

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 1, Introduction/Overview Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 1, Introduction/Overview, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's Christology Session 1 provides an **introduction and overview** of the course, beginning with **defining key terms** like pre-existence and incarnation. The session highlights the **two great mysteries** of the Christian faith: the Trinity and the person of Christ as one person with two natures. It outlines the course's progression from **early church history** and the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon to **modern Christology** and a systematic theological approach using key biblical passages. The lecture also discusses the concept of **mystery in theology**, the strengths and weaknesses of systematic theology, and different ways of **classifying Christologies** as either from above or below. Finally, it previews upcoming topics by introducing various **historical attacks on the deity, humanity, and unipersonality of Christ**, underscoring the role of controversy in shaping Christian doctrine.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 1 – 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).**



Peterson_Christology_Session01.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Christology, Session 1, Introduction/Overview

Briefing Document: Introduction to Christology

Executive Summary:

This briefing document summarizes the introductory lecture on Christology by Dr. Robert A. Peterson. The session lays the groundwork for the course by defining key theological terms, highlighting the concept of mystery in relation to Christ's person, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Systematic Theology, and providing an overview of the historical trajectory the course will take – from the early church councils to modern Christological debates and finally to a systematic theological approach grounded in key biblical passages. Peterson emphasizes the importance of understanding historical controversies in shaping orthodox Christology and introduces different classifications of Christological approaches. He concludes by outlining the topics for the next session, which will delve into patristic Christology and early heresies.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Course Overview and Objectives:

- The course aims to explore Christology, the study of the person of Christ.
- It will cover historical developments from the early church (culminating in the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon) to modern approaches.
- The course will then focus on a Systematic Theology of Christ, examining key biblical passages: John 1 (Incarnation), Hebrews 1 (Deity), Colossians 1 (Deity and Humanity), and Philippians 2 (Two States of Christ).

2. Definition of Key Theological Terms:

- **Pre-existence:** Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, existed eternally before his human birth. *"Pre-existence means that although Jesus' humanity began in Mary's womb in Bethlehem, he, as the second person of the Trinity, existed for all eternity."*
- **Incarnation:** The eternal, almighty God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth through the virginal conception (virgin birth). *"The Incarnation is the word that we use to speak of the fact that the eternal, almighty God became a*

human being in Jesus of Nazareth." The conception was supernatural, while the birth was normal.

- **Deity of Christ:** Jesus is fully God, distinct from yet equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- **Humanity of Christ:** Jesus is now fully man, a crucial aspect often wrongly de-emphasized. *"His humanity, we will study, is a neglected aspect. We rightly defend his deity over against liberal and cultic denials. We wrongly de-emphasize his humanity as if emphasizing that somehow encroached upon his deity. It does not. Both are essential to his person and as we will see, both are essential for his saving work."*
- **Unity of the Person:** Christ is one person, an ever-sincere Incarnation with two natures forever.
- **Two States of Christ (Humiliation and Exaltation):** A post-Reformation understanding describing Jesus' earthly life from conception to burial (humiliation) and his life from resurrection to his second coming (exaltation). *"His state of humiliation is everything from his conception to his burial... His state of exaltation is everything from his resurrection through his second coming."* This doctrine addresses how the same person of Christ lives differently in these states, emphasizing that he remains fully human in his state of exaltation.

3. The Concept of Mystery:

- Christian faith involves divinely revealed mysteries, defined as paradoxes or antinomies that can be understood in part but ultimately go beyond human reason. *"I'll define mystery as a divinely revealed paradox, antinomy, mystery that we can understand in part but that then goes beyond human reason."*
- The two great mysteries are the **Doctrine of the Trinity** (one God in three persons) and the **Doctrine of the Two Natures in the Person of Christ** (one person being both fully God and fully man). *"The other big mystery revealed by God is that the Son of God, after his incarnation, is one person in two natures."*
- Peterson also considers the relationship between God's sovereignty and human freedom a third, lesser mystery for Reformed theologians.
- The mysteries surrounding Christ, such as his simultaneous omniscience and admitted ignorance (during his earthly ministry), highlight the limitations of human comprehension. His statement about not knowing the hour of his return

was in his state of humiliation, where he often yielded the independent use of his divine powers out of obedience to the Father. *"But what he yields, again and again, is the independent use of them. He refuses to use his powers out of the Father's will."*

