

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 9, Doctrine of Sin, D. A. Carson, Sins Intrinsic Significance

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 9, Doctrine of Sin, D. A. Carson, Sin's Intrinsic Significance.

Prayer. Gracious Father, we bow before you, coming into your presence through your Son, who gives us access. We thank you for your word. We thank you for its truthfulness. Teach us, we pray, even hard things that we need to hear. Work in us according to your good pleasure. Bless us and our families, we pray, through Jesus Christ, the mediator. Amen.

We have thought about humanity as created, as being created in the image of God, and about the human constitution or makeup. We move to the Doctrine of Sin, and we start with an essay by D. A. Carson, *Sin's Contemporary Significance*.

Carson is remarkable. He's very gifted, and he served the Lord faithfully for many, many years. And perhaps I'll just leave it at that, and not tell you stories.

Carson wrote the introduction to a book edited by Christopher Morgan and me. Morgan is a Professor of Theology and Dean of the School of Christian Ministries at California Baptist University. We did a series of books for Crossway called Theology in Community, which is just as it sounds.

It's groups of scholars working together. We had some kind of introduction, and then we had Old Testament experts write on that theme in the Old Testament. The same goes for the New Testament.

We had a chapter on systematic theology, sometimes one on biblical theology, and then specialty chapters on themes and topics that would draw people in. So, for example, surely a chapter on Satan would be valuable in a book on sin, and people would be interested in that. And a chapter on the Christian life and so forth.

Sin's Contemporary Significance, D. A. Carson. It is worthwhile to distinguish sin's intrinsic and contemporary significance. These two cannot, of course, be kept absolutely separate.

Nevertheless, under its intrinsic significance, we ought to recall what place sin holds in the Bible, in the entire structure of Christian thought. Under its contemporary significance, we shall probe in what ways the Bible's teaching on sin addresses some

of the characteristics of our own age and historical location. The former is the more important heading, for it laps into the latter.

Indeed, to outline ways in which sin is intrinsically important to a biblically faithful grasp of the gospel is to argue for its perennial significance and therefore is also to display its contemporary significance. Only then are we better positioned to reflect on ways in which a mature grasp of sin speaks prophetically and powerfully to our own cultural context. So, two big headings.

Number two is *Sin's Contemporary Significance*. First of all, sin's intrinsic significance. 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. The one explicates the other. It is impossible to gain a deep grasp of what the cross achieves without plunging into a deep grasp of what sin is.

Conversely, to augment one's understanding of the cross is to augment one's understanding of sin. To put the matter another way, sin establishes the plotline of the Bible. In this discussion, the word sin will normally be used as the generic term that includes iniquity, transgressions, evil, idolatry, and the like unless the context makes it clear that the word is being used in a more restricted sense.

In the general sense, then, sin constitutes the problem that God resolves. The conflict carries us from the third chapter of Genesis to the closing chapter of Revelation. Before the fall, God's verdict was that everything he made was good and very good when he made human beings.

We're not told how the serpent came to rebel, but the sin of the first human pair introduces us to many of the human dimensions of sin. We find rebellion against God, succumbing to the vicious temptation to become like God, and openness to the view that God will not impose the sentence of death on sinners, and thus the implicit charge that God's word cannot be trusted. Defiance of a specific command, that is, transgression, the sacrifice of ultimate fellowship with God, the introduction of shame and guilt, eager self-justification by blaming others, the introduction of pain and loss, and various dimensions of death.

All in Genesis chapter three. The fourth chapter of Genesis brings us the first murder and the fifth chapter brings us the refrain, and then he died, and then he died, and then he died. The following four chapters bring us the judgment of the flood and its entailments, but humanity is not thereby improved, as the eleventh chapter makes clear.

It would be easy to keep running through the drama of the scripture storyline, carefully observing the shape and depth of sin in the patriarchal period, in the years of wilderness wanderings, in the time of the judges, in the decay of the Davidic monarchy, and in the malaise of the exile and the frequent sinful lapses among those who returned. Those whom Jesus confronts in his day are no better. The apostle Paul's massive indictment against all humanity, Romans 1:18 to 3:20, sets the stage for one of the deepest statements about what the cross achieved.

Chapter 3 of Romans verses 21 through 26. Indeed, so much of what the triune God discloses of himself is revealed in the context of showing how each member of the Godhead contributes to the salvation of God's elect, their salvation from sin. It is not for nothing that the very first chapter of the New Testament establishes that the child born of the Virgin Mary will be called, quote, Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins, close quote, Matthew 1:21.

