

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18, Original Sin – Calvinism, Evaluation 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 18, Original Sin – Calvinism, Evaluation, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture** on the doctrines of humanity and sin, specifically session 18, **explores the concept of original sin and contrasts different theological perspectives** on the matter. Utilizing Charles Finney's illustration of a person in the Niagara River, Peterson outlines **Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism**, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. The lecture further **examines Calvinistic viewpoints on original sin**, differentiating between federal headship and natural headship, as well as immediate and mediate imputation. Peterson relies significantly on S. Lewis Johnson's arguments regarding Romans 5 to critique Pelagian and Arminian understandings of original sin and to evaluate the internal consistency of Calvinistic positions.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18 – 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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ession18.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18, Original Sin – Calvinism, Evaluation

#### Briefing Document: Original Sin and Theological Perspectives

##### Overview:

This briefing document summarizes Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture (Session 18) on the doctrine of original sin, focusing on the contrasting perspectives of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism. Peterson utilizes Charles Finney's illustration of a person in the Niagara River to introduce these viewpoints and then delves into the Calvinistic understanding of original sin, specifically exploring the representative (federal headship) and natural headship (realism) views, as well as the distinction between immediate and mediate imputation. He critically evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Pelagianism and Arminianism before focusing on the nuances within Calvinism.

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

1. **Finney's Niagara River Illustration:** Peterson uses this illustration to frame the different theological positions on salvation and the impact of sin:
  - **Pelagianism (Human Monergism):** The person in the river can swim to safety unaided; no divine intervention is necessary. Peterson quotes, "The monergism of Pelagianism said the guy in trouble in the water wasn't really in trouble; he could just swim out. He had the ability on his own to save himself, to rescue himself. That is a monergism of human beings alone. God is not needed."
  - **Augustinianism/Calvinism (Divine Monergism):** The person is unconscious and completely helpless; God must take the entire initiative to save them. Peterson states, "In this case, the fellow is unconscious. There's no way he can help himself, but God takes the initiative, jumps in, grabs him, pulls him out, gives him CPR, and saves his life... Monergistic, divine monergism..."
  - **Semi-Pelagianism:** The person is in trouble, and God is willing to help, but the individual must first call out for help. Peterson explains, "But human beings must take the initiative. If he doesn't call out to God and say, hey, save me, he will not be saved. God's willing, but our making the first move is necessary. This is semi-Pelagian... a synergism, God and human beings working together."
  - **Semi-Augustinianism (Best Arminianism/Roman Catholicism):** God initiates the call, and humans must respond. Peterson clarifies, "In this case, God already calls

out from the beach. And to that call, we must respond, or God will not save us... [Augustinianism] says the prevenient, efficacious grace of God enables our response and our faith response to God."

1. **Calvinistic View of Original Sin:** Calvinism posits that humanity inherits both a corrupted nature and guilt from Adam's sin.
  - Peterson contrasts this with Pelagianism (no imputation of corruption or guilt) and Arminianism (imputation of corrupted nature but not guilt). He states, "Calvinism, on the contrary, says both guilt and corruption accrue to our spiritual bank accounts before birth."
1. **Two Sub-Positions within Calvinism:**
  - **Representative View (Federal Headship):** Adam acted as the representative of the entire human race. When he sinned, his guilt and corruption were imputed to all his descendants. Peterson explains, "We were all on probation in the person of the first man, our federal head... When Adam sinned, his guilt and corruption were imputed to all of his descendants." This view is supported by the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5.
  - **Natural Headship View (Realism):** Humanity was present in Adam in a "germinal or seed form," and therefore, when Adam sinned, the entire human race sinned in him. Peterson quotes Erikson: "So we were present in germinal or seed form in our ancestors, in a very real sense, hence realism, in a very real sense, we were there with Adam. We were in his seed. His action was not merely that of one isolated individual but of the entire human race."
1. **Evaluation of Pelagianism:**
  - **Strength:** Acknowledges Adam as a bad example.
  - **Weaknesses:** Fails to account for Paul's statements in Romans 5:12-19, which repeatedly link death and condemnation to Adam's single transgression. Peterson highlights, "Paul says five times in Romans 5:12 to 19, that the one sin of Adam was the cause of all dying. Do you really expect me to believe it's merely because of his bad example? I don't believe it." It also cannot explain why death reigned even over those whose sins were not like Adam's (Romans 5:14).
1. **Evaluation of Arminianism:**
  - **Strengths:** Correctly affirms the pervasive corruption of sin in humanity after the fall and the resulting inability of sinners to respond positively to God without

