

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Sin, D. A. Carson

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Sin, D. A. Carson, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This source presents **Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture on the doctrine of sin**, the ninth session in a series on humanity and sin, focusing on **D. A. Carson's perspective on sin's intrinsic significance**. Peterson introduces Carson as a gifted scholar and references his introduction to a book on theology in community. The lecture explores how **sin is fundamental to understanding the entire biblical narrative and the gospel**, arguing that grasping the nature of sin is crucial for comprehending salvation and God's character. Peterson also references other influential works on sin by authors like Cornelius Plantinga and Henry Fairlie, and outlines **various facets of sin, its connection to Satan, its multifaceted descriptions in scripture, and its entanglement with key theological concepts** such as anthropology, soteriology, pneumatology, conversion, and sanctification.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology → Theology, Peterson → Humanity and Sin).



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3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Sin, D. A. Carson

Briefing Document: D.A. Carson on Sin's Intrinsic Significance

Executive Summary: This briefing document summarizes the key themes and arguments presented in D. A. Carson's essay, as discussed by Dr. Robert A. Peterson. Carson argues that understanding sin's intrinsic significance – its place within the entire structure of Christian thought and the Bible's narrative – is foundational for grasping salvation and its contemporary relevance. He outlines several ways sin is intrinsically important, highlighting its role in the biblical plotline, its connection to God's character and actions, its cosmic dimension involving Satan and demonic forces, the multifaceted ways it is depicted in Scripture, and its deep enmeshment within key theological constructions like anthropology, soteriology, and pneumatology.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Distinguishing Intrinsic and Contemporary Significance:

- Carson emphasizes the importance of understanding both the intrinsic and contemporary significance of sin.
- **Intrinsic significance** refers to sin's place in the Bible and the overall structure of Christian thought.
- **Contemporary significance** concerns how the Bible's teaching on sin addresses the characteristics of our own age.
- Carson argues that the former is more important as it underpins the latter. Understanding sin's intrinsic importance reveals its perennial and thus contemporary significance.
- "Nevertheless, under its intrinsic significance, we ought to recall what place sin holds in the Bible, in the entire structure of Christian thought." (Peterson quoting Carson, p. 1)

2. Sin as Foundational to Understanding Salvation:

- Carson asserts that a proper understanding of salvation is impossible without a corresponding understanding of sin.
- The problem (sin) and the solution (salvation) are inextricably linked.

- "There can be no agreement as to what salvation is unless there's agreement as to that from which salvation rescues us. The problem and the solution hang together." (Peterson quoting Carson, p. 2)
- Grasping the cross's achievement requires a deep understanding of what sin is, and vice versa.
- Sin establishes the central plotline of the Bible, from Genesis 3 to Revelation.

3. Sin as Rebellion Against God:

- Sin, in a general sense, is the problem that God resolves throughout Scripture.
- The fall in Genesis introduces key dimensions of sin: rebellion against God, the desire to be like God, distrust of God's word, transgression of specific commands, loss of fellowship with God, shame, guilt, self-justification, pain, loss, and death.
- David's repentance in Psalm 51 highlights that at its deepest level, sin is against God.
- "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Psalm 51:4, quoted by Peterson, p. 6)
- This perspective emphasizes the vertical dimension of sin, beyond mere horizontal offenses against other humans or societal norms.

4. Sin's Connection to God's Character and Actions:

- Passages revealing God's character are deeply intertwined with the reality of sin and God's response to it.
- Exodus 34:6-7 illustrates God's compassion, grace, slowness to anger, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness, yet also his justice in not leaving the guilty unpunished. This tension finds its resolution in the cross.
- Isaiah 53:4-5 and 10, the fourth servant song, reveals penal substitution as God's design to deal with our transgressions and iniquities.
- John 3:16 demonstrates God's immense love for a "sinful world," highlighting that the object of his love is defined by its fallenness.
- 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 shows how Christ's resurrection defeats the death-dealing power of sin.

- These passages demonstrate that "the axis around which these themes revolve is sin." (Peterson quoting Carson, p. 7)

5. Sin's Cosmic and Demonic Dimension:

- Sin is radically tied to the work of Satan and demonic forces.
- The serpent in Genesis 3, later identified as Satan (Revelation 12:9), initiated the first human sin.
- While God created everything good, including the serpent, the inference is that Satan himself fell before Adam and Eve.
- Ephesians 6:12 reveals that our struggle is against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, indicating a cosmic dimension to sin.
- Angelic sin differs from human sin: it affected only those who sinned, with no redeemer offered, and angels were not made in the image of God in the same way humans were.
- Both unrepentant humans and Satan and his demons face eternal conscious suffering (Revelation 20:10).

