

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 17, Original Sin – Pelagianism, Arminianism 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 17, Original Sin – Pelagianism, Arminianism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture, "Humanity and Sin, Session 17, Original Sin, Plagianism and Arminianism," examines the theological concepts of original sin, Pelagianism, and Arminianism. Peterson begins by analyzing Romans 5:12-21, focusing on the contrasting roles of Adam and Christ and the implications of Adam's sin for humanity. He then discusses historical theological perspectives on sin, particularly Augustine's response to Pelagius' denial of inherited guilt and sinfulness. The lecture proceeds to outline Pelagianism, emphasizing its belief in human free will and the idea that Adam's sin was merely a bad example. Finally, Peterson details the Arminian view of original sin, highlighting its affirmation of human corruption and the necessity of prevenient grace to enable a response to God.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 17 – 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 17, Original Sin – Pelagianism, Arminianism

#### Briefing Document: Original Sin, Pelagianism, and Arminianism

**Overview:** This document summarizes Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture (Session 17 of his "Humanity and Sin" series) focusing on the doctrine of Original Sin and contrasting it with the theological positions of Pelagianism and Arminianism. Peterson primarily analyzes Romans 5:12-21 as the classical text on sin and then delves into historical and contemporary understandings of original sin, particularly in light of Augustine's response to Pelagius and the Arminian concept of prevenient grace.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

##### 1. Romans 5:12-21 as the Foundation for Understanding Original Sin:

- Peterson identifies Romans 5:12-21 as the "classical text on sin."
- He highlights Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ, noting that while Paul begins with a similarity ("Adam was a type of the one who was to come" - verse 14), he immediately emphasizes their dissimilarity in verses 15-17 regarding the effects of their respective actions.
- **Adam's Sin:** Through Adam's "one trespass," sin and death entered the world, and condemnation came upon "all men" (verse 18). Peterson clarifies that "all men" refers to Adam and those who belong to him, not necessarily every single individual without exception in this context. Adam's sin is described as "disobedience" and a broken "definite command of God."
- **Christ's Righteousness:** Through Christ's "one act of righteousness" (referring to his death on the cross), "justification and life" came to "all men" (verse 18), and "the many" were made righteous through his obedience (verse 19). Again, Peterson interprets "all" and "many" in relation to Christ and his people.
- Peterson emphasizes that the passage is primarily objective, focusing on the actions of Adam and Christ and their consequences, except for verse 17 which speaks of believers receiving grace and reigning in life.
- He notes that justification, while present, has its ultimate and technical fulfillment on the "last day."

## **2. The Nature of Original Sin:**

- Peterson defines original sin as Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden, which not only was the first sin (overlooking Eve for the sake of headship) but also "the sin that causes all the rest of humankind, Jesus accepted because of the virginal conception, to be born sinners, and consequently to sin."
- He emphasizes that the "mess, the tangle, the heinousness of sin comes from the first man."
- The verdict of God concerning Adam's sin is unequivocally "Guilty, condemned, damnable, condemnation." The result is "death," encompassing both physical and spiritual dimensions.
- Christ, as the "second Adam" and "head of a race of his people, the race of the redeemed," performed an act of "righteousness" (his obedience unto death) that necessitates a just and holy God to "declare righteous everyone who believes in Jesus." This is presented as the "Reformation gospel" and the assurance of salvation.

## **3. Historical Theological Background: Augustine and the Early Church:**

- Peterson highlights the significance of Genesis 1-3 in the early church, with virtually every church father writing extensively on it.
- He emphasizes Augustine of Hippo's crucial role in understanding sin. Augustine taught that creation is good, sin is a "corruption or distortion" of that goodness, and divine intervention (grace) through Jesus Christ is the only way to overcome sin.
- The church fathers understood sin as a "condition we have inherited from our first parents, Adam and Eve."
- They also recognized the role of Satan as a power of evil that tempted humanity.
- Many early church fathers, influenced by Greek philosophy, viewed sinfulness as a "lack, an absence, or a deprivation of goodness" resulting from separation from God.
- The Eastern Orthodox view, based on their translation of Romans 5:12 ("for which reason"), emphasized that Adam's sin brought death into the world, and mortality leads to sin. Peterson argues against this, stating that "sin is the cause of death and not the other way around."