grace (hypothetically). Peterson quotes the Janeluska affirmation: "since the fall of Adam, the corruption of sin has pervaded every person from that Janeluska affirmation."

- **Weaknesses:** Does not adequately explain *how* Adam's sin affected his posterity. Peterson questions, "My question is, how was the sin of the first man and woman determinative for the human race?" Peterson also criticizes the concept of universal prevenient grace enabling belief as lacking explicit scriptural basis. He argues, "...it does not teach that it enables human beings to believe. That is an assumption of Wesleyan theology."

#### 1. **Evaluation of Calvinism (Natural Headship/Realism):**

- **Strengths:** Correctly grounds the death of all in Adam's sin and acknowledges Adam as the natural head of humanity.
- **Weaknesses:** Struggles to address the problem of "alien guilt" – how can individuals be held guilty for a sin they did not consciously commit? Peterson quotes Johnson: "...even if we should grant that generic humanity sinned in Adam... we would have no relief from the problem of an alien guilt." It also faces challenges explaining why Adam's first sin is imputed and not his later sins, or why Adam's sin is imputed and not Eve's. Furthermore, Romans 5 repeatedly refers to the sin of "one man," not the sin of all men as realism implies.

#### 1. **Immediate vs. Mediate Imputation (within Representative View):** These two views differ on the order of imputation:

- **Immediate Imputation (Traditional View):** Adam's guilt is directly imputed to humanity, resulting in a corrupt nature.
- **Mediate Imputation (Placaeus):** Humanity inherits a corrupt nature from Adam, and this corrupt nature is the basis for each person's condemnation and guilt for Adam's sin. This view attempts to mitigate the issue of alien guilt.

#### 1. **Weaknesses of Mediate Imputation:**

- It interprets "all sinned" in Romans 5:12 to mean "to be or become corrupt," which Peterson deems an impossibility.
- Romans 5 repeatedly links death and condemnation to Adam's single sin without any intermediary. Peterson quotes Johnson: "'Death, condemnation, and the status of the sinner are all related to the one sin of the one man. There's no intermediary of any kind.'"

- It is inconsistent with the Adam-Christ parallel, where justification comes through alien righteousness, suggesting condemnation should come through alien guilt, not inherent corruption.
  - Even in attempting to solve alien guilt, it implicitly acknowledges guilt preceding corruption, raising the question of what that guilt could be other than Adam's sin.
  - Critics like the Helvetic Consensus argued that it effectively does away with the imputation of Adam's sin entirely, making corruption the primary basis for wrath.
1. **Importance of Exegetical Theology:** Peterson emphasizes the necessity of grounding theological doctrines in scripture, criticizing systematic theologies that become divorced from careful exegesis. He highlights S. Lewis Johnson's work as an example of strong exegetical theology in this area.

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Peterson's lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the major theological perspectives on original sin. He highlights the strengths and, particularly, the weaknesses of Pelagianism and Arminianism in light of biblical texts like Romans 5. The lecture then delves into the nuances within Calvinism, contrasting the representative and natural headship views and examining the debate between immediate and mediate imputation. Peterson favors the representative view with immediate imputation, while acknowledging the challenge of alien guilt. Throughout the lecture, he stresses the crucial role of sound biblical exegesis in formulating theological doctrines.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18, Original Sin – Calvinism, Evaluation

### Humanity and Sin: Original Sin and Theological Perspectives

#### Study Guide

#### I. Introduction to the Topic

- Recall Charles Finney's illustration of a person in the Niagara River to understand different theological positions on salvation and human ability.
- Identify the four positions Finney distinguished: Pelagianism, Augustinianism (and its descendant Calvinism), semi-Pelagianism, and semi-Augustinianism (often aligning with the best of Arminianism).