6. The Multifaceted Depiction of Sin:

- Scripture uses numerous words and descriptions to portray sin, including:
- Transgression (breaking laws)
- A power that overcomes
- Idolatry
- Dirt
- Missing the target
- Folly
- Tied to the flesh
- Unbelief
- Slavery
- Spiritual adultery
- Disobedience

- Sin is both individual and profoundly social and multi-generational, with consequences extending across generations.
- Narratives in Scripture often powerfully depict sin even without explicitly using the word (e.g., Joseph's brothers, Judges' final narrative).

7. Sin Enmeshed in Theological Constructions:

- The doctrine of sin is deeply interwoven with various key theological frameworks:
- **Anthropology:** The Bible depicts sinless humans before the fall and sin-free humans in the new creation, with the intervening narrative focused on sinful humanity (Romans 3:9-20, 5:12-21). This leads to doctrines like original sin and total depravity, emphasizing sin's pervasive nature.
- **Soteriology:** The essay's opening highlights the link between sin and salvation.
- **Pneumatology:** The Holy Spirit differentiates between the natural person and the spiritual person (1 Corinthians 2:10-15). The Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit, contrasting with the acts of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-23).
- **Conversion:** In confessional Christianity, conversion signifies a supernatural transformation from darkness to light, death to life, inherently tied to God's power to confront and ultimately destroy sin in an individual's life. It is more than just changing religious allegiance.
- **Sanctification:** This is the process of growing in holiness, putting sin to death, and conforming to Jesus in anticipation of ultimate glorification. Paul's example in Philippians 3 illustrates this ongoing pursuit of righteousness that comes from God through faith.

Quotes of Significance:

- "There can be no agreement as to what salvation is unless there's agreement as to that from which salvation rescues us." (Peterson quoting Carson, p. 2)
- "What makes sins really vile, intrinsically heinous, and what makes them worthy of punishment by God himself is that they are first, foremost, and most deeply sins against the living God who has made us for himself and to whom we must one day give account." (Peterson summarizing Carson's point based on Psalm 51, p. 6)

- "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God; he gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:56-57, quoted by Peterson, p. 8)
- "Sin is radically tied to the work of Satan and of demonic forces." (Peterson summarizing Carson, p. 9)
- "With the sole exception of Jesus the Messiah, we certainly mean not only that all human beings between Eden and the Fall, and before the Fall, and resurrection, exist in the new heavens and new earth are not only sinful, but that sin is not an optional characteristic, loosely tacked on to otherwise unblemished beings, but a pervasive power and guilt and tragedy that define all human experience, crying out for grace." (Peterson summarizing Carson on the implications of biblical anthropology, p. 13)

Conclusion:

Carson's analysis, as presented by Peterson, underscores the indispensable role of a robust understanding of sin within Christian theology. Recognizing sin's intrinsic significance – its central place in the biblical narrative, its profound offense against a holy God, its cosmic implications, its multifaceted nature, and its integration with core theological doctrines – is crucial for a proper grasp of salvation, the character of God, and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. This foundation then allows for a more informed reflection on sin's contemporary significance and its impact on our world.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Sin, D. A. Carson

Study Guide: The Intrinsic Significance of Sin (Based on D. A. Carson)

Key Concepts and Themes:

- **Sin's Intrinsic Significance:** The fundamental importance of understanding sin within the overarching narrative and theological structure of the Bible. This understanding is crucial for grasping the meaning of salvation.
- **Sin's Contemporary Significance:** How the biblical teaching on sin addresses the characteristics of our current age, which flows from its intrinsic importance.
- **The Relationship Between Sin and Salvation:** Agreement on the nature of sin is foundational for understanding what salvation rescues us from. The problem (sin) and the solution (salvation through Christ) are inextricably linked.
- **Sin and the Plotline of the Bible:** Sin establishes the central conflict in the biblical narrative, from Genesis to Revelation.
- **The Multifaceted Nature of Sin:** Sin is described using various terms (iniquity, transgression, evil, idolatry), encompassing rebellion, disobedience, broken fellowship with God, guilt, shame, and its consequences (pain, loss, death).
- **Sin as Offense Against God:** While sin has horizontal dimensions (affecting others), its deepest and most significant aspect is that it is an offense against the living God.
- **Sin and the Character of God:** Passages revealing God's attributes (compassion, grace, justice, love, wrath) are often disclosed in the context of how God responds to sin.
- **Sin and the Work of Christ:** The death and resurrection of Jesus are the ultimate response to sin, providing atonement, reconciliation, and victory over its power.
- **Sin and the Work of Satan:** Sin has a cosmic and demonic dimension, with Satan playing a role in humanity's fall. However, Satan is a created being, not an equal and opposite eternal force to God.
- **The Distinction Between Human and Angelic Sin:** While both exist, they have different structures and outcomes. There is redemption offered for humanity but not for fallen angels. Humans are made in God's image, while angels are not.