4. The Role and Limitations of Systematic Theology:

- Systematic Theology aims to organize and synthesize biblical teachings for better understanding.
- It builds upon exegetical theology (careful Bible study), biblical theology (understanding the unfolding biblical narrative), and historical theology (the church's attempts to understand Scripture through history).
- A weakness of Systematic Theology is that it can artificially separate concepts that are intrinsically linked in Scripture, such as the person and work of Christ. *"For one, it separates what God has put together... the person and work of Christ are inseparable, as we will see in the very passages that portray his person wonderfully, most clearly, and powerfully."*

5. Classifying Christologies: Continuity vs. Discontinuity & From Above vs. From Below:

- Following David Wells, Christologies can be classified based on whether they emphasize **discontinuity** or **continuity** between the being of God and the created order.
- **Discontinuity:** Views Christ's coming as an "invasion of the divine into that domain which is natural and created." These are typically "high Christologies" (emphasizing divinity), often use "word-flesh" language, accommodate miracles, and affirm the need for divine revelation. They are generally Chalcedonian in outlook and are represented by traditional Roman Catholicism, Anglo-Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, Conservative Protestantism, and some Neo-Orthodoxy (like Karl Barth).
- **Continuity:** Argues that the supernatural is revealed within the natural, often equating miracles with natural law. Human insight is seen as a means of divine revelation, and biblical interpretation may prioritize contemporary relevance. These Christologies often follow a "word-man" pattern, may lose Chalcedonian elements, are constructed "from below," and can depict Jesus as the perfection of existing religious consciousness. Examples include older Protestant liberalism, Catholic modernism, process thought, and some liberation theologies.

- Another classification is **Christology from Above** (starting with the pre-existent Son of God who became incarnate) and **Christology from Below** (starting with the human Jesus).
- **From Above:** The approach of the early church, Reformers, Puritans, and found in the Gospels of John, Paul, and Hebrews.
- **From Below:** Starts with the man Jesus. While starting absolutely from below will not lead to the truth (resulting in a "mere man Jesus"), some theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg have attempted to start relatively from below for apologetic reasons, ultimately affirming the resurrection as proof of Christ's divine nature.
- Both approaches have potential pitfalls, highlighting the mystery involved. Christologies from above sometimes struggled to fully affirm Jesus' humanity, while those from below may fail to adequately account for his deity.

6. Controversy Theology and Early Heresies:

- Much of Christian theology, including Christology, developed through controversies and the need to refute errors. *"Much of Christian theology is controversy theology. It is God has used errors to promote the truth..."*
- The course will address early heresies, categorized as attacks on Christ's deity, humanity, and unipersonality (one person with two natures), as well as attacks on the Incarnation.
- **Attacks on Deity: Ebionism:** Denied Christ's deity outright.
- **Arianism:** Claimed Jesus was God's first creature, not of the same substance as the Father ("there was a time when the Son was not"). The Council of Nicaea (325) condemned Arianism, largely championed by Athanasius, who argued that Christ had to be God to save humanity (soteriological argument).
- **Attacks on Humanity: Docetism:** Argued that Christ only appeared to be human, a "phantom" who "strode above the earth."
- **Apollinarianism:** Held that Christ had a human body but the divine Logos replaced his human soul, resulting in a partial humanity. The Cappadocian Fathers argued against this, stating, "what is not assumed cannot be saved or healed."
- **Attacks on Unipersonality: Eutychianism (Monophysitism):** Denied the distinctiveness of the two natures in Christ, suggesting he ultimately had only one (confused) nature.

