

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Method, Books, Soundings Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Method, Books, Soundings, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture introduces the theological method for studying Christ's saving work, emphasizing exegesis, biblical theology, and historical theology as **foundational**. He then surveys key books influential to his understanding of the atonement, including works by Brunner, Alain, Morris, Berkouwer, McDonald, Stott, and Letham. **Peterson reflects on his own contributions to the doctrine and highlights the significance of Isaiah 53 as a profound Old Testament passage foreshadowing Christ's suffering and glory.** This session lays the groundwork for subsequent discussions by outlining his methodological approach and identifying critical resources for understanding the saving work of Christ.

**2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2 – 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 → Christology).**



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3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Method, Books, Soundings

Briefing Document: Christ's Saving Work - Introduction, Part 2

Overview: This session, the second part of the introduction to Dr. Peterson's lectures on Christ's Saving Work, focuses on two main areas: the **Theological Method** for studying Scripture and key theological books relevant to understanding the atonement. It concludes with a detailed examination of **Isaiah 53** as a crucial biblical sounding for the doctrine of Christ's saving work.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Theological Method:

- **Biblical Warrant:** Peterson establishes the importance of studying Scripture to understand its teachings, citing 2 Timothy 3:16 ("All scripture is inspired by God, and it's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.") as a "biblical warrant" for this endeavor.
- **Components of Theological Method:** He outlines a multi-stage process:
- **Exegesis:** The foundational step, focusing on understanding the biblical author's intended meaning through careful study of literary genre, context (literary and historical), and word meanings within their immediate and broader contexts. Peterson laments the decline in the teaching of biblical languages, echoing Luther's concern that losing these languages could lead to losing the gospel.
- **Biblical Theology:** Placing individual passages within the overarching narrative of Scripture, from creation to new creation, culminating in the person and work of Christ. This involves understanding the development of the biblical story through covenants and identifying central themes (covenant, kingdom, atonement, etc.) to see the interrelationships of doctrines.
- **Historical Theology:** Recognizing the Church as the historical interpreter of Scripture. While not authoritative like Scripture ("sola Scriptura"), historical church teachings and creeds offer valuable insights from thinkers throughout the centuries (Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc.). Peterson emphasizes subordinating experience, reason, and tradition to Scripture. Good theology is done "by, with, and for the Church."

- **Systematic Theology:** The goal of theological study, aiming for a theological synthesis that incorporates biblical themes, addresses central topics, and shows priorities and interrelationships among doctrines, ideally organized around the biblical storyline.
- **Practical Theology:** The application of systematic theology in various practical disciplines.
- **Interconnectedness:** Peterson notes that these stages are not isolated; for example, systematic theology can influence exegesis. He observes how different theological traditions (Reformed, Arminian) tend to focus on historical figures aligned with their perspectives.

2. Key Books on the Doctrine of the Atonement:

Peterson shares several key books that have been influential in his over 40 years of studying the atonement:

- **Emil Brunner, *The Mediator*:** Presents Christ's saving work chiefly as **penal substitution**, a significant contribution against liberal theology.
- **Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor*:** Argues for a view of the atonement where Christ is the great victor who overcame our enemies, especially evil powers, delivering his people. Peterson notes its significance as a theological nomenclature and its attempt to find a middle ground. He plans a detailed evaluation later, noting Aulén's downplaying of the Old Testament and overemphasis on Christus Victor in the Church Fathers and Luther.
- **Leon Morris: *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*:** Famous for its treatment of biblical words of salvation (Lamb of God, Redemption, Reconciliation, Propitiation), defending the traditional Reformation view of propitiation. Peterson highlights its importance in the context of attacks on propitiation.
- ***The Cross in the New Testament*:** Examines the teaching on Christ's work corpus by corpus throughout the New Testament.
- Other works (possibly *The Atonement*): Morris made a "significant contribution" and convinced scholars like C. E. B. Cranfield on the meaning of propitiation in Romans 3:25-26 against C. H. Dodd's argument for expiation.
- **G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*** (from *Studies in Dogmatics*): Praised for its strong historical theology and its surveying of different viewpoints, allowing readers to form their own conclusions.