#### 4. Pelagianism:

- Peterson introduces Pelagius, a British monk who opposed the idea of inherited guilt and seemed to deny inherited sinfulness.
- Pelagius emphasized human beings' "free will" and believed that the fall of Adam did not change this. He was a "creationist," believing each soul is a special creation of God, untainted.
- Pelagius argued that Adam's sin affected his descendants through a "bad example."
- He believed that "no special grace of God is necessary for man to be saved," defining grace as "the law, the example of Jesus, and the free will of human beings." Peterson strongly refutes this definition.
- Peterson concludes that Pelagianism offers "no view of original sin at all" as it posits no inherited corruption or guilt. He cautions against unfairly labeling Arminians as Pelagians.

#### 5. Arminianism (Specifically Conservative Wesleyan Theology as represented by the Junaluska Affirmation):

- Peterson focuses on the views of James Arminius' theological successors, using the Junaluska Affirmation (1975) and Paul A. Mickey's commentary ("Essentials of Wesleyan Theology") as primary sources.
- **Corruption:** Conservative Arminians affirm the "corruption of humankind" since the fall, pervading every person and extending to social structures and all creation. This distinguishes them from Pelagians, as they acknowledge more than just a bad example from Adam.
- **Inability:** They teach that this corruption makes a sinner's "positive response to God's offer of redemption" impossible without divine aid.
- **Prevenient Grace:** The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is necessary, facilitated by "prevenient or preparing grace of God," which is traditionally held by Arminians to be "universal," affording all people the possibility of salvation. This concept is attributed to Wesley, building on Augustine's use of the term but giving it a universal application.
- Peterson explains that prevenient grace "ameliorates the effects of original sin in one area," enabling even "stillborn sinners" to believe.

- Peterson expresses his disagreement with the biblical basis for universal prevenient grace, noting that while Augustine used the term, he understood grace to be efficacious and particular to God's elect.
- He notes that some later Arminians (like Clark Pinnock and Norm Geisler) do not adhere to the doctrine of universal prevenient grace, with Geisler suggesting humans are "crippled by sin" but not "spiritually dead" in the Ephesians 2 sense.
- Peterson acknowledges that the Arminian view of inherited corruption initially seems close to the Calvinist view but leads to different conclusions due to the role of prevenient grace in removing culpability and neutralizing corruption (specifically freeing the will).

#### Quotes:

- "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12, cited as the classical text on sin).
- "Adam was a type of the one who was to come." (Romans 5:14)
- "...as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness led to justification and life for all men." (Romans 5:18)
- "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)
- "Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden is the original sin. Not only the first sin, overlooking Eve's right now, but the sin that causes all the rest of humankind, Jesus accepted because of the virginal conception, to be born sinners, and consequently to sin..."
- "We condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that the original flaw is sin and in order to dissipate the glory of the merit and the benefits of Christ, argue that man can be declared righteous before God by the strength of his own reason..." (Augsburg Confession, quoted regarding Pelagianism).
- "since the fall of Adam, the corruption of sin has pervaded every person and extended into social relationships, societal systems, and all creation." (Junaluska Affirmation, representing Arminianism).
- "This corruption is so pervasive that we are not capable of positive response to God's offer of redemption." (Attributed to conservative Arminian teaching).

- "except by the prevenient or preparing grace of God." (Quoted in relation to the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in Arminian theology).
- "Man is not now condemned for the depravity of his own nature, although that depravity is of the essence of sin. Its culpability, we maintain, was removed by the free gift of Christ." (Orton Wiley, quoted to explain the Arminian view of prevenient grace).

