

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 16, Systematics, Criticism of Kenoicism, Humanity of Christ, Colossians 1:15-20

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on Christology. This is session number 16, Systematics, Criticism of Kenoicism, Humanity of Christ, Colossians 1:15-20.

After working with the five historic proofs of the deity of Christ, we gave attention to the so-called extra-Calvinisticum, how God the Son became fully incarnate and yet remained fully outside of Jesus of Nazareth.

Then we began the kenosis and the canonic theories, and we're up to the point where we're learning the person of Christ, David Wells, criticisms of the kenosis viewpoints. First, it was not clear to critics that it is possible, as Tomasius and others proposed, to sever some of the attributes of God from the essence of God. The only God of whom Scripture speaks is one who is all-powerful, knows everything, and is everywhere.

By definition, a god, small g, who has diminished power and knowledge is not the biblical God. Forsyth tried to evade the force of this criticism by refusing to use the language of the discussion, but whether the evasion was successful is questionable. Scripture nowhere encourages us to think that there is an irreducible minimum to what is divine and that there are acts and characteristics normally associated with being divine that are simply optional extras.

Second, kenotic theories all implied a disruption in the internal relations of the Trinity. Some theorists proposed their views in moderate terms, others in radical ways. But what was held in common was that for a period, be it short or long, the divine self-consciousness of the incarnate Son was expunged.

Not only so, but the divinity was also said to be contracted into mere potentiality. This potentiality, however, became synonymous with divine passivity, and divine passivity can only be distinguished from divine impotence in theory. In practice, a necessary passivity is an operating impotence.

In many kenotic theories, this was virtually admitted in the large role that was invariably assigned to the Holy Spirit in the nurturing of the human Jesus. The Spirit became a surrogate for the extinguished, depotentiated Word. In practice, this meant that during the Incarnation period, the divine circuitry was broken. The second person was on a leave of absence from Godhead, and the Trinity was at best reduced to a binity.

Third, the contraction of the divine inevitably led to a vitiation of that love, which it was the chief purpose of the canonic theories to exhibit. A. B. Bruce said, quote, But the love which moved the Son of God to become man consumed itself at one stroke, close quote.

For the love of which the Incarnation, as a result, was lost for years until at length Jesus began to find its first yearnings within himself, and at the end was able to say amen to it. The divine word lost his consciousness for much of Jesus' life, and in that loss lies much that the canonic theories claim to exhibit. Fourth, most canonic views led to a conversion of Godhead into manhood, violating Nicaea's prohibition on supposing the Son is subject to change.

I believe that Chalcedon should prohibit supposing the Son is subject to change and, in the process, removing any serious element of unity in Christ. For if this logos, stripped of divine characteristics, infused himself into a human ego or took upon himself human nature, what coalesced was what was essentially compatible. If the logos was reduced to the dimensions of humanity, then, in joining with humanity, there's little reason to speak of the need for unity when the possibility of disunity is no longer there.

The self-reduced logos and the human center of the man Jesus simply became the coordinates of the same self-consciousness. The one person could never be a composite of elements, essentially contradictory or different, and therefore to say that Christ was one was as unexceptional as saying that people today are one. Fifth, canonic theories misplaced the element of humiliation.

Undoubtedly, they were correct in emphasizing the costliness of incarnation for the one who surrendered his riches for our poverty. It is possible, however, to make too much of this, perhaps even to leave the impression, however unwittingly, that there is something degraded and reprehensible about being human. If the emphasis of Philippians 2:5 to 11 is to be sustained, the element of humiliation is to be associated not with Christ's incarnation but with his atonement, with his death.

What is degraded and reprehensible is not the flesh to which he was joined, but the sin which he took upon himself as our substitute to effect our reconciliation to God. Christ emptied himself for the purposes of incarnation, but he had to humble himself for the work of redemption. We move to the humanity of Christ.

We want to begin with Colossians 1:15 to 20, a passage that obviously is filled with both the deity and the humanity of Christ, but let me give an overview of where we'll go after that. Our study of the humanity of Christ begins with the incarnation, for the incarnation is the beginning of the humanity of the divine Son. As we've said a number of times, he didn't take to himself a human being. He took to himself a

human nature, a human body and soul, in order to redeem human beings from their sins.

We're going to use other proofs, so the incarnation proves the humanity of Christ. The fact that Jesus had human weaknesses and needs proves his humanity as well. He was tired; he was thirsty, he was tempted, and he avoided danger.

Furthermore, his humanity is evident in his displaying human emotions. He was angry and sorrowful, showed love for his friend Lazarus, and experienced distress. His humanity is very plain in his human experiences.

He was born, and his conception was miraculous, but his birth was the same as ours. He grew. In Luke 2:52, he grew in wisdom and in knowledge. In Luke 2:52, I botched it. He grew in wisdom and in stature, that's it. He grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. That is, the incarnate Son grew intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially.

Over the years, these things have been very hard for my students to confess. Oh, they believe the Bible, they believe Luke 2, but somehow they so began with the deity of Christ and saw a need to protect the deity of Christ over against liberal and cultic attacks that they were unwittingly downplaying the full humanness of Jesus. And to say he grew intellectually seemed awkward.