- **H. Dermot McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*:** Highly helpful for its extensive treatment of the historical theology of the atonement, providing valuable quotations from historical figures.
- **John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*:** Considered Stott's magnum opus, combining biblical study with addressing the modern world, serving as an "apologia for the penal substitutionary theme of the scriptures." Peterson considers it a good recommendation for laypersons.
- **Robert Letham, *Contours of Christian Theology: The Work of Christ*:** An "outstanding book," solidly orthodox and engaging with contemporary thought. Letham utilizes the three-fold office of Christ (prophet, priest, king), which Peterson notes can be limiting but Letham addresses this with additional chapters.
- **Robert Peterson: *Calvin and the Atonement*** (2nd ed. of dissertation): Focuses on Calvin's understanding of the work of Christ, clarifying that it is not primarily about limited atonement. Peterson argues that both limited and unlimited atonement proponents read their views into Calvin, suggesting particular redemption is a legitimate development of Calvin's thought.
- ***Salvation Accomplished by the Son, the Work of Christ*:** Organized into two main sections: Christ's nine saving events and biblical pictures of his work. Peterson emphasizes that events are not self-interpreting and require word revelation for understanding, using the Exodus and the cross as examples. He lists six comprehensive biblical pictures: redemption, reconciliation, penal substitution, second Adam's new creation, sacrifice and purification, and victory.

3. Biblical Soundings: Isaiah 53:

Peterson identifies Isaiah 53 (starting from Isaiah 52:13) as an exceptionally important passage for understanding Christ's saving work, calling it a "biblical sounding" to judge the depths of the waters.

- **Significance:** He believes it presents a New Testament picture of Christ's work with remarkable clarity, stating, "You cannot beat Isaiah 53:4, 5, and 6 as you bow your head and meditate at the Lord's Supper."
- **Suffering Servant:** The passage vividly depicts the tremendous suffering of the servant, whose appearance is "so marred beyond human semblance" (Isaiah 52:14), who is "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3), and suffers alone.

- **Injustice and Justice:** Peterson raises the apparent paradox of the servant's suffering being both unjust (he "had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth" - Isaiah 53:9, called "my righteous servant" - Isaiah 53:11) and just ("it was the will of the Lord to crush him" - Isaiah 53:10). He resolves this by emphasizing trust in God's character and highlighting the substitutionary nature of the servant's suffering.
- **Substitutionary Atonement:** Peterson argues that Isaiah 53 is the strongest chapter in the Bible on substitutionary atonement, quoting verses like:
 - "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).
 - "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).
 - "He was stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isaiah 53:8).
 - "Yet he bore the sin of many" (Isaiah 53:12).
- **Glory Surrounding Suffering:** Despite the gore and suffering, the passage begins and ends with glory. "My servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted" (Isaiah 52:13). This intertwining of suffering and glory is seen as a precursor to the Gospel of John's picture of the Son of Man being "lifted up."
- **Hint of Resurrection:** While focusing on death, Isaiah 53 also hints at the resurrection: "When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days" (Isaiah 53:10). This indicates that despite dying, the servant will have offspring and a prolonged life.

Conclusion:

This session provides a foundational understanding of the theological method essential for studying Christ's saving work, introduces key influential books on the doctrine of the atonement, and underscores the crucial importance of Isaiah 53 as a rich Old Testament passage that powerfully foreshadows the substitutionary suffering and ultimate glory of Christ. The detailed analysis of Isaiah 53 highlights the themes of the servant's suffering, its just yet seemingly unjust nature, its substitutionary character, and the glory that surrounds and ultimately follows it.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Method, Books, Soundings

Christ's Saving Work: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Peterson, what are the key components of the Theological Method? Briefly describe the foundational element.
2. Explain the relationship between exegesis and biblical theology, and how historical theology fits into this framework.
3. What does Peterson mean by *sola Scriptura* in the context of theological interpretation, and what does it subordinate?
4. Why does Peterson emphasize the importance of historical theology and engaging with the Church's historical interpreters of Scripture?
5. Name three of the key books Peterson identifies as helpful in studying the doctrine of the atonement and briefly state why he finds them significant.
6. According to Peterson, what is particularly remarkable about Isaiah 53 in relation to the New Testament?
7. What are the two main questions Peterson poses when examining Isaiah 53, and how are they initially answered?
8. How does Peterson resolve the apparent tension between the justice of God and the seemingly unjust suffering of the servant in Isaiah 53?
9. Identify three of the six comprehensive biblical pictures of Christ's death and resurrection that Peterson enumerates.
10. How does Peterson explain the intertwining of suffering and glory in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, and what New Testament concept does he connect it to?

Answer Key

1. The key components of the Theological Method, according to Peterson, are exegesis, biblical theology, and historical theology, all leading toward systematic theology. The foundational element is exegesis, which involves understanding the meaning of biblical passages based on the biblical author's intention through careful study of genre, literary context, word meanings, and historical setting.