Carson notes that he's quoting from the NIV, the New International Version. Very little of the tabernacle temple system of the old covenant makes sense unless one understands something of sin. Certainly, none of its antitype does, worked out with stunning care in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Whether one considers the theme of God's wrath or the particular objects of his saving love, whether God's thunders from Sinai or weeps over Jerusalem, whether we focus on individual believers or the covenantal identity of the people of God, whether one stands aghast at the temporal judgments poured out on Jerusalem or stands in rapt anticipation of the glories of the new heaven and the new earth, the substratum that holds the entire account together is sin and how God, rich in mercy, deals with sins and sinners for his own glory and for his people's good. Sin, "offends God, not only because it becomes an assault on God directly, as in impiety or blasphemy, but also because it assaults what God has made," from a tremendous book.

It replaced my old standard. This book is Cornelius Plantinga, he goes by Neil Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed To Be, A Brief Treatment of Sin*, Erdmann's 1995. It's a powerful book, very powerful book, solidly evangelical, loaded with contemporary illustrations from culture. And unlike my previous gem, it contains grace.

It's a Christian book, and it gives some hope. I mentioned in a previous lecture Henry Fairley's book, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today*. In church history, especially in the Middle Ages, there were seven deadly sins that were focused on and made much of in describing the awful ugliness of sin.

Henry Fairlie, F-A-I-R-L-I-E, was a British social critic who moved to the United States and became an American social critic. Among other things, he wrote this amazing

book on sin. I told you that it is so good, it's like a spiritual x-ray machine, and it just exposes our hearts without pity.

So that my students, although they read in the book, the man said he's a reluctant unbeliever, they always argued with me. You know, the assignment was due that day, so we're going to discuss the book for, I don't know, how many, 20 minutes or so. They always said he is a closet Christian.

I said, excuse me, but we have to listen to what comes out of the man's own mouth. He calls himself a reluctant unbeliever because the book is just powerful. It's got beautiful line drawings that are awesome, penetrating, and riveting.

And then the chapters on gluttony and avarice and lust and, oh my word. I said there are two reasons: although he is an unbeliever, he's a reluctant one, and his book accomplishes what you're showing me today: it's talking about my students. Number one, he uses borrowed capital.

He says, "Surely you have to read Augustine, and if you haven't read Pilgrim's Progress, you're an uneducated human being," and on and on. C.S. Lewis, "Oh, he's the best," and on and on like that. He's using borrowed capital. He's using Christian writers with deep perception of the sinfulness of man.

Number two, the man's job was to be a muckraker. He was a social critic, and guess what? He got very good at it, so he knew how to penetrate the human heart.

But that was a great book, but it was a depressing book because there is no solution. When Plantinga's book came along, *Not the Way It's Supposed To Be*, A Brief Treatment of Sin, it replaced Fairlie's book. Students still wince because some of the illustrations are just disgusting from real life.

Oh, I don't even want to mention a couple that come to mind. I don't want viewers to go get sick. It's terrible.

Anyway, that is a great book. Neil. Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed To Be*. That expression has become commonplace for theologians to talk about the doctrine of sin, and rightly so.

Sin is rebellion. I'm continuing with Carson. Sin is rebellion against God's very being, against his explicit word, against his wise and ordered reign, his kingdom, and providence.

It results in the disorder of the creation and in the spiritual and physical death of God's image bearers. No sin, no death. Sin, death indeed.

When perfect justice, with perfect justice, God could have condemned all sinners, and no one could justly have blamed him. In reality, the Bible storyline depicts God out of sheer grace, saving a vast number of men and women from every tongue and tribe, bringing them safely and finally to a new heaven and a new earth where sin no longer has any sway and even its effects have been utterly banished. When I've been asked, I am sort of an expert on the doctrine of hell, fortunately, or unfortunately, where is hell in the new world? The answer is it is outside of the new creation.

It is not part of the new heavens and a new earth. It exists. It exists forever, but it is outside of the city.

And even more than that, it's away. It's not the focus, although the last three chapters of the Bible mention it. So those attempts to say everybody's going to be saved or the wicked are going to be annihilated totally contradict the end of the Bible story.

For in chapter 20, 21 and 22 of Revelation, there are clear depictions of eternal punishment for the wicked. You want to rewrite God's story? You need Revelation 23. There is none.