- **Various Depictions of Sin:** The Bible uses numerous metaphors and descriptions to portray sin, including transgression, power, idolatry, dirt, missing the target, folly, connection to the flesh, unbelief, slavery, spiritual adultery, and disobedience.
- **The Social and Multi-Generational Impact of Sin:** Sin affects individuals and has broader social and historical consequences, impacting families and communities across generations.
- **Sin's Enmeshment in Theological Constructions:** The doctrine of sin is integral to various theological areas, including anthropology (human nature), soteriology (salvation), pneumatology (the Holy Spirit), conversion, and sanctification.
- **Conversion:** In confessional Christianity, conversion signifies a supernatural transformation involving a change of allegiance from darkness to light, death to life, and reconciliation to God, directly addressing the problem of sin.
- **Sanctification:** The process of growing in holiness, putting to death sin, and conforming to Jesus Christ in anticipation of ultimate glorification.

Quiz (Short Answer):

1. According to Carson, why is understanding sin's intrinsic significance more important than understanding its contemporary significance?
2. Explain the relationship between understanding sin and understanding salvation as presented by Carson.
3. In what fundamental way does David's confession in Psalm 51 reveal the deepest nature of sin?
4. Describe the cosmic dimension of sin, highlighting the role of Satan as discussed in the text.
5. What are two key differences highlighted in the text between the sin of fallen angels and the sin of humanity?
6. Provide two examples from the text of how the Bible depicts sin using different metaphors or expressions beyond the general term "sin."
7. How does the concept of "federal headship" (as related to Adam) connect to the theological understanding of sin's universality?

8. In confessional Christianity, how does the theological understanding of "conversion" specifically address the issue of sin?
9. Explain the essence of "sanctification" as it relates to the ongoing struggle with sin in the life of a believer.
10. According to the text, what is the ultimate fate of unrepentant sinners and Satan, and what does this reveal about God's justice?

Answer Key (for Quiz):

1. Understanding sin's intrinsic significance, its place in the Bible and Christian thought, underpins its perennial significance and naturally informs its contemporary relevance. If we grasp the fundamental problem, we are better equipped to see its manifestations today.
2. Carson argues that there can be no agreement on what salvation is unless there is agreement on what humanity is being rescued from. The problem of sin and the solution of salvation are intertwined; a deeper understanding of one enhances the understanding of the other.
3. David's confession, "Against you, you only have I sinned," reveals that at its core, sin is an offense against God, even when it has clear horizontal consequences against other people. This highlights the vertical dimension of sin as a violation of our relationship with our Creator.
4. Sin has a cosmic dimension involving Satan and demonic forces, who are presented as instigators of rebellion against God. This dimension shows that sin is not merely a human phenomenon but has roots in the spiritual realm, influencing human actions.
5. Two key differences are that angelic sin corrupted only those angels who sinned, while human sin infected the entire human race, and that God has provided a redeemer for fallen humanity but not for fallen angels.
6. Two examples of how the Bible depicts sin are as "transgression," implying the breaking of God's laws, and as "idolatry," indicating misplaced worship and allegiance to things other than God.
7. The concept of Adam as the "federal head" of humanity suggests that his sin had consequences for all his descendants, leading to the theological formulations of original sin and the pervasive nature of sin in human experience.