#### II. Theological Positions on Original Sin and Human Agency

- **Pelagianism:**
  - Define its core tenet: humans have the inherent ability to save themselves (human monergism).
  - Understand its view on Adam's sin: it was merely a bad example; no imputation of corruption or guilt.
  - Recognize its monergistic nature, excluding the necessity of God's grace for initial salvation.
  - Note the text's critique based on Romans 5, highlighting the universal consequence of Adam's sin beyond mere example.
- **Augustinianism and Calvinism:**
  - Define their core tenet: God alone initiates and accomplishes salvation (divine monergism).
  - Understand their view on Adam's sin: both corrupted nature and guilt are imputed to humankind.
  - Distinguish Calvinism from Pelagianism and Arminianism regarding the imputation of guilt.
- **Semi-Pelagianism:**

- Define its core tenet: salvation requires both human initiative (calling out to God) and God's assistance (synergism).
- Understand its view on Adam's sin: humans are in trouble but must make the first move for salvation.
- **Semi-Augustinianism (Best of Arminianism):**
- Define its core tenet: salvation involves a divine initiative (God's call) and a necessary human response (synergism).
- Understand its view on Adam's sin: humans are born corrupt but receive prevenient grace enabling their response.
- Note the text's argument that prevenient grace, as conceived in Arminianism, lacks explicit scriptural basis for enabling belief.

### III. Calvinist Perspectives on the Transmission of Original Sin

- **Federal Headship (Representative View):**
- Define its core tenet: Adam acted as a legal representative of the entire human race.
- Understand the concept of "federal head": Adam's actions (sin) are imputed to his descendants because he represented them.
- Recognize the concept of being "on probation in the person of the first man."
- Note the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5 as a key scriptural support.
- Understand the subdivision into immediate and mediate imputation.
- **Natural Headship (Realism):**
- Define its core tenet: the entire human race was present in Adam in a seminal or germinal form.
- Understand the concept of "natural head": Adam's sin was the sin of the entire race because they existed in him.
- Recognize the connection to the "traditionist view of the origin of the soul."
- Note the text's critique regarding the concept of acting before individual existence and the implications for justice.

- Understand the argument against it based on Romans 5:14, concerning those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression.

#### **IV. Evaluation of Theological Positions**

- **Pelagianism:**
  - Strength (acknowledged but weak): Adam as a bad example.
  - Key Weakness: Fails to account for the universal consequences of Adam's sin as described in Romans 5:12-19.
- **Arminianism:**
  - Strengths: Correctly identifies the universal corruption of sin since the fall and the inability of fallen humans to initiate salvation without grace (hypothetically).
  - Key Weaknesses: Does not adequately explain how Adam's sin affected posterity; the concept of universal prevenient grace enabling belief lacks explicit scriptural support.
- **Calvinism (Natural Headship/Realism):**
  - Strengths: Correctly grounds the death of all in Adam's sin; correctly identifies Adam as the natural head of the human race.
  - Key Weaknesses: Does not adequately address the problem of alien guilt; contradicts Romans 5 by implying the sin and guilt of the human race result from the acts of all men rather than the one man Adam; has difficulty with the Adam-Christ parallel.
- **Calvinism (Federal Headship/Representationalism):**
  - Key Weakness: The problem of alien guilt – how can individuals be held guilty for Adam's sin? (The text suggests a parallel with alien righteousness in Christ as a possible answer).