He grew physically; again, God grew physically. No, not per se, but the God-man, in terms of his humanity, grew physically. Did he grow spiritually? Did Jesus grow spiritually? Yes, as the incarnate word, he grew spiritually and socially as well. And if we understand these things are right, those areas of growth are as important for our salvation as is his essential and eternal deity.

His crucifixion and death, likewise, are human experiences. God in heaven, I speak irreverently, can't be crucified and die. God in heaven became God on earth, specifically according to Hebrews 2;14 and 15, to experience death and to defeat the devil and deliver his people.

Jesus, furthermore, had a human relationship with his father. Oh, not for eternity past, he didn't, but in his earthly ministry, he certainly did have a human relationship with his father. He was subordinate to God.

These things are evident in that they're not reversible. It is not correct to say the father was subordinate to the son. It doesn't work.

But the son was subordinate to God. We'll examine more the difference between essential and functional or economic subordinationism, but make no mistake about it. In John 14:28, Jesus said that the Father is greater than I. Jesus honored his father.

He obeyed God's commands. It is not accurate to say the father obeyed Jesus' commands. One book of the Bible, Hebrews, three times uses the language of the son being made perfect.

Oh, this makes us nervous. And what sense was he made perfect? I mean, he's God. That doesn't need to be made perfect. He's a sinless man.

He was never a sinner; he needed to be perfected. What does that mean? Hebrews 2, 10, Hebrews 5, 8, and 9, and Hebrews 7:28, have this doctrine of the perfection of the son of God. Surely, it pertains to the whole person of the son with reference to his humanness, but how are we to conceive of this? What is its meaning? What is its function in Hebrews' argument? Jesus was sinless.

We find it in John, Hebrews, 1 John, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, all over the New Testament. I think I found it when I had a more complete list, like 20 different times, already starting in Isaiah 53. There was no deceit in his mouth.

And God calls him my righteous servant. The sinlessness of Jesus is important. Lest we get confused and somehow think that sin is an essential part of human nature.

It is not. It's a derangement, and it's a distortion. Hence, Jesus is the second man, the last Adam, or theologically we use the language, the second Adam.

In this headship theology, Eve just doesn't count. Of course, she was also made sinless. But it's Adam over against the second Adam.

Both of them were sinless, but only one of them remained so. Finally, I would like to look at, as far as proofs of Jesus' deity are concerned, three places. Proofs of Jesus' humanness, excuse me.

Three places where Jesus' humanity is, my word, raw. The fathers of the church had trouble with these places. They basically fudged in their interpretation of scripture.

Because the humanity of Jesus was so raw, it was an embarrassment to them. They were wrong. They were guarding his deity by downplaying his humanness.

They should have been rejoicing that the one who existed in the form of God, truly took the form of a servant, of a slave, to rescue us. And that his deity is absolutely essential because only God can save us. And his humanity is also, St. Anselm was right, absolutely essential because only the God-man can rescue us.

God in heaven, or God on earth, without human nature, cannot die to save us. Cannot experience temptations successfully. He cannot rise because he never died.

All these things demand his full humanness, including these difficult passages. His temptations in the wilderness showed his humanness in a way that many Christians find embarrassing when they watch movies of the life of Christ. I'm not endorsing any particular movies of the life of Christ.

But he was tempted in the wilderness, truly tempted. And it was not the Father's will for him to use divine powers. As a matter of fact, the very temptation that the devil was teasing him with was to try to get him to use his divine powers.

If you are the son of God, make these stones bread. Jump off the temple, and God will protect you even as I distort this scripture to mean like that.

Bow down to me, Satan said, and I'll give you the kingdoms of the world. It was the father's will, not for the son to exercise divine powers, which he had and which he sometimes used. But it was the father's will for the son to take refuge in the word of God and to do spiritual battle with the devil, quoting Deuteronomy three times. You shall not tempt the Lord your God. You shall worship him, and he only is the one you should serve.

Secondly, the Father is already fudged by the fact that Jesus said no one knows the time of Christ's return, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son.

Plainly a reference to himself. Oh, the father said, he just said that. He really knew it, knew it.

Why would they say that? Because it seems incompatible with his being God. It is not incompatible. Even as we confess the extra Calvinisticum, the trinity remains intact.

The second person remains outside of Jesus. By the same token, he becomes fully incarnate. Oh, that construal is mysterious, to be sure.

But in becoming incarnate, he retains his divine powers, and he's able to use them, but he refuses to listen to Satan's solicitations and use those powers outside the Father's will. Rather, as a friend reminded me this very day, he always and only obeyed the Father, and that included using his divine powers. Oh, come on, did he ever use them? Yes, he did.

I say to you, your sins are forgiven you. Oh, his enemies just were in revulsion. What kind of a person is this? Who is this person? This is blasphemy.

Jesus, using his divine powers, read their thoughts understood their unbelief, and said, in order that you might know that the son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, that is to do an invisible miracle. Any charlatan could say your sins are forgiven,

but Jesus was no charlatan. You might know that I could do that. Let me do one, you can see.