There is none. We cannot rewrite God's story. In short, Carson wrote, if we do not comprehend the massive role that sin plays in the Bible and, therefore, in biblically faithful Christianity, we shall misread the Bible.

Positively, a sober and realistic grasp of sin is one of the things necessary to read the Bible in a perceptive fashion. It is one of the required criteria for a responsible hermeneutic. It may be helpful to lay out a handful of the theological structures that are shaped by what the Bible says about sin and that, in turn, shape our understanding of sin.

Here's an outline. Sin is tied to passages that disclose important things about God, and those things follow. First, sin is deeply tied to any number of illuminating passages that disclose important things about God.

Consider Exodus 34:6 and 7, where God intones certain words to Moses who is hidden in a cleft of rock on Mount Sinai. Moses is neither permitted nor able to gaze directly on God. Should he do so, he would die.

Exodus 33:20. No one is permitted to see me and live, God said. Moses is permitted to see no more than the trailing edge of the afterglow of the glory of God.

My theology professor called it the aftermath of God, or the law itself, which sometimes calls it the back of God. But he is permitted and able to hear. God

discloses himself to Moses supremely in words, and those words move and puzzle simultaneously.

Puzzling it is. The italicized words draw attention to what is puzzling. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God.

I'm quoting Exodus 34, which is sort of the biblical definition of the attributes of God, if you will, with a profound effect on the rest of the Old Testament and underlying the New Testament's presentation of God. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands. And here comes some italics and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations. End of italics. End of quote.

Here is the God who forgives wickedness, rebellion, and sin yet who does not leave the guilty unpunished. Is this some sort of strange dialectic? Alternating procedures, perhaps? The tension is not fully resolved until Calvary.

Certainly, the focus of this strange tension is sin. Or consider the words of David after his seduction of Bathsheba and his cold-blooded arrangements to murder her husband. Brought low in brokenness and repentance.

He not only begs God for mercy, Psalm 51:1, but tells him, "against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." verse four, Isaiah 51. At one level, of course, this is blatantly untrue.

David has sinned against Bathsheba, her husband, her child, his family, the military high command, and the nation as a whole, for which he serves as chief magistrate. Yet there's something profound in David's words. What makes sin in its deepest sense is that it is against God.

We let ourselves off the hook too easily when we think of sins along horizontal axes only, whether the horizontal sins of socially disapproved behavior or the horizontal sin of genocide. 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. In other words, this psalm of repentance from sin discloses important things about sin's relation to God.

In that way, the Christian study of the Bible's teaching is aptly named because it is all theology. Oh yes, we call the doctrine of God himself theology proper, but it is all theology. Every doctrine pertains to God.

Or we might remind ourselves of the fourth servant song, including these words, Isaiah 53:4, 5 and 10. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought him us peace was on him.

And by his wounds, we are healed. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days.

And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. Again, Isaiah 53:4, 5 and 10. Here is penal substitution by Yahweh's own design, taking our suffering, our transgressions, our iniquities, our punishment, and our sin.

Again, once we recall how, in John's gospel, the word world commonly refers to the human moral order in deeply culpable rebellion against God, that is the word world commonly means this sinful world. The words of John 3:16, shout matchless grace.

God's love for the world is to be admitted, not because the world is so big, but because the world is so bad. God so loved this sinful world. He gave his one and only son.

And the context shows that the locus of this gift is not in the incarnation only but in Jesus being lifted up in death. Compare lifted up in verses 14 and 15 and the consistent use of *hops*. Oh, I raise, I lift up in John.

The plan of redemption for this sinful world is driven by God's undeserved love, most magnificently expressed in the gift of his son, whose death alone is sufficient to lift a sentence of condemnation. Verses 17 and 18 to reject such love that is to continue in sin is to remain under the wrath of God. Verse 36 of John 3. Even this handful of verses says much about God, his character, his redemptive purpose, his love, and his wrath.

The axis around which these themes resolve, revolve the axis around which these themes revolve is sin. One could easily draw attention to hundreds of passages where similar dynamics prevail between God and sin. But I shall restrict myself to one more.

Toward the end of the famous chapter on the resurrection, Paul raises two rhetorical questions in words drawn from Hosea 1:13, 14. Hosea 1:13, 14. Quote, “where, oh death, is your victory? Where, oh death, is your sting?” 1 Corinthians 15:55.

Then he answers his own question. “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, verses 56 and 57. In other words, the death-dealing power of sin has been defeated by God's resurrection of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Once again, then, the display of what God has done supremely in the resurrection of his son is occasioned by sin and all its brutal power.