#### **V. Mediate vs. Immediate Imputation (Within Federal Headship)**

- **Immediate Imputation (Traditional View):**
  - Adam's sin is directly imputed, resulting in condemnation and a subsequent corrupt nature.
- **Mediate Imputation (Placaeus' View):**



- As a result of Adam's sin, humans are born with a corrupt nature. This corrupt nature is the basis for each person's condemnation, and guilt for Adam's sin is dependent on participation in this corrupt nature.
- Motivation: To address the problem of alien guilt.
- Weaknesses: Misinterprets Romans 5:12; contradicts the repeated emphasis in Romans 5 on one man's sin causing death and condemnation; inconsistent with the Adam-Christ parallel; if inherent depravity is a punishment, guilt must precede it.

## **VI. Conclusion**

- Recognize the ongoing theological debate surrounding original sin and its implications.
- Understand the importance of grounding theological doctrines in careful exegesis of scripture.

## **Quiz: Short-Answer Questions**

1. According to Finney's illustration, what is the core difference between the Pelagian and Augustinian (Calvinistic) views of human beings in relation to salvation?
2. How does Arminianism differ from Pelagianism and Calvinism regarding the imputation of guilt for Adam's sin?
3. Explain the central idea behind the Calvinistic view of federal headship concerning original sin.
4. What is the main argument of the natural headship (realism) view regarding how original sin is transmitted?
5. According to the text, what is a primary weakness of Pelagianism in light of Romans 5:12-19?
6. What is the text's main critique of the Arminian understanding of prevenient grace?
7. What is the primary weakness attributed to the natural headship (realism) view in explaining original sin?
8. What is the problem of "alien guilt" as it relates to the federal headship view of original sin?

9. Describe the key difference between the immediate and mediate imputation views within Calvinism.
10. According to the text, what is a significant problem with mediate imputation's interpretation of Romans 5?

### **Answer Key**

1. Pelagianism posits that humans have the inherent ability to save themselves without God's direct intervention, like someone who can swim out of the Niagara River. Augustinianism (Calvinism) argues that humans are completely incapable of saving themselves and require God's unilateral action, like someone unconscious being rescued and resuscitated.
2. Pelagianism denies the imputation of both corruption and guilt, believing each person is like a new Adam. Arminianism agrees with the imputation of a corrupted nature but rejects the imputation of Adam's guilt. Calvinism, on the other hand, asserts that both corruption and guilt are imputed to humanity from Adam's sin.
3. Federal headship asserts that God appointed Adam as the representative or "federal head" of the human race. When Adam sinned, his guilt and corruption were legally imputed to all his descendants because he acted on their behalf; they were all "on probation" in him.
4. The natural headship (realism) view argues that the entire human race was seminally present in Adam. Therefore, when Adam sinned, the whole human race sinned in him because they existed in his "loins" in a real, albeit non-individual, sense, making his sin their sin and resulting in inherited corruption and guilt.
5. A primary weakness of Pelagianism is its inability to account for the repeated assertion in Romans 5:12-19 that death and condemnation came upon all humanity through the sin of the one man, Adam, not merely through his bad example being followed.
6. The text critiques the Arminian conception of prevenient grace by stating that while scripture teaches grace precedes salvation, it does not explicitly teach that this grace universally enables human beings to believe, which the text identifies as an assumption of Wesleyan theology.
7. The primary weakness attributed to natural headship (realism) is its struggle with the concept of justice regarding "alien guilt." The text argues it's difficult to see

how individuals can be justly held guilty for a sin committed before they existed as individual persons, even if they were present in Adam's seed.