2. Exegesis is the foundation upon which biblical theology builds by placing individual passages within the larger context of the entire biblical canon and God's unfolding plan of redemption. Historical theology, while not directly flowing from biblical theology, is brought in to learn from the interpretations of Scripture throughout Church history, providing a broader understanding beyond individual or contemporary readings.
3. Peterson understands *sola Scriptura* as deliberately and consistently subordinating our experience, reason, and tradition to Holy Scripture as the ultimate authority in theological interpretation. It means the Bible alone holds authoritative weight over modern and postmodern interpretive approaches that might prioritize individual or contemporary community readings over historic Church teachings.
4. Peterson emphasizes historical theology because the Church has been the historical interpreter of Scripture, and we can learn much from the leading thinkers throughout Church history. While not authoritative like Scripture, these teachings and creeds offer valuable insights, and we should only diverge from the historic stream of thought with great hesitancy and when thoroughly convinced by Scripture or evident reason.
5. Three key books are:
 - **Emil Brunner's *The Mediator***: Significant for presenting Christ in his saving work chiefly as a penal substitute during a time when this was crucial.
 - **Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor***: Remarkable for offering an alternative to liberal and conservative atonement theories by emphasizing Christ as the victor over evil powers.
 - **Leon Morris's *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross***: Justly famous for its treatment of the biblical words of salvation, such as redemption and propitiation, defending traditional views.
1. Peterson finds it astonishing that Isaiah 53 presents a New Testament picture of Christ's saving work so clearly in the Old Testament. He believes that passages like Isaiah 53:4-6 are unparalleled in their depiction of substitutionary atonement and Christ's suffering.
2. The two main questions are whether the suffering of the servant is just or unjust. Initially, the suffering appears unjust due to the servant's lack of sin and the

oppressive nature of his treatment. However, verse 10 suggests it must be just because it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

3. Peterson resolves this tension by highlighting that the servant's death is both voluntary (he doesn't open his mouth, he pours out his soul to death) and substitutionary. Isaiah 53 clearly teaches that the servant bears our griefs, transgressions, iniquities, and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all, indicating he suffers in place of others.
4. Three of the six comprehensive biblical pictures are:
 - Redemption (Christ is our redeemer)
 - Reconciliation (Christ is our peacemaker)
 - Penal Substitution (Christ paid the penalty for our sins)
1. Peterson explains that while Isaiah 53 vividly portrays the suffering of the servant, it is framed by glory. Isaiah 52:13 speaks of the servant being high, lifted up, and exalted, and the chapter concludes with him dividing the spoil with the strong, signifying victory. Peterson connects this intertwining of suffering and glory to the Gospel of John's depiction of the Son of Man being "lifted up," referring to both crucifixion and exaltation.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the importance of each component of Peterson's Theological Method (exegesis, biblical theology, and historical theology) and explain how they contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Christ's saving work.
2. Analyze Peterson's perspective on *sola Scriptura*. How does he define it, and what are the implications of this principle for theological study and the role of tradition?
3. Critically evaluate Peterson's assessment of Isaiah 53. In what ways does this Old Testament passage foreshadow the New Testament understanding of Christ's saving work, and are there any limitations to drawing such direct connections?
4. Compare and contrast two of the key books on the atonement discussed by Peterson (e.g., Brunner's *The Mediator* and Aulén's *Christus Victor*), highlighting their main arguments and Peterson's evaluation of their contributions and shortcomings.
5. Explore the concept of substitutionary atonement as presented in Peterson's discussion of Isaiah 53. What biblical evidence does he cite, and why does he consider this theme so central to understanding Christ's saving work?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a biblical text, focusing on the original author's intended meaning within its literary and historical context.
- **Biblical Theology:** A discipline that studies the themes and doctrines of the Bible within the historical progression of God's revelation from creation to new creation, culminating in Christ.
- **Historical Theology:** The study of how Christian beliefs and doctrines have developed throughout church history, examining the interpretations and formulations of key figures and movements.
- **Systematic Theology:** A discipline that organizes and synthesizes biblical doctrines into a coherent and logical system of belief.
- **Sola Scriptura:** A Latin phrase meaning "Scripture alone," a foundational principle of the Protestant Reformation asserting that the Bible is the ultimate and final authority in matters of faith and practice.
- **Verbal Inspiration:** The theological doctrine that the very words of Scripture were inspired by God, not just the general ideas or concepts.
- **Canon:** The collection of books recognized as the authoritative Word of God.
- **Covenant:** A binding agreement between God and humanity, establishing a relationship with specific promises and obligations.
- **Atonement:** The work Christ did in his life and death to reconcile humanity to God, making amends for sin.
- **Propitiation:** The act of appeasing or satisfying God's wrath against sin through sacrifice.
- **Expiation:** The act of removing or covering over sin, often through a cleansing ritual or sacrifice.
- **Penal Substitution:** A theory of atonement stating that Christ died as a substitute for sinners, bearing the penalty of God's wrath that they deserved.
- **Christus Victor:** A model of atonement emphasizing Christ's victory over the forces of evil, sin, death, and the devil.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 2, Introduction, Part 2, Method, Books, Soundings, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Christ's Saving Work