Sin is deeply tied to any number of illuminating passages that disclose important things about God. And if about God, then about the salvation that God has wrought in Christ. Whoo, Carson is good, is he not? Sin is tied to passages that disclose important things about God.

I will tell one on myself. Toward the end of my active seminary teaching career, Carson asked me to write a recommendation for a book he wrote. A book on the words, son of God, especially as it pertains to evangelism in Muslim countries.

Because some Christians were saying, you know what? That is offensive language. And maybe we can turn that down and not call Jesus son of God directly. And, of course, Carson studied the scriptures and said, we can't do that.

We can try to express it as compassionately as we can, but we can't do that. That is just too important. Anyway, I wrote that recommendation and sent him an email.

His email address is very hard to find. I will not tell you what it is because he would be inundated. Here's a man who receives a request to go teach somewhere every month of his career.

Not me, Carson. I sent him an email. I said, I never said this to you before, but perhaps now is a good time.

You have helped me more than any of my contemporaries. Contemporaries in age only. Not in gifts.

God gives the gifts. He emailed back, and he said we all stand on the shoulders of many others. I called Morgan up, and I said, I can die now.

I've made my mark. That's the second time in my career that I did that. The other time was I was sitting at my desk with two students who happened to be in the

camping ministry, and I got a call from, I told us in one of these lectures before, a call from Jim Packer, J.I. Packer.

Morgan and I were co-editing what turned out to be a very significant academic book on the Zondervan. And Packer agreed to write the chapter on universalism. It is powerful.

He said, I finally get to unload my file, my card file on hundreds of references on universalism. Boy, he did. And he was straightforward and kind but hard-hitting.

Anyway, and we had offered the people, the contributors, again, it was one of these books with different participants, a free copy of *Hell Under, Hell on Trial*, a book I wrote in 1995 that's helped a lot of people, say, at the college level and lay persons who are interested in learning. It's pretty simple. It's expressed in simple language.

I also debated for InnerVarsity with Edward Fudge, who affirms annihilationism. And I taught eternal punishment, of course. *Two Views of Hell*.

And Packer calls me up. He said, I need a copy of *Hell on Trial*. I said, you need a copy of *Hell on Trial*? You wrote a recommendation for the back cover of that book.

How could you possibly need that? And I cut his words. I remember till they put me in the ground. I've marked it up so much.

I need another copy. I said, hallelujah. And my two students, I said, you are my witnesses.

So those are my two claims to fame. And God is good to sinners. But Carson has helped me immensely.

Here's what he's done over the years, starting with his dissertation, put into more common language. It's a heavy read. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility, biblical perspectives intention.

Starting with that book, what he did was articulate things I knew to be true from studying the Bible's teachings exegetically for years, but I couldn't express them like that. I'm reading that book, and I say that is exactly what I know and believe. And again and again, he's changed my teaching by articulating things that are indeed biblical but are sometimes hard for lesser lights like me to grab hold of.

Next sin, I still find Carson's introduction to the doctrine of sin so helpful. Sin is tied, get a load of this one, to the work of Satan. Second, sin is radically tied to the work of Satan and of demonic forces.

Otherwise put, sin has a cosmic slash demonic dimension. The serpent stimulates the first human descent into sin. Genesis three, later identified as Satan himself.

Revelation 12, nine. The text in Genesis does not tell us how it happened that he, the devil first sinned. But the opening lines of Genesis three make it clear that since he was made by God, the serpent has no independent status akin to God's, but is darker, but in a darker hue.

He has no independent existence like God's, but in a darker hue. That is, epistemological, ontological dualism is false. Okay.

There are no eternal principles of good and evil. Oh no, no, no, no, no, no. God didn't create evil and that God didn't create Satan evil.

Since everything in the creation that God made was very good, in Genesis 1:31, one assumes that this was also true of the serpent. When he was created, he was good. The obvious reference is inference.

The obvious inference is that the serpent had himself fallen at some point, antecedent to the fall of Adam and Eve. An inference that Jude is prepared to draw. Jude verse six follows that sin has dimensions that stretch beyond the human race.

I'm not referring to the consequences of human sin that stretch beyond the human race, the corruption of the created order, and the subjection of the created order to frustration, bondage, and decay, Romans 8:20-21. Rather, I'm referring to the sin of rebellious heavenly beings of angels themselves. Although scripture says relatively little about this wretched reality, there were small windows.