**Next Steps (as indicated in the source):** The following lecture will address Calvinist views of original sin, followed by an evaluation of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 17, Original Sin – Pelagianism, Arminianism

### Study Guide: Original Sin, Pelagianism, and Arminianism

#### Key Concepts from Romans 5:12-21

- **Adam's Sin and its Consequences:** Understand how Paul presents Adam's transgression as the entry point of sin and death into the world, affecting all humanity.
- **"All Sinned":** Explore the different interpretations of this phrase and its connection to the spread of death.
- **Law and Sin:** Analyze Paul's discussion of the law's role in making sin obvious and blameworthy, and the presence of sin before the Mosaic Law.
- **Adam as a Type of Christ:** Grasp the significance of this comparison and the initial dissimilarities Paul emphasizes between Adam's trespass and Christ's gift.
- **Justification and Condemnation:** Differentiate between the condemnation resulting from Adam's sin and the justification offered through Christ's righteousness.
- **"All" and "Many":** Understand the nuanced usage of these terms in Romans 5:18-19 and their reference to Adam's and Christ's respective people.
- **Objective vs. Subjective Aspects of Salvation:** Identify the primarily objective nature of Paul's argument in this passage and the brief mention of the subjective element of "receiving" grace.
- **Future Justification:** Recognize the concept of justification as having a future aspect, linked to the final judgment.
- **Law and Grace:** Understand Paul's contrast between the law increasing trespass and the superabundance of grace.

#### Historical Theological Background (Gerald Bray)

- **Early Church Fathers on Genesis 1-3:** Understand the significance of the creation and fall narrative for early Christian thinkers.
- **Augustine's View of Sin:** Comprehend his understanding of creation as good, sin as a corruption, and the necessity of divine grace for overcoming sin.

- **Sin as an Inherited Condition:** Recognize the early church's understanding of sin as a condition inherited from Adam and Eve's disobedience.
- **The Role of Satan:** Understand the early church's view of Satan as the tempter and the reality of spiritual warfare.
- **Sinfulness vs. Sinful Acts:** Differentiate between the inherent condition of sinfulness and the actual sins committed.
- **Eastern Orthodox View of Sin and Death:** Understand their interpretation of Romans 5:12, emphasizing death as the cause of sin due to inherited mortality.
- **Critique of the Eastern Orthodox View:** Recognize the argument that sin is the cause of death, rather than vice versa.

### Views of Original Sin

- **Pelagianism:** Understand Pelagius' emphasis on human free will and denial of inherited corruption and guilt.
- Grasp his view of Adam as merely a bad example.
- Recognize his understanding of grace as the law, Jesus' example, and free will.
- Understand why this view is considered to have no concept of original sin in the traditional sense.
- **Arminianism (Conservative Wesleyan Theology - Junaluska Affirmation & Mickey):** Understand the Arminian affirmation of the corruption of humankind since the fall.
- Recognize their teaching that this corruption makes a positive response to God impossible without divine aid.
- Grasp the concept of "prevenient grace" as a universal, preparing grace that enables belief.
- Understand the Arminian perspective that prevenient grace removes the culpability of inherited depravity, freeing the will.
- Note the critique of the biblical basis for universal prevenient grace.
- Differentiate between the more robust Arminian view with prevenient grace and weaker versions that minimize the effects of sin.



### Quiz: Original Sin, Pelagianism, and Arminianism

1. According to Romans 5:12, how did sin and death enter the world, and what is the immediate consequence for all of humanity?
2. Explain Paul's point in Romans 5:13-14 regarding sin before the law and how the sin of those between Adam and Moses differed from Adam's transgression.
3. Describe the significance of Adam being a "type" of Christ in Romans 5, and why Paul immediately follows this by highlighting their dissimilarities in verses 15-17.
4. What is the main contrast Paul draws in Romans 5:18-19 regarding the results of Adam's trespass and Christ's act of righteousness, and how does he use the terms "all" and "many"?
5. Summarize Augustine's understanding of sin as presented by Gerald Bray, emphasizing the role of divine grace.
6. Contrast the Eastern Orthodox view of the relationship between sin and death with the perspective argued against it in the text.
7. Describe the core tenets of Pelagianism regarding human nature, free will, and the impact of Adam's sin on his descendants.
8. According to the Junaluska Affirmation and Mickey's commentary, how do conservative Arminians view the state of humanity after the fall of Adam?
9. Explain the Arminian concept of "prevenient grace" and its purpose in their understanding of salvation and human ability.
10. Briefly discuss the critique presented in the text regarding the biblical support for the doctrine of universal prevenient grace.

