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned. 18, the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men.

And 19, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners. Adam was a bad example, yes. So was Eve.

But that is no view of original sin at all. S. Lewis Johnson, in that article I referred to earlier, Romans 5:12 to 19, a test case in exegesis and theology, something like that, in a book called *New Studies in New Testament Theology*, edited by Merrill Tenney and Longenecker and Tenney. S. Lewis Johnson argues effectively that the sense of verse 14 is against this view.

There, it is stated that certain persons, part of all who sinned and ones who suffered death as a penalty for sin, did not commit sin resembling Adam's. That is individual and conscious transgressions. They must then have died because of Adam's sin.

And that is impossible in Pelagianism for there to be another *modus*, another way of sinning, because we follow his example. And Paul says death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam. It also spells the death of realism, by the way, because if we're really in his loins, then how can he sin differently than we did? But it just kills Pelagianism, because it says some people didn't sin the same way he did.

Well, we're following his bad example if Pelagius is right. Johnson is right. Whatever 13 and 14 mean in detail, they didn't sin the same way he did. Therefore, they must have died because of his sin.

And five times, we saw that's exactly what Paul says in that passage. I conclude that although Adam was a bad example, Pelagianism fails as a theory to explain original sin. Arminianism, strengths.

Arminianism is correct when it posits that, quote, since the fall of Adam, the corruption of sin has pervaded every person from that Janeluska affirmation. The Arminian view is also correct when it holds that the result of that corruption is that sinners are incapable of making a positive response to God for salvation.

Unfortunately, as the best Arminian plays out, that is a hypothetical position. That is a hypothetical condition because no human beings actually are incapable. Oh, they're technically born incapable, hypothetically, but they are immediately hit with universal prevenient grace.

Given it, they immediately receive universal, prevenient grace that enables them to believe. So, actually, no human beings are incapable. Weaknesses.

Arminianism is correct in what it asserts. It does not assert enough, however. In re-reading the Janeluska affirmation and Mickey's commentary upon it, I noticed there is no explanation of the way in which Adam's sin affected his posterity.

Merely, the fact of this effect was affirmed. Mickey says, quote, Adam and Eve were the prototype of humanity, and their action has been determinative for each person since. Page 82 of that Zondervan book.

My question is, how was the sin of the first man and woman determinative for the human race? One could read Pelagianism, any of the Calvinist positions, or other views into this statement. Arminian could respond by claiming to say, to stay precisely within the bounds of scripture and accuse others, for example, Calvinists, of going beyond the word in their theologizing. Yet we have seen how biblical data in Romans 5 rule out the Pelagian view of original sin.

Therefore, more definition of original sin is necessary than that given in the Arminian position advocated by Paul Mickey and other godly evangelical Arminians. I also take exception with the Arminian conception of prevenient grace, which nullifies the effects of Adam's sin upon the human race. What's my exception based on? The lack of scriptural basis for it.

My own position is that we need to investigate every single article of our faith, everything we believe, based upon holy scripture. And not merely deduce certain

principles from other principles that we have even demonstrated from scripture. Of course, our theology should be coherent, but it also has to be exegetically grounded. What's the scientific way of saying it? It must be exegetical data, along with logical coherence, for theology and a theological system to be sound.

Thus, at the end of the day, my system isn't complete. And some things are more clearly taught in scripture than others. And I'm hesitant to go building a gigantic superstructure, even with biblical foundations based upon philosophy or human reason or whatever, where the Bible does not say, yes, the Bible teaches of grace.

Yes, it teaches of grace. Yes, it teaches that grace saves. Yes, it teaches that grace precedes salvation.

It's prevenient. But it does not teach that it enables human beings to believe. That is an assumption of Wesleyan theology.

Rather, the prevenient grace in scripture is efficacious and, therefore, particular. Calvinism, natural headship, strengths, natural headship, or realism correctly holds that the death of all is grounded in the sin of Adam. It also correctly teaches that Adam is the natural head of the human race.

I am not questioning Adam's natural headship. I am questioning as to whether that is the way to explain original sin. Weaknesses, although realism claims to handle better the problem of alien guilt than the representative view does.

That is the big problem with the representative view or federal headship—alien guilt. Wait a minute.

You're telling me the guilt, the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, means the condemnation of the human race? Yes. That's unbelievable. That's unfair.

That's alien guilt. And as a matter of fact, that's what it is. I don't mean to, yes, I do mean to prejudge my conclusions.

But in the Romans 5 passage, it looks pretty much to me like you do have alien guilt because you have alien something else. And that's called alien righteousness. And even as the righteousness of Christ is of Christ, not our righteousness, it's an alien righteousness outside of us, as Luther said, not produced by us, even as that is counted to our spiritual bank account and makes us acceptable to God.

So it's parallel in the way the passage works is that alien guilt was imputed, reckoned, and counted to our spiritual bank account. Similarly, in the same way, although realism claims to handle better the problem of alien guilt than the representative view does, it does not seem to live up to its claim. Johnson says it.