Take up your bed and walk, he says. And the man does. And they're not happy with that either, because, of course, it was Saturday.

Did not Jesus have the divine ability to know all things? Yes. Did he not sometimes exercise supernatural knowledge when it was the father's will? Yes. He knew everything the Samaritan woman had done.

She hadn't told him that. He knew ahead of time the circumstances concerning the disciples going, making preparation for the Passover, and so forth. But it was not the father's will for the son to know the time of his second coming during the son's state of humiliation.

Why? We don't know. But that's the fact. It doesn't disprove his divine knowledge.

It simply underlines his humanity. He willed to obey the Father and not use his divine powers when it was not the Father's will. Gethsemane.

I had a teacher. A godly man. Surely, he spoke foolishly. I could not honor Jesus as my Lord if he shrank from the cross in the garden of Gethsemane. Oh, dear brother, don't say it like that. That is so foolish.

You should honor Jesus as your Lord whether you understand him fully or not. And you don't, like the rest of us. I think he shrank from the cross without sin because he saw what was ahead, and it was an unprecedented catastrophe for him whom the father loved, and it was vice versa.

And I don't want to leave the Holy Spirit out of this divine love, Trinitarian unity and communion for all eternity. And from heaven more than once, the father said while the son was on earth, this is my beloved son. Their fellowship was going to be broken.

Jesus was going to bear what the fathers and Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin called the punishment of hell. That is poena sensus, the punishment of sense, feeling the wrath of God. He drank the cup of God's wrath to its dregs on the cross.

And then the poena damni, being forsaken by God, as he cried out in his cry of dereliction which David could never have fully understood, being a mere man who had terrible persecution. It is true—my word, not only from Saul but from his own son Jonathan [Absalom].

That's terrible. Oh, but it was not like that of the son of God who feared the disruption of eternal fellowship with his father. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? If I say that right, then I choose not to do that.

Gethsemane was real. And the places where our Lord's humanity is raw, temptations, is not knowing the day, guarding Gethsemane, are as important for our faith as those passages that say the Father used him to create the heavens and the earth. Our passage for Jesus' genuine and full humanity is Colossians 1:15 through 20.

I'll say it again. Colossians 1, John 1, Philippians 2, and Hebrews 1 all show the deity of Christ. Oh my goodness.

This is a great passage on the deity of Christ, but it also, along with John 1 and Hebrews 1, and especially then going into Hebrews 2, powerfully teaches the humanity of our Lord. Colossians 1:15 to 20. A key here is the language in verse 18 that in everything, he might be preeminent.

Everything is he is supreme or preeminent or has first place over creation. Verses 15 to 17. And he is supreme or preeminent over the new creation, which includes the church.

Verses 18 through 20. Colossians 1, starting with 15. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things.

And in him, all things hold together. And he's the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

That is everything, creation, and new creation, he might be preeminent. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Granted, the emphasis is indeed on his divine nature.

I struggled to parcel these passages out with the great theological themes. Incarnation, John 1, is just a ringer. Deity, John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1. I chose Hebrews 1 because all five historic proofs were there, but Colossians 1 is equally impressive.

Oh, my goodness. Nevertheless, his humanity is here. His incarnation is hinted at in verse 15.

He's the image of the invisible God. The meaning is that he's the visible image, the visible manifestation; the visible revelation is a good word of God, the invisible one. If God were to become seen, no one can see me and live, God told Moses in Exodus 33.

Then he hit him in the rock and gave Moses a glimpse of his back. That is a tiny glimpse at his divine nature and glory. But now, the invisible God, even as it was said in John 1:18, no one has seen God.

The only God who's in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him. Similar to this, he's the image, the visible revelation of the invisible God. How is that so? Only in his incarnation.

So, already, his incarnation is hinted at. He's the highest one over the whole creation, the firstborn, for he made, for by him the Father made everything. He's eternal, 17.

He does the work of providence, 17b. Furthermore, he's the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn, that is repeated.

Firstborn over all creation, the highest one, because he made it. He's the firstborn from the dead. Obviously, speaking of his death refers to his humanity.

How is he at the beginning? Once again, it's an allusion to Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. You say, but wait a minute, creation was in that first paragraph, we'll call it, 15 to 17. 18 and following speaks of the church.

Oh, that's right, that's right. In the beginning, by him, all things in heaven and earth were created. 16.

18. He's the beginning, this time, not of the creation, but of the new creation, the re-creation, which involves regeneration now and the new heavens and the new earth on the last day. He is the beginning of the new creation of God, the firstborn from the dead.

I get it. He is raised, and as such, he will be the cause of our resurrection. As we saw in Philippians 3:21, by the power he has to subject all things to Himself, he will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

The purpose of all of this is that in everything, both creation and new creation, he might have first place. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Who's in him? In the incarnate Jesus.

And through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. That is by his violent death. The passage emphasizes his deity more.

I fess up, it's true. It also teaches and alludes to his body, his blood, his incarnation, and his death and, as such, is a testimony to his humanness. Lord willing, in our next lecture, we'll begin those proofs of the humanity of the incarnate son of God.

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