### Answer Key

1. Sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and death entered through sin. As a result, death spread to all men because all sinned, indicating a universal consequence of Adam's initial transgression.
2. Sin was present in the world before the law, but it was not "counted" in the same way because there was no explicit, universally known law. The sin of those between Adam and Moses was not like Adam's specific transgression of a direct prohibition.

3. Adam being a type of Christ is key to completing the comparison of their impact on humanity. Paul initially emphasizes their dissimilarities (the free gift vs. the trespass) to highlight the superiority and abundance of God's grace through Christ.
4. Adam's one trespass led to condemnation for all people, while Christ's one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all people (though understood as the many who belong to Christ). "All" and "many" refer to those connected to each representative head.
5. Augustine viewed creation as inherently good, and sin as a corruption or distortion of this original goodness. He believed that overcoming sin and achieving sinlessness is impossible without God's freely given grace through Jesus Christ.
6. The Eastern Orthodox view, based on their translation of Romans 5:12, suggests that Adam's sin brought mortality into the world, and this mortality is the reason all his descendants sin. The critique argues that sin is the cause of death, as Adam was protected from death before his sin, and even immortal beings like Satan sinned.
7. Pelagianism emphasized that humans are created with free will, and Adam's sin only served as a bad example, not corrupting human nature or imputing guilt. Pelagius believed humans could fulfill God's commands and maintain righteousness through their own free will, without needing special grace for initial salvation.
8. Conservative Arminians affirm that since the fall, the corruption of sin has pervaded every person, extending beyond individuals into social structures and all creation. This corruption is so pervasive that humans are incapable of a positive response to God's offer of redemption on their own.
9. Prevenient grace is understood as a universal grace that comes before salvation, preparing all people, even infants, to be able to believe in God. It is seen as ameliorating the effects of original sin by freeing the human will, which was bound by corruption, enabling individuals to respond to God's offer.
10. The text critiques the biblical basis for universal prevenient grace, noting that while Augustine used the term, he understood God's grace as efficacious and particular, given only to the elect, rather than a universal enablement for all to choose God.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the theological implications of interpreting Romans 5:12-21 as primarily highlighting either the similarities or the differences between Adam and Christ. How do these differing emphases affect doctrines of sin and salvation?
2. Compare and contrast the understanding of "original sin" presented in the historical theological background (drawing on Augustine) with the view articulated by Pelagius. What were the key points of contention, and why did Augustine's perspective become more dominant in Western Christianity?
3. Evaluate the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace as a solution to the tension between human free will and the pervasive effects of original sin. What are its strengths and weaknesses from a biblical and theological perspective, as presented in the source material?
4. Discuss the significance of the translation and interpretation of Romans 5:12, particularly the phrase "because all sinned" or "for which reason all sinned," in shaping different theological understandings of original sin and the transmission of sin.
5. Explore the pastoral implications of holding to different views of original sin (Pelagian, Arminian, or a more Augustinian/Calvinistic perspective) in areas such as evangelism, discipleship, and understanding human nature.

## **5. FAQs on Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 17, Original Sin – Pelagianism, Arminianism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions on Original Sin, Pelagianism, and Arminianism**

#### **1. What is original sin according to the passage?**

According to Dr. Peterson, drawing from Romans 5:12-21, original sin stems from Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. This single act brought sin and death into the world, affecting all of humanity. It's not just the first sin chronologically, but the foundational sin that results in all of humankind (with the exception of Jesus due to the virgin conception) being born as sinners and consequently engaging in sinful actions. Adam's sin is viewed as the origin of the "mess," "tangle," and "heinousness" of sin in the world.