8. The problem of "alien guilt" in federal headship is the question of how it is fair or just for individuals to be considered guilty and condemned for a sin committed by someone else (Adam), even if he was their representative.
9. Immediate imputation holds that Adam's guilt was directly imputed to humanity, leading to a corrupt nature. Mediate imputation reverses this, arguing that humanity inherits a corrupt nature from Adam, and this corrupt nature then serves as the basis for their condemnation and guilt for Adam's sin.
10. The text argues that mediate imputation struggles with Romans 5 because the passage repeatedly states that death reigned due to Adam's one sin, even over those who did not sin in the same way Adam did, implying Adam's guilt is the primary cause, not a consequence of inherent corruption.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism as presented in the text regarding their explanations of original sin and human agency in salvation.
2. Analyze the two main Calvinistic views on the transmission of original sin: federal headship and natural headship. Discuss their core tenets, scriptural support (or lack thereof, according to the text), and the challenges or criticisms leveled against each.
3. Evaluate the concept of "alien guilt" as it arises in the discussion of federal headship and natural headship. How does the text address this issue, and what are the potential theological implications of accepting or rejecting this concept?
4. Discuss the significance of Romans 5:12-19 in the theological debate about original sin. According to the text, how does this passage support or challenge the different perspectives of Pelagianism, Arminianism, and the various views within Calvinism?
5. Critically assess the concept of prevenient grace as presented in the text's discussion of Arminianism. What are the arguments for and against this doctrine based on the provided source material, and what are its implications for understanding human responsibility and God's initiative in salvation?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Original Sin:** The state of sin and guilt that humankind is said to have inherited from the sin of Adam and Eve.
- **Pelagianism:** A theological view denying original sin and asserting that humans have the free will and ability to obey God's commands and achieve salvation through their own efforts.
- **Monergism:** The theological doctrine that God is the sole agent in salvation. The text also uses it to describe Pelagianism's view of human self-salvation.
- **Augustinianism:** A theological tradition emphasizing God's sovereignty and the fallen nature of humanity due to original sin, necessitating divine grace for salvation.
- **Calvinism:** A theological system rooted in the teachings of John Calvin, emphasizing God's absolute sovereignty, predestination, and the total depravity of humanity.
- **Semi-Pelagianism:** A theological view holding that salvation is initiated by human free will, but God's grace is necessary for its completion.
- **Synergism:** The theological doctrine that salvation involves the cooperation of both God and human beings.
- **Semi-Augustinianism:** A theological view affirming the necessity of prevenient grace but also emphasizing human free will to respond to God's offer of salvation. Often associated with Arminianism.
- **Arminianism:** A theological system named after Jacobus Arminius, which modifies some Calvinistic tenets, emphasizing God's universal salvific will, conditional election based on foreseen faith, and the possibility of losing salvation.
- **Imputation:** The theological concept of crediting or reckoning something (like righteousness or sin) to someone's account.
- **Federal Headship (Representative View):** The Calvinistic view that Adam acted as the legal representative of humanity, and his sin is therefore imputed to all.
- **Natural Headship (Realism):** The Calvinistic view that the entire human race was seminally present in Adam, and his sin is therefore the sin of all humanity.

- **Alien Guilt:** The concept of being held guilty for someone else's sin, specifically Adam's sin in relation to his descendants.
- **Prevenient Grace:** Divine grace that precedes human decision and enables a person to respond to God's offer of salvation. Understood differently in Calvinism and Arminianism.
- **Efficacious Grace:** Divine grace that inevitably results in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.
- **Mediate Imputation:** The view that Adam's corruption is directly inherited, and this corruption is the basis for each person's guilt for Adam's sin.
- **Immediate Imputation:** The view that Adam's guilt is directly imputed to humanity, resulting in a corrupt nature.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, particularly of scripture.
- **Theological Systematics:** The discipline of organizing and systematizing Christian doctrines into a coherent whole.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Humanity and Sin, Session 18, Original Sin – Calvinism, Evaluation, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on Original Sin and Theological Perspectives

**1. How did the illustration of a person in the Niagara River help explain different theological views on humanity and salvation?** The illustration depicts humanity as being in a dangerous predicament, like someone heading towards Niagara Falls. God is portrayed as offering help from the shore. The different theological positions are then framed by the person's ability to respond and God's role in the rescue. Pelagianism is presented as the view that the person can swim to safety on their own (human monergism). Augustinianism and Calvinism are depicted as the view that the person is helpless and God must initiate and complete the rescue (divine monergism). Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism are shown as synergistic views where both human initiative and divine assistance are necessary for salvation, differing on who takes the first step.