It does provide insight into this antecedent fall, which is highly illuminating. Part of our own struggle quote is against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12.

There's a cosmic, indeed heavenly dimension to the struggle glimpsed again in the first two chapters of Job. Three further characteristics of this angelic non-human sin function in the Bible to provide something of a foil to the way human sin plays out. One, the initial human sin infected the human race and brought down the wrath of God upon the entire race.

The initial angelic sin corrupted those who sinned while the rest remained unaffected. With this fundamental difference in the way sin is structured in the two races, human and angelic turns on the non-organic and non-generating nature of angels. According to Jesus, angels do not marry.

Matthew 22:30 is nowhere made explicit. Two, in God's grace, there has arisen a redeemer for fallen human beings but none for angels. Quote, for surely it is not angels he helps but Abraham's descendants.

Hebrews 2:16. Compare 2:5. The horde of demons lives utterly without hope. They know there's an appointed time for their endless conscious torment. Matthew 8:29. Compare Revelation 20:10. None of them discovers that the words, quote, come to me all you who are weary and burdened. I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28 are for them.

At the very least, a recognition of this truth ought to engender in redeemed men and women awestruck humility and gratitude at the sovereignty of grace. God was not obligated to save us. He chose not to save fallen angels.

Three, no text depicts angels as having been made *imago dei* in the image of God, the way this claim is made of human beings. Genesis 1:26-27.

Moreover, to sweep these three observations together, the culminating blessing for God's redeemed image bearers, once their sin has been entirely done away with, is the beatific vision. They will see his face. Revelation 22:4. Unlike the highest order of angelic beings, who in the presence of God constantly cover their faces with their wings.

Isaiah 6:2. Compare Revelation 4:8. There's at least one way in which the outcome of the sin of Satan and his minions is akin to the outcome of the sin of unregenerate, unrepentant human beings. It ends in eternal conscious suffering. Revelation 20:10. Compare Revelation 14:11. Satan does not stop being Satan and become wonderfully pure and holy when he is finally and forever consigned to the lake of fire.

Forever he will be evil and will be punished. Similarly, there's no scrap of biblical evidence that hell will be filled with purified human beings. There is no purgatory.

There is no third place. As official Catholic theology still teaches, as the documents of Vatican II show, that is a false hope. Hell's denizens will still pursue self-justification rather than God's justification.

They'll still love themselves while hating God, and they will continue to receive the that is sin's just due. Helps explain the difficult matter of everlasting punishment. If there's no repentance, then punishment continues.

Third, sin is depicted in many ways. Third, so far, I have primarily used the generic word sin, but sin is depicted by many words, expressions, and narrative descriptions. Sin can be seen as transgression, which presupposes laws that are being transgressed.

Sin is sometimes portrayed as a power that overcomes us. Frequently, sin is tied ineluctably to idolatry. Sin can be envisioned as dirt, as missing the target, as folly, as tied to the flesh, a notoriously difficult concept to capture in one English word, as unbelief, as slavery, as spiritual adultery, and as disobedience.

Sin is the offense of individuals, but it is profoundly social and multi-generational. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generations, and sins committed in the days of Hezekiah carry their own inescapable entailment in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The Bible frequently depicts sin in terms of the guilt of individuals.

At other times it shows how the sins of some parties turn others into hopeless victims. The sin of Achan in the battle of Ai got him killed along with his family. The sins of those who opposed, who tried to trap Daniel and get him thrown into the lion's den, in Daniel, perhaps it's chapter six, ended up in those accusers being thrown in with their families.

The application comes to us, mothers and fathers, that it is possible for us to help send our children and grandchildren to hell by our evil, bad examples and rebellion against God. Some of the most powerful depictions of sin, Carson writes, occur in narratives where the word is not used because it's not necessary to use it. One thinks, for example, of the description of the interchanges among Joseph's brothers as they debate whether to kill him or sell him and again as they lie to their father.

More potently, the final major narrative in Judges depicts such soul-destroying, God-dishonoring corruption and decay that even the ostensible good guys in the story are shockingly obscene. One simply cannot make sense of the Bible without a profound and growing sensitivity to the multifaceted and powerful ways the Bible portrays sin. Sin is enmeshed in theological constructions.

Fourth, just as sin is depicted by many words, expressions, and narrative descriptions, the previous point is also enmeshed in powerful theological constructions. These constructions are so numerous and rich that to treat them in any detail would demand a very long book. Here, I can merely list a few such constructions in no particular order of importance.