#### **2. How does Romans 5:12-21 inform the understanding of original sin?**

Romans 5:12-21 is considered the classical text on sin. Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ. Just as Adam's one trespass led to condemnation and death for all, Christ's one act of righteousness (his obedience unto death on the cross) leads to justification and life for many. The passage emphasizes the catastrophic effects of Adam's sin on the entire human race, resulting in a reign of sin and death. It also highlights the contrasting and superior work of Christ, who brings a reign of grace and righteousness, leading to eternal life for those who believe. While Paul uses "all" and "many," these terms should be understood as referring to those who belong to Adam and those who belong to Christ, respectively, rather than absolute universalism or limited atonement in this specific context.

#### **3. What is Pelagianism and why is it considered problematic?**

Pelagianism, attributed to the British monk Pelagius, emphasizes human free will to the extent that it denies any inherited sinfulness or guilt from Adam's fall. Pelagius believed that each human soul is a fresh creation by God, untainted by Adam's sin. Adam's sin only serves as a bad example. Pelagius taught that humans are fully capable of fulfilling God's commands and achieving righteousness on their own without needing special grace for salvation. This view is considered problematic because it downplays the pervasive impact of sin, minimizes the necessity of God's grace, and contradicts the biblical understanding of humanity's fallen state and dependence on divine intervention for salvation.

#### **4. How does Arminianism differ from Pelagianism regarding original sin?**

Arminianism, as presented through the Junaluska Affirmation and Paul Mickey's commentary, acknowledges the significant impact of Adam's fall, affirming the "corruption of sin" that has pervaded every person and extended into all aspects of creation. Unlike Pelagianism, conservative Arminians teach that this corruption is so pervasive that humans are incapable of a positive response to God's offer of redemption on their own. They recognize a state of inability due to inherited corruption, going beyond simply Adam setting a bad example.

#### **5. What is "prevenient grace" in Arminian theology and what role does it play?**

Prevenient grace, a key concept in Wesleyan-Arminian theology, is the grace of God that "comes before" salvation, preparing individuals to be able to respond to God's offer. Arminians traditionally hold that this grace is universal, extended to all people, including infants. It ameliorates the effects of original sin in the area of human will, freeing it from its bondage to sin sufficiently to enable belief. While humans are born sinners and unable to save themselves, prevenient grace empowers them to exercise their free will to accept or reject God's grace.

#### **6. What are some critiques of the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace presented in the passage?**

Dr. Peterson expresses his reservations about the biblical basis for universal prevenient grace. While acknowledging that Augustine also used the term "prevenient grace," Peterson points out that for Augustine, it was efficacious and particular, given only to God's elect to draw them to himself, not a universal enabling grace. Peterson finds the exegetical underpinnings for the Arminian understanding of universal prevenient grace weak, suggesting that while it serves as a crucial element in their soteriology, it may not be fully supported by scripture.

#### **7. How did early church fathers like Augustine view sin and its inheritance?**

Early church fathers, particularly Augustine, viewed sin as a corruption or distortion of God's original good creation. They understood sinfulness as a condition inherited from Adam and Eve's disobedience, which led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Augustine emphasized the necessity of God's grace, freely given through Jesus Christ, for overcoming sin. He argued that human efforts alone, no matter how sincere, are insufficient to escape the power of sin without divine intervention and the new birth in Christ.

## **8. What is the significance of the Adam-Christ parallel in understanding the doctrine of sin and salvation?**

The parallel between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21 is crucial for understanding both the depth of humanity's fallen state due to sin and the comprehensive nature of God's救贖 through Christ. Adam's single act of disobedience brought sin, condemnation, and death to all humanity, highlighting the solidarity of the human race in sin. Conversely, Christ's single act of righteousness (his obedient death) brings justification, righteousness, and life to those who are united with him by faith. This comparison underscores the transformative power of Christ's work, which reverses the effects of Adam's sin and offers a path to reconciliation with God and eternal life.