

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 12, Biblical Description of Sin 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 12, Biblical Description of Sin, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This source presents a theological lecture by Dr. Robert A. Peterson, continuing a study on the biblical description of sin and exploring its origins, particularly in relation to the Fall of humanity and the role of Christ. The lecture analyzes sin as a historical act of rebellion against God, initiated by Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. It uses the sinless life of Christ as a lens to understand the essence of sin, emphasizing that sin is a violation of God's commands and a breach of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. The discussion highlights that while sin manifests in various ways, its root lies in a fundamental turning away from God's will, a concept illustrated through the contrasting obedience of Christ. Ultimately, the lecture sets the stage for further examination of the doctrine of original sin in subsequent sessions.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 12 – 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 12, Biblical Description of Sin

Briefing Document: Peterson on Humanity and Sin - Session 12

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

This session, the twelfth in a series on humanity and sin, continues to explore the doctrine of sin, drawing heavily on John Mahoney's biblical description and introducing a "pre-fall paradigm" and a "Christological perspective" to understand the essence of sin, particularly in relation to the Fall of Adam and the sinlessness of Christ.

I. Mahoney's Biblical Description of Sin (Concluding Remarks):

- **Sin had a definite beginning and will be defeated:** The biblical narrative is presented as a three-part drama: creation, the intrusion of sin (the tragic rebellion), and redemption through Christ (the spectacular finish).
- Quote: "Sin had a definite beginning in human history and will finally be defeated. The biblical story arises out of three historical events: the creation of the universe, the intrusion of sin, and the redemption accomplished by Christ."
- **God's Response to Sin:** Instead of destroying creation, God initiated a "retrieval project," personally involved in the process of recovering the world and humanity. This culminated in sending his Son.
- **Ultimate Victory:** Through Christ's death and resurrection, God triumphs over evil, freeing his people. The final state will be a "new heaven and a new earth" where suffering and death are no more (Revelation 21:1-4).
- Quote: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there's no longer any sea... And God himself will be among them, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

II. The Pre-Fall Paradigm and Adam's Sin:

- **Critique of Traditional Approaches:** Peterson challenges the traditional strategy of projecting post-fall understanding of sin (like pride and unbelief) onto pre-fall Adam. While acknowledging these played a role in temptation, they weren't Adam's sin *until* the act of disobedience.

- **Adam's Sin as an Act of Rebellion:** Adam's sin was "coterminous with the intrusion of death" (Genesis 2:17) and was fundamentally an act of rebellion against God's direct command, choosing not to continue believing by disobeying.
- Quote: "Adam's rebellious act is the root of all sin, not his pride."
- **Adam's Original Righteousness:** Peterson emphasizes Adam's sinless state *before* the act. He rejects the idea that Adam was created immature or morally neutral, arguing this would implicate God as the author of sin.
- **Satan's Appeal to Sinless Limitations:** Satan tempted Adam and Eve by appealing to their natural, sinless human limitations, like the desire for knowledge and new experiences, and perhaps a sense of entitlement as image bearers.
- **The Essence of Adam's Sin:** It was the choice to disobey the Creator, to act independently of God's ordained path. Drawing on C.S. Lewis, Peterson suggests a desire to have a sphere independent of God. Ultimately, sin for Adam was "an act of rebellion, eating the fruit that God had commanded him not to eat."

III. Clarifying Adam's State Through a Christological Perspective:

- **Christ as the Expression of Pre-Fall Humanity:** Jesus, in his sinless human character, provides insight into the moral uprightness of pre-fall Adam.
- **Objectivity of Sin:** Using Christ as a "grid" clarifies Adam's inward state during temptation and provides needed objectivity in understanding the essence of sin.
- **Key Features of Sin (Based on Adam's Act): Rebellion:** A positive assertion of personal rights and a negative rejection of God's rights.
- Quote: "Basic to this disobedience is the presence of a positive and a negative component. The positive component is the assertion of personal rights, and the negative component is the rejection or overthrow of the rights of the one who gave the command."
- **Stated Command:** The existence of a clear command from an authority figure, understood by the recipient, with a clear choice to obey or disobey.
- **Move from Righteousness to Unrighteousness:** Sin is viewed as the transition from a state of righteousness, requiring a context for testing and a righteous representative.
- **Devastating Effects:** Sin has intensive (total depravity), extensive (universal), and eternal (hell) consequences.