Anthropology. The first two chapters of the Bible depict sinless human beings. The last two chapters of the Bible depict transformed, forgiven, sin-free human beings.

All the chapters in between depict or presuppose sinful human beings, with the exception of those that describe the humanity of Jesus and insist he is utterly without sin. For the rest of us, we read descriptions of our sinfulness that set out sin's universality and sweep, for example, Romans 3:9-20, and its connection with

Adam, our federal head, for example, Romans 5:12-21. Out of such evidence, spring theological formulations try to summarize what the Bible says in a few words.

We speak of original sin and total depravity, carefully explaining what we do and do not mean by such expressions. 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. Two theological constructions in which sin is enmeshed.

The opening paragraphs of this essay point to some of the links between sin and soteriology. One might press on to pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, especially the fundamental division of fallen humankind into those who merely are natural and those who have the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 2:10-15. The effect of the sin's work is observable in all who have been born of God, even if the mechanisms are obscure.

I do want to mention a footnote. Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom, and Wonder, Common Grace in Science and Art*. It is clear, quote, that it is the antithesis between a natural man and a spiritual man.

With that, scripture does not merely refer to a person who does and another who does not take holy scripture into account. Its pronouncement goes much deeper by positing the distinction between having and not having received the Spirit of God, 1 Corinthians 2:12. The Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23, which stands over against the acts of the flesh, verses 19-21, which is another way of describing sin.

At the moment, we restrict ourselves to a few comments on just one element of God's saving plan, namely conversion. In the sociology of religion, as in popular parlance, conversion signals the change of allegiance from one religion to another. A Buddhist becomes a Muslim, or the reverse.

A Taoist becomes a Christian. A Christian becomes an atheist. An atheist becomes a Hindu.

In every case, we commonly say the person has converted. We may even use the language of conversion when a person changes denomination or allegiance. We speak of a Baptist converting to Roman Catholicism.

Carson is a Baptist. Or the reverse. In confessional Christianity, however, conversion has a much more precise focus.

Phenomenologically, when a person truly becomes a Christian, he or she has changed religious allegiance. So, we may still use the conversion word group in a purely descriptive fashion. But underlying the outward phenomenon is supernatural transformation.

In biblical terminology, a person has passed from darkness to light, from death to life. That person has been born again, born from above. Once blind eyes now see.

The lost sheep has been found. Natural has been overtaken by the supernatural. Relationally and forensically, a sinner has been reconciled to God.

Eschatologically, the person already belongs to the kingdom that has been inaugurated and consequently lives in the sure and certain hope of the transforming resurrection and the consummation of all things. The final outcome will be perfection. For no sin or taint of evil will be permitted in the new heaven and the new earth.

In such uses, of course, conversion cannot rightly be applied to people when they swap religious allegiances. It can be applied only to those who become Christians in the strongest New Testament sense of that word. In short, the transformation inherent in conversion in this theological sense is inescapably tied to God's plan and power to confront sin in an individual's life and ultimately destroy it entirely.

Sanctification. For present purposes, we shall exclude such categories as positional or definitive sanctification. That leaves us with the theological concept of growing in holiness, a notion that can be expressed in many ways without using the term sanctification.

Carson avoids the word concept fallacy, which says you must have the word sanctify or sanctification to speak of that reality. No, you don't have to. Who made that law? The Bible writers don't know of any such law.

For example, in Philippians 3, Paul does not hold that he already has attained full maturity in Christ. Rather, he presses on, quote, he presses on to take hold of that for which Christ, for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Verse 12, what he strains toward, what lies ahead is, quote, the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Verse 14, resurrection existence. Verse 11 and 21, which is opposed to the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose, quote, destiny is destruction and whose God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Verses 18 and 19 of the same Philippians 3. Those who are mature should adopt Paul's view, follow his example, and live up to what we have already attained.

Verses 14 to 17. In other words, sanctification works now in Paul and in other believers, the beginnings of what will finally be achieved in the ultimate glorification. That includes firm allegiance to the gospel that eschews all, quote, confidence in the flesh, verse 3, and is passionate for, quote, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith, verse 9. In other words, sanctification is bound up with putting to death of sin, with conformity to Jesus, with moral and spiritual transformation now in anticipation of the climactic transformation to come.

In our next lecture, we'll continue with Carson's introduction and learn more good stuff, as some would put it.

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Doctrines of Humanity and Sin. This is session 9, Doctrine of Sin, D. A. Carson, Sin's Intrinsic Significance.