- **Nestorianism:** Seemed to divide Christ into two persons, which was condemned by the church, emphasizing that Christ is one person with two natures.
- **Attacks on the Incarnation: Adoptionism:** Claimed Jesus was a man whom God adopted and endowed with the Holy Spirit, denying the pre-existence and inherent divinity.
- **Kenoticism (Historical):** Erroneously taught that the Son of God divested himself of some divine attributes when becoming human. Orthodox belief affirms that he possessed all divine attributes, even if he didn't always independently exercise them, acting within the Father's will.
- Peterson notes that a contemporary "practical kenosis" is being taught by some evangelicals, who claim Jesus only performed miracles by the Holy Spirit and never by his own divine power. Peterson and Stephen Wellum oppose this view.

7. Preview of Next Session:

- The next lecture will focus on **Patristic Christology** before the Council of Nicaea.
- It will cover **early heresies:** Jewish, Monarchian, and Gnostic heresies.
- It will then explore **orthodoxy** through figures like Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.
- Finally, it will address the **Council of Nicaea (325)** and the Arian controversy.

This introductory session provides a crucial framework for understanding the historical development and key theological concepts that will be explored in greater detail throughout the course on Christology. The emphasis on mystery, the inseparable nature of Christ's person and work, and the role of historical controversies in shaping orthodox doctrine are key takeaways from this lecture.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Christology, Session 1, Introduction/Overview

Christology: An Introduction Overview

Quiz

1. Define pre-existence as it relates to Christ.
2. Explain the theological significance of the Incarnation, mentioning the means God used.
3. What are the two great mysteries of the Christian faith, according to the lecture? Briefly define "mystery" in this context.
4. Contrast Christology from above and Christology from below. Which approach did the early church and reformers primarily use?
5. Why is the study of historical theology, particularly early heresies, important for understanding Christology?
6. Describe the core error of Arianism regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. What was the church's response?
7. Explain why both the deity and humanity of Christ are considered crucial for salvation.
8. What was Docetism, and what fundamental aspect of Christ's being did it deny?
9. Briefly describe the central problem with Apollinarianism's understanding of Christ's humanity.
10. What is the doctrine of the two states of Christ, and what are these two states?

Answer Key

1. Pre-existence, in the context of Christology, refers to the belief that Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Trinity (God the Son), existed eternally before his human birth in Bethlehem. This means his being did not begin with his conception in Mary's womb.
2. The Incarnation is the theological term for the event in which the eternal, almighty God became a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This is considered a great miracle accomplished through the virginal conception (virgin birth), where the Holy Spirit caused Jesus to be conceived in Mary's womb.

3. The two great mysteries of the Christian faith are the doctrine of the Trinity (one God in three persons) and the doctrine of the two natures in the one person of Christ (divine and human). A mystery in this context is a divinely revealed paradox or antinomy that can be understood in part but ultimately goes beyond full human comprehension.
4. Christology from above starts with the pre-existent Son of God in heaven and teaches that he came down and became incarnate in Jesus. Christology from below begins with the man Jesus and attempts to understand his divine nature through his life and resurrection. The early church, reformers, and the biblical authors of John, Paul, and Hebrews primarily used the Christology from above approach.
5. Studying historical theology, especially early heresies, is important because it reveals how the church has historically wrestled with understanding biblical teachings about Christ. These controversies helped clarify orthodox doctrine and identify errors that continue to resurface in different forms today.
6. Arianism erroneously taught that Jesus Christ, the Son, was the first creature created by God and was therefore not of the same substance or eternally equal with the Father. The church, most notably at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), condemned Arianism and affirmed that the Son is of the same substance (homoousios) as the Father, thus upholding Christ's full deity.
7. The deity of Christ is crucial for salvation because only God has the power and nature to atone for humanity's sins and reconcile us to himself. The humanity of Christ is equally crucial because the atonement needed to be made by a member of the human race, the God-man, who could represent humanity and experience human suffering and death.
8. Docetism was an early belief (not a formal group) rooted in Gnostic thought that Christ only appeared or seemed to be human but was not truly so. It denied the genuine incarnation and the reality of Jesus' physical body, suffering, and death.
9. Apollinarianism, while attempting to affirm Christ's deity, incorrectly taught that Jesus took on a human body but not a human soul (or rational spirit). Instead, the divine Logos (Word) took the place of the human soul, resulting in an incomplete humanity that the church rejected.