Well, I keep depending on this beautiful article by S. Lewis Johnson's beautiful essay in that book, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*. That's not the right title. I'll get it right.

Johnson says, quote, even if we should grant that generic humanity sinned in Adam. Humanity in his loins, in his seed, if you will. So, he's our natural head.

And again, I'll say it. He is our natural head. But realism, as far as an explanation of original sin, is saying more.

It's saying that his natural headship is the key to understanding the imputation of his sin to humankind; even if we should grant that generic humanity sinned in Adam, we would have no relief from the problem of an alien guilt. If punishment is to be vindicated, the act of sin must be one of conscious self-determination and personal criminality, if you will. Yet, according to realism, when Adam sinned, his posterity as an individual and person did not even exist.

The act of his sin antedated their personhood. I cannot see how this alleviates the problem of justice one iota. How can we act before we are? Is it really just for us to be seeds in Adam's loins? And that establishes our guilt, our sin, our corruption.

Johnson points to, quote, intolerable implications, which, quote, arise from realism and burden the theory. Page 310 of his essay. Why are Adam's descendants responsible only for his first sin and not his later sins? Why is Adam's sin counted against the human race and not that of Eve? I'll tell you why.

He was our representative, and his first sin is what is counted to us. Eve wasn't our representative, and his other sins are not imputed. All it took was one.

The original sin, justly so-called. Realism argues for what Romans 5, the textus classicus for original sin, never says. That sin and guilt are the result of the act of all men.

Repeatedly, the passage relates the sin of one man to our sin and guilt. It never relates the sin and guilt of the human race to the acts of all men. "Realism could say this, Johnson wrote, but Paul never says it, and the silence is almost deafening" page 310.

Yeah, he's a little dramatic, but that's okay. A realist will object that those holding the representative view are using the argument from silence.

The federal headship advocates counter by saying that the main beam in the realist doctrinal construction is simply missing from the passage. Surely, such an omission is

important. How can one base his view on something the passage does not say? Representation accuses realism of assuming its conclusion, of begging the question.

That is, what the passage doesn't say is that the sin and guilt of the human race is the act of all men. It keeps saying it's the act of one man, Adam. Furthermore, the last clause in Romans 5.14 seems to contradict realism.

The clause asserts that death reigned, quote, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, close quote. Realism holds that all people, quote, without exception, sinned as Adam did since they sinned racially in him. All have broken a definite and positive command.

The same one Adam broke. Thus, realism has no place for a different modus, a different manner of sinning. If we were in his loins when he spoke the prohibition, so did we, right? Romans, that clause, even over those death reigned who did not sin as he did, how could that be true? If he was really our head in terms of original sin.

Johnson contends rightly, I think, that realism has trouble with the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5, quote, just as people are justified for a righteousness which is not personally their own, so they were condemned for a sin which was not personally their own. Of course, it must be recognized that this analogy is not a perfect one, but it does seem essential to Paul's point to maintain that the nature of the union between the two principles and their people is parallel. The nature of the union between Adam and his people, the nature of the union between Christ and his people, isn't that what 5:14 sets us up for when it says Adam was a type of Christ? And what 18 and 19 explicitly say, even repeating, 19 repeating 18, and that the chart bore out, is that exactly what it says? All details are, of course, not the same, and that's what 15, 16, and 17 in Romans 5 showed, but the nature of the union between the two Adams and their people is exactly the same.

It is a representational union. Mediate imputation—a brief summary.

The Calvinist views of mediate and immediate imputation are alike in holding to the representative union between Adam and his posterity and to the imputation of Adam's sin to the race. Joshua Placaeus, p-l-a-c-a-e-u-s, Joshua Placaeus, a professor at the theological school at Salmore in France, is the originator of the view of mediate imputation. I might say that the school was famous for a number of deviations from Calvinism that Orthodox Calvinists didn't like, including unlimited atonement.

Previously, all of the Orthodox Reformed scholars had taught that Adam's sin was the basis for the condemnation of humankind and that the corruption of human nature was a result of Adam's sin. Guilt is imputed to the human race. We're guilty, and out of that guilt, when we're born, we sin, and we're condemned.

The corruption follows logically the guilt. Adam's sin was the basis for corruption, and that corruption was a result of Adam's sin. Placaeus reversed the order.

He made the corrupt human nature the basis of the condemnation and made the guilt of Adam's sin dependent upon participation in the corrupt nature. What's he trying to do? Get away from alien guilt. It is the motivation of all these other views.

It may help to set forth the differences between the two, thus. According to immediate imputation, the standard view up until this time, number one, Adam's sin is imputed to humankind, resulting in condemnation for the race. As a result, human beings are born with a corrupt nature.