**2. What is "original sin" as understood in the context of these theological discussions, and how do Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism differ on this doctrine?** Original sin refers to the state of sin and corruption that humanity inherits as a result of Adam's transgression. Pelagianism denies the imputation of both corruption and guilt, viewing each person as starting anew like Adam. Arminianism acknowledges that humanity is born with a corrupted nature inherited from Adam, rendering them incapable of saving themselves, but it denies the imputation of Adam's guilt. Calvinism, on the other hand, asserts that humanity inherits both a corrupted nature and guilt as a consequence of Adam's sin.

**3. What are the core tenets of the Pelagian view, and what are some of its perceived strengths and weaknesses?** Pelagianism essentially teaches that humans are born without sin and possess the free will to live without sinning. Its perceived strength, though the source finds it weak, is that it acknowledges Adam as a bad example. However, its major weakness, according to the source, lies in its failure to account for biblical passages like Romans 5:12-19, which repeatedly state that death and condemnation came upon all through Adam's one sin, not merely through his bad example.

**4. What is Arminianism's perspective on the effects of Adam's sin, and what is the concept of "prevenient grace" in this theological system?** Arminianism teaches that Adam's sin resulted in a universal corruption of human nature, making all individuals born incapable of responding positively to God for salvation on their own. To address this incapacity, Arminian theology posits the concept of "prevenient grace," a universal grace given by God to all humanity that enables them to believe. The source highlights a weakness in Arminianism's lack of explanation for *how* Adam's sin affected his posterity and questions the scriptural basis for prevenient grace enabling belief, suggesting scriptural prevenient grace is efficacious and particular, not universally enabling.

**5. What are the two main sub-positions within Calvinism regarding the connection between Adam's sin and human sinfulness, and how do they differ?** The two main Calvinistic views on this are the representative view (also known as federal headship) and the natural headship view (also known as realism). The representative view holds that God appointed Adam as the federal head and representative of the human race, and when Adam sinned, his guilt and corruption were imputed to all his descendants because they were legally represented by him. The natural headship view (realism) argues that the entire human race was present in Adam in a seminal or seed form, and thus, when Adam sinned, humanity sinned in him, leading to inherited corruption and guilt through natural descent.

**6. What are the main criticisms or weaknesses raised against the representative (federal headship) view of original sin?** The primary criticism against the representative view is the problem of "alien guilt"—how can individuals be held guilty and condemned for a sin they did not personally commit? Critics argue that it seems unfair for Adam's transgression to result in the condemnation of the entire human race.

**7. What are the main criticisms or weaknesses raised against the natural headship (realism) view of original sin?** While realism attempts to address the issue of alien guilt by asserting humanity's real presence in Adam, it faces criticisms regarding the justice of holding individuals accountable for an act committed before their personal existence. Additionally, the source points out that Romans 5 speaks of condemnation through the sin of "one man," not the collective act of humanity, which seems to contradict the core of realism. It also struggles to explain why only Adam's first sin is imputed and not his subsequent ones or Eve's sin.

**8. What is "mediate imputation" within Calvinism, and what are the arguments presented against it in the source?** Mediate imputation is a modification within Calvinism that proposes that Adam's corruption is immediately imputed to humanity, and this inherent corruption then becomes the basis for each person's condemnation and guilt for Adam's sin. This view attempts to soften the idea of "alien guilt." However, the source argues against it, stating that if inherent depravity is a punishment, it must be a consequence of prior guilt (Adam's sin). Additionally, it contends that mediate imputation is inconsistent with the Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5, where justification comes through an alien righteousness, suggesting condemnation comes through alien guilt, not inherent corruption. Furthermore, the source suggests that mediate imputation ultimately undermines the imputation of Adam's sin itself, making corruption the primary basis for condemnation.