10. The doctrine of the two states of Christ is a post-Reformation understanding that describes the different ways in which Christ lived out his life as the God-man. The two states are the state of humiliation, encompassing his conception to his burial, and the state of exaltation, beginning with his resurrection and continuing through his ascension and second coming.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of both the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) in the development of Christian understanding of Christ's person. How did these councils address specific challenges or heresies of their time?
2. Analyze the strengths and potential weaknesses of approaching Christology "from above" versus "from below." Provide examples from the lecture to support your points.
3. Explain the concept of "mystery" as it applies to Christology, specifically in relation to the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Why is this concept important for understanding these doctrines?
4. Evaluate the claim that much of Christian theology, particularly Christology, is "controversy theology." Using examples of early heresies and the church's responses, argue for or against this statement.
5. Discuss the interconnectedness of Christ's person and his saving work, as highlighted in the lecture's discussion of systematic theology. Why is it essential to consider both aspects when understanding Jesus Christ?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Christology:** The branch of Christian theology that studies the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Pre-existence:** The theological doctrine that Christ, as the Son of God, existed before his incarnation and human birth.
- **Incarnation:** The doctrine that the eternal Son of God took on human nature in the person of Jesus Christ.

- **Virgin Birth (Virginal Conception):** The belief that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, without a human father.
- **Deity of Christ:** The belief that Jesus Christ is fully God, possessing all the attributes and nature of God.
- **Humanity of Christ:** The belief that Jesus Christ was fully human, possessing a complete human nature, including a body and soul.
- **Unity of Person:** The theological understanding that Jesus Christ is one single person, not a combination or mixture of two separate persons.
- **Two Natures:** The doctrine, formally defined at the Council of Chalcedon, that Christ has two distinct natures, divine and human, which are united in one person without confusion, change, division, or separation.
- **Two States (of Christ):** A post-Reformation doctrine describing the two modes of Christ's existence: the state of humiliation (from conception to burial) and the state of exaltation (from resurrection to his second coming).
- **Mystery:** In a theological context, a truth revealed by God that transcends full human understanding or comprehension, often involving seemingly paradoxical elements.
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being in three co-equal and co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.
- **Systematic Theology:** A discipline of Christian theology that aims to arrange and categorize religious truths into an ordered system.
- **Historical Theology:** The study of the development of Christian doctrines and practices throughout church history.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of biblical texts.
- **Biblical Theology:** A discipline that seeks to understand the overarching story and themes of the Bible as they unfold historically.
- **Heresy:** A belief or teaching that contradicts the fundamental doctrines of a religious faith.
- **Ebionism:** An early Jewish-Christian sect that denied the deity of Christ, viewing him as a purely human messiah.

- **Arianism:** A 4th-century heresy that taught that Jesus Christ was a created being, subordinate to God the Father, and not fully divine.
- **Docetism:** An early belief that Christ only appeared to be human but was not truly so.
- **Gnosticism:** A diverse religious and philosophical movement that emphasized spiritual knowledge (gnosis) and often presented a dualistic worldview, impacting early Christological understandings.
- **Apollinarianism:** A 4th-century heresy that taught that Christ had a human body but not a human soul; the divine Logos took the place of the soul.
- **Eutychianism (Monophysitism):** A 5th-century heresy that asserted Christ had only one nature after the Incarnation, a fusion or absorption of the human into the divine.
- **Nestorianism:** A 5th-century view that was interpreted as dividing Christ into two separate persons, one divine and one human, loosely joined.
- **Adoptionism:** An early belief that Jesus was born a mere human being whom God later "adopted" as his Son, often at his baptism or resurrection.
- **Kenosis:** From the Greek word for "to empty," referring to Philippians 2:7, often interpreted (though debated) as Christ voluntarily setting aside the independent exercise of some divine attributes during his incarnation.
- **Practical Kenosis:** A contemporary evangelical teaching that suggests Jesus, while possessing all divine power, chose to operate solely through the power of the Holy Spirit during his earthly ministry.
- **Christology from Above:** An approach to Christology that begins with the pre-existent divine nature of Christ and moves to his incarnation.
- **Christology from Below:** An approach to Christology that begins with the human life and ministry of Jesus and moves towards understanding his divine nature.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Christology, Session 1, Introduction/Overview, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Christology