IV. The Covenantal Context:

- **God's Relationship Through Covenant:** God relates to humanity through covenants, inaugurated by mediators or representatives (Noah, Abraham, Moses).
- **The Two Adams:** Theologically, Adam and Christ represent the beginning and end of human society as appointed representatives in moral probation.
- **Jesus as the Second Adam:** Paul's writings in Romans 5 emphasize this representation. Jesus' baptism, obedience (active and passive), and resurrection are all representational.
- Quote: "Even his virtuous resurrection, even his, excuse me, victorious resurrection, is realized in believers because he represents us."
- **Parallels Between Adam and Christ:** Both were perfect image bearers, righteous, lived in total dependency on the Creator, possessed the ability to sin and not to sin ("pose non peccare, pose peccare" - Augustine), and experienced testing (probation).

V. Applying the Christological Lens to Understand Sin's Essence:

- **Christ's Full Humanity, Sinlessness, and Divinity:** These three features qualify Christ for testing and allow him to experience it fully.
- **Christ's Temptation:** While God cannot be tempted by sin (James 1:13), the incarnation allowed the divine nature to experience temptation through the vehicle of Christ's fully human nature. His choices during temptation had ultimate significance.
- **Sin for Christ as a Violation of Covenant:** Viewing Christ's temptations in the wilderness reveals that yielding to the devil's suggestions (bread, pinnacle, nations) would have been a violation of the covenant of grace and his covenant with the Father.
- Quote: "At the heart of each challenge was the prospect of violating God's will and breaking the covenant with him."
- **Christ's Freedom to Act:** Jesus, like Adam, possessed actual freedom of alternate choice, the capacity to act in accord with or contradiction to his sinless human nature. His willing obedience within the covenant is the basis of our sanctification (Hebrews 10:10).

VI. Key Insights into the Nature of Sin from an Incarnational Perspective:

- **Sin as Violation of a Specific Command:** The absence of sin is defined by obedience to God's commands. The core of sin is the choice to disobey.
- Quote: "First, the perspective supports our initial contention that the absence of sin is the violation of a specific command of God. Sin's essential features appear in the choice to disobey God."
- **Sin as Disregard and Defiance:** Disobedience involves rejecting the command and the authority of the one who issued it, asserting human independence and crossing God's set boundaries.
- Quote: "Sin then is both disregard and defiance. It disregards the rights and position of the creator and defies the creator by crossing a boundary he has set."
- **Root of All Sin as Historical Rebellion:** While sin manifests in many ways post-fall, the root is Adam's initial covenant violation, making all subsequent sins covenant violations. The analogy of the students breaking into the locked facility illustrates this.
- **Sin as Essential Contradiction:** For a sinless being like Jesus, sin would have been a fundamental contradiction of his love and desire to honor the Father, lacking any rational basis.
- Quote: "Sin is choosing to follow the contradiction."
- **Christ's Righteousness and Freedom:** Christ's inherent righteousness as fully human (as God intended) granted him the freedom to act morally, a freedom that sinners, bound by their fallen nature, do not possess in the same way. Adam also possessed this freedom before the Fall.

VII. Conclusion:

- **Moral Failures and the Point of No Return:** Sinful actions, like a hastily spoken word or a click online, can have irreversible consequences.
- **Christ as the Image of God and the Standard of Righteousness:** Jesus, fully human and righteous, exemplifies God's intention for humanity and had the capacity to turn from God through a deliberate act, mirroring Adam's choice.
- **Adam's Deliberate and Malicious Rebellion:** Adam's sin was not due to deception or weakness but a deliberate act of rebellion, crossing God's moral barrier.

- **Essence of Sin: Turning from God in Rebellion:** The root of all sin is the act of turning away from God in rebellion, a rebellion that continues in humanity.
- **Hope in Christ:** Despite this, the good news is that through Christ's act of righteousness and obedience, justification and righteousness are available (Romans 5:18-19).