8. In confessional Christianity, conversion is understood as a radical, supernatural transformation where an individual turns from sin and self to God in Christ, experiencing forgiveness, reconciliation, and the beginning of deliverance from sin's dominion.
9. Sanctification is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in believers, enabling them to grow in holiness by putting to death sinful desires and habits and increasingly conforming to the likeness of Jesus Christ in their thoughts, words, and actions.
10. The text indicates that unrepentant sinners and Satan will face eternal conscious suffering outside of the new creation. This highlights God's perfect justice in dealing with sin and its ultimate consequences.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the claim that understanding the doctrine of sin is essential for a proper understanding of the entire biblical narrative and the Christian faith. Use specific examples from the provided text to support your argument.
2. Analyze the relationship between sin and the character of God as revealed in the excerpts. How does God's response to sin illuminate his attributes of justice, mercy, love, and wrath?
3. Compare and contrast the biblical understanding of human sin with the sin of Satan and demonic forces as presented in the text. What are the key similarities and differences, and what implications do these have for Christian theology?
4. Explore the various ways in which the Bible depicts sin, moving beyond a simple definition. How do these different metaphors and descriptions contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of its nature and impact?
5. Evaluate the role of the doctrine of sin in the theological concepts of conversion and sanctification. How does a proper understanding of sin inform our understanding of these crucial aspects of the Christian life?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Intrinsic Significance:** The inherent and fundamental importance of something within its own context, in this case, the role of sin within the Bible and Christian theology.
- **Contemporary Significance:** The relevance and impact of something on the present time or current context, here referring to how the biblical teaching on sin addresses modern issues.
- **Soteriology:** The theological doctrine of salvation.
- **Hermeneutic:** The theory and practice of interpreting texts, especially biblical texts.
- **Impiety:** Lack of reverence or respect for God.
- **Blasphemy:** The act or offense of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things.
- **Penal Substitution:** A theory of atonement asserting that Christ's death was a substitutionary punishment in place of sinners, satisfying God's justice.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Epistemological Dualism:** The philosophical view that mind and matter are fundamentally distinct kinds of substances or realities.
- **Ontological Dualism:** The philosophical view that reality is ultimately composed of two fundamentally different kinds of being, such as good and evil as co-eternal principles.
- **Imago Dei:** Latin for "image of God," referring to the theological concept that human beings are created in God's likeness.
- **Beatific Vision:** The direct and immediate sight of God in the glory of heaven, considered the ultimate blessedness for the redeemed.
- **Purgatory:** In Roman Catholic theology, a state or place in which those who have died in grace but still need to expiate some sin undergo purification before entering heaven.
- **Anthropology (Theological):** The study of human nature and destiny in relation to God.

- **Pneumatology:** The theological doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit.
- **Conversion (Theological):** A radical reorientation of life, involving repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, leading to a supernatural transformation.
- **Sanctification:** The process by which believers are progressively made holy, conformed to the image of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Positional Sanctification:** The definitive and complete holiness that believers possess in Christ from the moment of justification.
- **Definitive Sanctification:** A view emphasizing a decisive break with the power of sin at conversion, though not the complete eradication of the propensity to sin.
- **Concept Fallacy:** The mistaken belief that a reality cannot exist or be discussed unless there is a specific word or concept for it.
- **Glorification:** The final aspect of salvation, the resurrection and transformation of believers into their perfect, eternal state in the presence of God.
- **Federal Head:** A theological concept, often applied to Adam and Christ, suggesting they act as representatives whose actions have consequences for those they represent (humanity in Adam's case).
- **Original Sin:** The state of sinfulness into which humanity is born as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve.
- **Total Depravity:** The theological doctrine that sin has affected every part of a person's being (mind, will, emotions, body), though not necessarily to the extent of utter depravity in every action.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Sin, D. A. Carson, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Doctrine of Sin

1. What is the "intrinsic significance" of sin according to the provided text, and why is it considered more important than its "contemporary significance"?

The intrinsic significance of sin refers to the fundamental place sin holds within the Bible and the entire structure of Christian thought. It underscores sin as the core problem that God resolves through salvation. This significance is considered more important because understanding the inherent nature and impact of sin is foundational to grasping the gospel itself. Without a deep comprehension of what sin is, there can be no true understanding of what salvation rescues us from or what the cross of Christ achieves. The text argues that establishing sin's intrinsic importance demonstrates its perennial significance and, consequently, lays the groundwork for understanding its contemporary relevance.

2. How does the Genesis account of the fall illustrate the "human dimensions of sin"?

The sin of the first human pair, as depicted in Genesis 3, introduces several key human dimensions of sin. These include rebellion against God's command, succumbing to the temptation to become like God, doubting God's word and his promised consequences, the act of transgression itself (defying a specific command), the breaking of fellowship with God, the experience of shame and guilt, the tendency to self-justify by blaming others, and the introduction of pain, loss, and various forms of death (both spiritual and eventually physical).

3. How does the Bible's narrative, from Genesis to Revelation, demonstrate the pervasive role of sin in God's relationship with humanity and his plan of salvation?