1. What is the "Theological Method" discussed, and why is it important for understanding Christ's saving work?

The Theological Method, as presented here, involves a process of studying Scripture that begins with **exegesis** (understanding the meaning of biblical passages in their original context), moves to **biblical theology** (tracing themes and doctrines across the entire canon of Scripture within God's unfolding plan), incorporates **historical theology** (learning from the Church's interpretation of Scripture throughout history), and aims towards **systematic theology** (synthesizing biblical teachings into a coherent and organized understanding). This method is crucial for accurately understanding Christ's saving work because it emphasizes a grounded interpretation of the Bible, considers its overarching narrative, learns from the wisdom and errors of past theological reflection, and strives for a comprehensive and interconnected understanding of this central doctrine.

2. Why is exegesis considered the foundation of the Theological Method?

Exegesis, the careful and contextual interpretation of individual biblical passages, is the foundation because it seeks to understand the original author's intended meaning. This involves considering the literary genre, context (immediate, book, and canonical), word meanings within their surrounding text, and the historical setting. Without a solid exegetical foundation, any subsequent theological construction risks being built on misinterpretations or a misunderstanding of the primary sources, potentially leading to flawed conclusions about Christ's saving work.

3. How does biblical theology contribute to our understanding of Christ's saving work?

Biblical theology places individual passages and doctrines within the broader narrative of Scripture, from creation to new creation, culminating in the person and work of Christ. It helps us see how the theme of salvation unfolds through the covenants and across different parts of the Bible (Law, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Epistles, Revelation). By locating Christ's saving work within this grand storyline and relating it to

central biblical themes like covenant, kingdom, and atonement, we gain a more comprehensive and interconnected understanding of its significance and scope.

4. What is the role of historical theology in studying Christ's saving work, and what is the principle of *sola Scriptura* in this context?

Historical theology provides insights into how the Church throughout history has interpreted Scripture and understood doctrines, including the saving work of Christ. While historical Church teachings and creeds are not considered authoritative in the same way as Scripture (*sola Scriptura*), they offer valuable perspectives, highlight potential pitfalls, and connect us to the ongoing tradition of faith. *Sola Scriptura* means that Scripture alone is the ultimate authority, and all other sources, including tradition, reason, and experience, should be deliberately and consistently subordinated to it in our interpretation. We learn from historical theology but ultimately test its conclusions against the Bible.

5. According to the source, what are some key books that have significantly contributed to the understanding of the atonement?

The source highlights several key books, including Emil Brunner's *The Mediator* (emphasizing penal substitution), Gustav Aulén's *Christus Victor* (focusing on Christ's victory over evil powers), Leon Morris's *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* and *The Cross in the New Testament* (analyzing biblical words and New Testament corpora related to salvation), G. C. Berkouwer's *The Work of Christ* (a comprehensive survey in his *Studies in Dogmatics*), H. Dermot McDonald's *The Atonement of the Death of Christ* (with extensive historical theology), John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* (an apologia for penal substitution), and Robert Letham's *Contours of Christian Theology* and *The Systematic Theology* (emphasizing the three-fold office of Christ).

6. What is the significance of Isaiah 53 in understanding Christ's saving work?

Isaiah 53 is presented as a remarkably clear Old Testament prophecy that foreshadows the suffering and saving work of Christ. It vividly depicts the servant's marred appearance, rejection, unjust suffering, and ultimately, his substitutionary atonement for the sins of others ("pierced for our transgressions," "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"). The passage also hints at the glory that would follow his suffering, including the idea of resurrection ("he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days") and exaltation. It serves as a foundational biblical text for understanding the nature and purpose of Christ's death and resurrection.

7. What are some of the key themes identified in Isaiah 53 regarding the suffering servant?

Key themes in Isaiah 53 include the **intense and horrific suffering** of the servant, his **apparent injustice** coupled with the divine will behind it, his **sinlessness** ("he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth"), the **voluntary nature** of his suffering ("he opened not his mouth," "he poured out his soul to death"), and most significantly, its **substitutionary character** ("he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," "he was pierced for our transgressions"). Additionally, the passage intertwines this suffering with **future glory and vindication**.

8. What are the "biblical pictures" of Christ's death and resurrection mentioned in the source, and why are they important?

The source identifies six comprehensive "biblical pictures" of Christ's death and resurrection found in the New Testament: **redemption** (Christ as our redeemer), **reconciliation** (Christ as our peacemaker), **penal substitution** (Christ paying the penalty for our sins), **the second Adam's new creation** (Christ overcoming Adam's failure), **sacrifice and purification**, and **victory** (Christ triumphing over his and our enemies). These pictures are important because they offer different but complementary ways of understanding the multifaceted nature and impact of Christ's saving work, revealing the various dimensions of what God accomplished through his Son.