According to immediate imputation and Placaeus's take on this, trying to make Calvinism more palatable, as a result of Adam's sin, human beings are born with a corrupt nature. This corrupt nature is the basis for each person's condemnation. Since each person has a corrupt nature from Adam, each is guilty of Adam's sin.

Weaknesses. Immediate imputation takes all sinned, in Romans 5:12, to mean to be or become corrupt. This seems to be an impossibility.

B. in Romans 5, Paul repeatedly teaches that Adam and his posterity die for the one sin of Adam. "Death, condemnation, and the status of the sinner are all related to the one sin of the one man. There's no intermediary of any kind." Johnson, page 311. I told you I'm relying on Johnson. It's wonderful.

His exercise in exegesis and theology is beautiful. By the way, he introduces that by saying theology is becoming increasingly divorced from exegesis, and that is a very bad thing. He induces some liberal systematic theologies.

Tillich, for example, says that it is as strange compared to traditional theology's use of the Bible as the later Picasso's art, cubism, and so forth, is to regular representational art of the tradition in which he was born, and which he was very good at doing. It is bizarre. Tillich hardly even quotes the Bible, and when he does, oh boy, it's a philosophical treatise, his systematic theology.

And so, S. Louis Johnson says, S. Louis Johnson taught the New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary forever. Then he retired, so to speak, and went to Trinity Divinity School and taught theology, exegetical theology, which he was very good at. His exercise in exegesis and theology seems as an antidote to many systematic theologies' views of original sin, which may mention Romans 5, but I think he found none of them do an exegesis of it.

A theological exegesis. The day of Warfield's is long gone. To go do, to be a professor of systematic theology at a university, one either majors in philosophy, as John Feinberg of Trinity did, or usually, all the rest of it, most of us do. That's not right to say, and some do philosophy.

We do historical theology. You don't do exegetical theology, and consequently, systematic theologians are sometimes philosophical, systematic theologians, or, I'm not saying that's unhelpful, or historical systematic theologians, and there are good things there too, but we need exegetical systematic theologians. Now, D. A. Carson's probably right.

Thirty years ago, he wrote an essay, among other things he said, the unity of the Bible and the possibility of systematic theology in a book called Scripture and Truth, one of those Ibri volumes, the Council on Biblical Inerrancy, not Ibri, the Council on Biblical Inerrancy, I got my organizations mixed up, sorry. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. He argued that the unity of the scriptures is a presupposition for traditional systematics, and the tremendous onslaught of biblical criticism, especially on the Old Testament and now on the New, has made systematic theology an impossible impossibility in universities.

There's a lot of truth to that, and S. Louis Johnson's essay is very helpful. Obviously, I think that's the case. Median imputation has difficulty with Romans 5:13, and 14.

There is Adam's sin, which is the cause of death, even for those who did not sin as Adam did. It's the sin of the first man that's the cause of death's reign from Adam until Moses. Johnson correctly argues, quote, the theory of mediate imputation; by the way, what is mediate, and what is immediate? The answer is the imputation of Adam's guilt.

In immediate imputation, Adam's guilt is immediately imputed, and corruption is mediately imputed. It comes from it. In mediate imputation, Adam's corruption is immediately imputed, and guilt is mediately imputed.

So, to keep them straight, immediate, and mediate imputation, the aspect that is either immediately or mediately imputed, ah, is Adam's guilt. Johnson correctly argues that the theory of mediate imputation with the parallel is inconsistent with the parallelism between Adam and Christ, just as we are not justified by inherent righteousness but by alien righteousness. So, we are not condemned by inherent corruption but by alien corruption, alien guilt.

The fifth argument against the weakness of mediate imputation. Mediate imputation was devised as an attempt to soften Calvinism, in this case, by solving the problem of God's reckoning guilt to those who had not personally sinned. This is the problem of alien guilt.

As in the case of realism, this theory, too, fails to reach the goal. Johnson aptly argues, quote, if inherent depravity is a punishment, and it's hardly possible to argue otherwise, why does God impute corruption, depravity, and pollution? Because of Adam's sin. It's a punishment for Adam's sin.

Then guilt must have preceded it. Understand? If inherent depravity is a punishment, and it is, then guilt must have preceded it. What, then, could the guilt be other than the guilt of Adam's first sin? As a matter of fact, mediate imputation suppresses; I'm not accusing anybody's motives here, and I'm not maligning anybody's motives; it has a hidden, a hidden punishment.

In brackets. Guilt. We're guilty in Adam. Therefore, we're corrupt, and therefore we sin, and we're guilty.

Otherwise, you have inherent corruption without guilt? What's the cause of it? Is God unjust? In fact, as the Helvetic Consensus said, the formula Consensus Helvetica 1675, and Toreton, its prime mover, claimed that Placaeus' doctrine, in reality, did away with the imputation of Adam's sin entirely, for it is really corruption that makes us liable to wrath. In our next lecture, we will treat immediate imputation with its strengths and objections and move on to systematic and pastoral implications of the doctrine of original sin.

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