The Bible's storyline, from the initial sin in Genesis to the final judgment in Revelation, consistently portrays sin as the central conflict that God addresses. The consequences of sin are shown to escalate throughout the Old Testament, leading to widespread human corruption and the need for God's intervention. The New Testament then reveals how the triune God, through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, provides salvation from this pervasive sin. The very name "Jesus" signifies his role as the one who will save his people from their sins. Even the tabernacle and temple systems, and their fulfillment in Christ, are understood in the context of dealing with sin. Ultimately, the

narrative culminates in a new creation where sin and its effects are completely eradicated, highlighting sin as the problem God definitively resolves.

4. Beyond individual acts, how is sin portrayed as having broader dimensions, such as a "cosmic/demonic dimension" and social/multi-generational consequences?

The text emphasizes that sin is not limited to individual actions but also has a cosmic and demonic dimension, evidenced by the serpent's role in the fall, later identified as Satan. This suggests a pre-existing rebellion in the heavenly realms that influences human sin. Furthermore, sin is depicted as profoundly social and multi-generational. The consequences of sin can extend to future generations, as seen in the visiting of the "sins of the fathers" on their children. The actions of individuals can also have devastating social consequences, affecting entire communities and even leading to collective guilt and judgment.

5. The text mentions several ways sin is depicted using different words and expressions. Can you list a few of these and briefly explain what they convey about the nature of sin?

The Bible uses a variety of terms to describe sin, each highlighting different facets of its nature:

- **Transgression:** This implies the breaking of established laws or commands, emphasizing the disobedience aspect of sin.
- **Idolatry:** This portrays sin as misplaced worship, turning away from the true God to other things.
- **Missing the target:** This suggests a failure to live up to God's standards or intentions for humanity.
- **Folly:** This highlights the irrational and unwise nature of sin, leading to negative consequences.
- **Unbelief:** This underscores the fundamental rejection of God's truth and trust in his promises as a form of sin.
- **Rebellion:** This captures the act of willfully opposing God's authority and will.

6. How does the doctrine of sin intersect with other key theological concepts such as anthropology (the study of humanity), soteriology (the study of salvation), pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit), conversion, and sanctification?

The doctrine of sin is deeply intertwined with other theological concepts:

- **Anthropology:** The Bible's depiction of sin informs our understanding of human nature. Humans were created sinless but fell into sin, resulting in a universal state of sinfulness (original sin and total depravity), which is not merely an add-on but a defining characteristic.
- **Soteriology:** Sin necessitates salvation. The understanding of the depth and pervasiveness of sin directly shapes our understanding of the nature and necessity of God's saving work through Jesus Christ. The problem (sin) and the solution (salvation) are inseparable.
- **Pneumatology:** The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in overcoming sin. The division between the "natural" person and the "spiritual" person (one indwelt by the Spirit) highlights the Spirit's work in producing righteousness and standing against the "acts of the flesh" (sin).
- **Conversion:** In a theological sense, conversion is not just a change of religious allegiance but a supernatural transformation that addresses sin at its root. It involves a turning from darkness to light, from death to life, and signifies God's power to confront and ultimately destroy sin in an individual's life.
- **Sanctification:** This is the process of growing in holiness and being conformed to Christ. It involves the ongoing putting to death of sin and the progressive moral and spiritual transformation in believers, anticipating the final, complete elimination of sin in glorification.

7. What is the significance of D.A. Carson's distinction between sin's intrinsic and contemporary significance for understanding the Bible and addressing modern culture?

Carson's distinction highlights that understanding the fundamental nature and role of sin within the biblical narrative (its intrinsic significance) is essential for a proper interpretation of Scripture and for effectively addressing the characteristics of our own age (its contemporary significance). By first grasping why sin is inherently important to God and his plan, we gain a solid foundation for recognizing its enduring relevance and how the Bible's teachings on sin speak prophetically and powerfully to contemporary cultural issues.

8. According to the text, what is the ultimate fate of sin and those who remain in it, and how does this relate to the new heavens and new earth?

The text indicates that sin will ultimately be banished from the new heavens and the new earth. While hell, a place of eternal conscious suffering for the wicked and Satan, will exist outside of the new creation, it will not be a part of it. This signifies that God's final plan involves the complete eradication of sin and its effects from his redeemed creation. Those who reject God's grace and remain in their sin will face eternal punishment, underscoring the seriousness of sin and the necessity of God's salvation. There is no biblical basis for universal salvation or annihilationism of the wicked, according to the text's interpretation of Revelation.