Next Steps: The next lecture will focus on the "neglected matter" of original sin, building upon the foundation laid in this session.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 12, Biblical Description of Sin

Humanity and Sin: A Study Guide

Quiz:

1. According to Mahoney, what three historical events form the basis of the biblical story of sin?
2. Explain Peterson's interpretation of Adam's pre-fall state in relation to pride and unbelief during the temptation.
3. In what key way does Peterson argue that viewing Adam through the lens of Christ's sinless character clarifies our understanding of Adam's temptation?
4. What are the two components Peterson identifies as basic to any act of disobedience or rebellion?
5. Describe the significance of the covenantal context in understanding the relationship between God and humanity, as discussed in the lecture.
6. How did Jesus' baptism and his experience of learning obedience relate to his role as a representative of humanity?
7. Identify and briefly describe the three components of the original image of God in humanity, as mentioned in the context of Christ.
8. Explain why the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, according to the lecture, would have constituted a violation of the covenant of grace.
9. What does the lecture conclude is the root from which all sins emerge, drawing from the examples of Adam and Christ?
10. What is presented as the fundamental essence of sin, summarized at the end of the lecture in relation to God's moral boundaries?

Answer Key:

1. Mahoney states that the biblical story arises out of the creation of the universe, the intrusion of sin, and the redemption accomplished by Christ. This narrative is presented as a drama in three parts: a happy beginning, a tragic rebellion, and a spectacular finish.

2. Peterson explains that while pride and unbelief were present during the temptation, Adam's sin was not rooted in pre-existing pride or unbelief. Instead, Adam's sin was coterminous with the act of disobedience—eating the forbidden fruit—which was a choice not to continue believing God by defying his direct command.
3. Viewing Adam through the lens of Christ's sinless character helps clarify that Adam remained sinless even while contemplating the fruit. He only became a sinner when he chose to defy God's command. This perspective emphasizes that the temptation sought to lead Adam to act independently of God, not because he was already inherently corrupted.
4. The two basic components of disobedience are the assertion of personal rights (the positive component) and the rejection or overthrow of the rights of the one who gave the command (the negative component). All acts of disobedience, according to the lecture, carry these twin features.
5. The covenantal context is presented as a prominent feature of the divine-human relationship, suggesting that God relates to all people through covenants established via appointed mediators. In the context of sin, any violation of this covenant is considered a fundamental act of sin, as seen in Adam's disobedience.
6. At his baptism, Jesus identified with the people he came to redeem, representing their need for cleansing. His experience of learning obedience (Hebrews 5:8) was part of his moral testing as the representative of humanity, qualifying him to be an understanding high priest.
7. The three components of the original image of God are the structural aspect (rationality, morality, volition, etc.), the functional capacity (God-orientation and pursuit of righteousness), and dominion over the created order. Jesus perfectly reflected each of these in balance, while humanity after the fall has a diminished capacity in these areas.
8. Each of the three temptations in the wilderness presented Jesus with an opportunity to choose a path different from the Father's will. Yielding to hunger independently of God's provision, seeking self-affirmation over God's plan of humiliation, or accepting dominion from Satan instead of God would have been acts of disobedience, thus violating his covenant with the Father and the covenant of grace.

9. The lecture concludes that the root from which all sins emerge is a historical act of rebellion against God, specifically Adam's covenant violation in the Garden of Eden. This original act of turning from God in disobedience makes all subsequent expressions of sin covenant violations.
10. The fundamental essence of sin is presented as the act of crossing God's moral barrier or boundary in rebellion. It is a disregard and defiance of the creator's rights and position, as well as a rejection of his commands, much like the clay rising up against the potter.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Discuss the implications of understanding Adam's pre-fall state through the lens of Christ's sinless humanity for our understanding of temptation and the nature of sin.
2. Analyze the significance of the covenantal framework in understanding the relationship between God and humanity, and how the concept of covenant violation informs the doctrine of sin presented in the lecture.
3. Compare and contrast the roles of Adam and Christ as representatives of humanity in relation to sin and obedience, highlighting the unique positions they held and the consequences of their actions.
4. Evaluate the claim that the essence of sin is fundamentally an act of rebellion against God, considering the various expressions of sin discussed in the lecture (attitudes, motives, etc.) and providing biblical support.
5. Explore the practical implications of understanding sin as a covenant-voiding act for the Christian life and the pursuit of holiness.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Pre-fall Paradigm:** A theological approach that attempts to understand the essence of sin by projecting our knowledge of sin (from scripture and post-fall experience) onto Adam before the Fall.
- **Covenant:** A solemn agreement between God and humanity, often established through a mediator, outlining the terms of their relationship and mutual obligations.
- **Representation:** The act of one person standing in place of or acting on behalf of a larger group. Adam represented humanity in the original covenant, and Christ represents humanity in the covenant of grace.
- **Pose Non Peccare:** Latin phrase meaning "able not to sin," used to describe the unique state of Adam and Christ who had the capacity to remain sinless.
- **Pose Peccare:** Latin phrase meaning "able to sin," indicating the capacity for moral failure that Adam and Christ possessed (though Christ never acted on it).
- **Probation:** A period of testing or trial. Both Adam and Christ underwent a form of moral probation to demonstrate their obedience.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the Son of God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, possessing both divine and human natures.
- **Propitiation:** An act of appeasing or satisfying God's wrath against sin. Christ's death on the cross is understood as a propitiation for the sins of humanity.
- **Sanctification:** The process by which believers are made holy and conformed to the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Original Sin:** The state of sinfulness into which humanity is born as a result of Adam's rebellion, often understood to include both guilt and a corrupted nature.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 12, Biblical Description of Sin, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Biblical Doctrine of Sin, the Fall, and Christ's Role

1. How does the Bible describe the overall story of sin in human history? The biblical narrative of sin unfolds in three major acts: a glorious creation by God, the tragic intrusion of sin through rebellion, and the spectacular defeat of sin and redemption accomplished by Christ. This story begins with a perfect creation reflecting God's majesty, followed by the introduction of sin first among spiritual beings and then humanity. God's response was not abandonment but a retrieval project culminating in the sacrifice of his Son to triumph over sin and its consequences, ultimately leading to a new creation free from suffering.

2. What was the nature of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, and was it rooted in pride or unbelief? Adam's primary sin was an act of rebellion against God's direct command not to eat from the forbidden tree. While pride and unbelief were involved in the temptation, they were not sins for Adam until he acted upon them by disobeying God. His sin was the choice to act independently of the Creator, a deliberate defiance of the covenantal command, which brought death and corruption.

3. How does the sinless life of Jesus Christ help us understand the essence of sin and Adam's pre-fall state? Jesus, being the expression of pre-fall humanity, provides insight into the moral uprightness of Adam before the fall. By examining Jesus' sinless nature and his obedience to the Father, we understand that Adam was created righteous and capable of choosing obedience. Christ's temptation highlights that sin is fundamentally a violation of God's will and a breach of the covenantal relationship, even when faced with desires or the prospect of something seemingly good.

4. What are the key components of the proposed definition of sin based on Adam's transgression? The proposed definition of sin centers on an act of rebellion against a stated command of God. This act involves a positive component, the assertion of personal rights, and a negative component, the rejection of God's authority. It occurs within a context where the individual understands the command and has the freedom to obey or disobey, and it results in devastating consequences, including total depravity and eternal punishment.

5. What is the significance of the covenantal context in understanding sin, particularly in relation to Adam and Christ? God relates to humanity through covenants, and both Adam and Christ acted as representatives within specific covenants. Adam's disobedience was a violation of the covenant of works, impacting all of humanity. Jesus, in contrast, perfectly fulfilled the covenant of grace through his obedience, culminating in his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, thereby providing redemption for those Adam represented in sin.

6. How did Jesus, being fully human and divine, experience temptation, and what does this teach us about the nature of sin? Jesus, as fully human, experienced genuine temptation with real limitations and desires. However, as the divine Son, any yielding to temptation would have been an incomprehensible and catastrophic act of disobedience against the Father's will, nullifying the covenant of grace. His constant choice to obey the Father reveals that sin, even in the face of human desires or perceived benefits, is fundamentally a contradiction to a loving relationship with God and a violation of the established covenant.

7. From the perspective of Christ's sinless life and the fall of Adam, what is the root and essence of all sin? From this perspective, the root of all sin is a historical act of rebellion against God, exemplified by Adam's disobedience. This initial covenant violation makes all subsequent expressions of sin (attitudes, motives, thoughts, words, and deeds) further breaches of that broken covenant. The essence of sin is thus the act of turning from God in rebellion, disregarding his rights and defying his commands.

8. What crucial lesson does the study of Christ's sinless life and the fall offer regarding our own struggles with sin? The study highlights that sin is ultimately a choice to disobey God, even when faced with seemingly compelling desires or justifications. Just as Adam had the freedom to obey but chose rebellion, and Jesus, with the same freedom, perpetually chose obedience, we too face this fundamental choice. Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice offer a path to redemption from the consequences of our rebellious choices, emphasizing the critical importance of choosing to align our will with God's.