1. What is Christology, and why is it important in Christian theology? Christology is the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a central aspect of Christian theology because the Christian faith fundamentally revolves around who Jesus is and what he accomplished. Understanding Christology is crucial for grasping the nature of God, the means of salvation, and the relationship between the divine and human realms. As Dr. Peterson notes, the person of Christ is one of the two great mysteries revealed in Scripture (along with the Trinity), making its study essential for a proper understanding of Christian doctrine.

2. What are the two major mysteries concerning Christ's person discussed in the lecture? The two major mysteries are the Trinity (one God eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and the Incarnation (the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, becoming fully human in the person of Jesus Christ while remaining fully God). These are considered divinely revealed paradoxes that can be understood in part but ultimately go beyond full human comprehension.

3. What do the terms "pre-existence" and "incarnation" mean in relation to Jesus Christ? Pre-existence refers to the doctrine that Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Trinity, existed as God the Son for all eternity before his conception and birth as a human being in Bethlehem. The Incarnation describes the event where this eternal, almighty God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. This involved the supernatural virginal conception, where the Holy Spirit caused Jesus to be conceived in Mary's womb.

4. How does the lecture explain the seemingly contradictory aspects of Jesus, such as knowing all things yet claiming ignorance about the time of his return? The lecture addresses these apparent contradictions by referencing the "two states" of Christ: the state of humiliation (from conception to burial) and the state of exaltation (from resurrection to the second coming). During his state of humiliation, Jesus, while possessing all his divine powers, often chose not to exercise them independently of the Father's will. His statement about not knowing the hour of his return is understood within this context. In his state of exaltation, it is affirmed that he fully exercises his divine knowledge and power. This highlights the mystery of the one person of Christ with two natures experiencing life in different ways.

5. What is the significance of the Councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD) mentioned in the lecture?

The Council of Nicaea (325 AD) is significant for unambiguously affirming the deity of Christ, countering the Arian heresy which claimed Jesus was a created being. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) further clarified the understanding of Christ's person, defining that he is one person with two natures (divine and human), which are distinct yet unified, without confusion, change, division, or separation. These councils established crucial boundaries for orthodox Christology in response to various heresies.

6. What is the difference between "Christology from above" and "Christology from below," and which approach does the lecturer seem to favor? "Christology from above" begins with the eternal Son of God in heaven and traces his coming down and becoming incarnate in Jesus. This was the approach of the early church, the Reformers, and is evident in the Gospels of John and Hebrews. "Christology from below" starts with the human Jesus and attempts to understand his divinity through his life and ministry. While acknowledging that one can start relatively from below for apologetic purposes, the lecturer indicates that the traditional "Christology from above" is the correct starting point for understanding the truth about Jesus, as beginning absolutely from below would fail to reach his deity.

7. The lecture discusses several historical heresies related to Christ. Can you name a few and briefly describe their main errors? Several heresies are mentioned: * **Ebionism:** Denied the deity of Christ, viewing him as merely human. * **Arianism:** Taught that Jesus was the first creature of God, not of the same substance as the Father, thus denying his full deity. * **Docetism:** Claimed that Christ only appeared to be human but was not truly so. * **Apollinarianism:** Held that Jesus had a human body but his divine Logos replaced the human soul, thus denying his full humanity. * **Eutychianism (Monophysitism):** Confused the two natures of Christ after the Incarnation, resulting in a single, mixed nature. * **Nestorianism:** Was understood by its opponents as dividing Christ into two persons, one divine and one human. * **Adoptionism:** Claimed that Jesus was a human who was adopted by God and given the Holy Spirit. * **Kenoticism:** Erroneously taught that the Son of God divested himself of some divine attributes when he became human.

8. What is the concept of "practical kenosis" discussed in the lecture, and what is the lecturer's view on it? "Practical kenosis" is a contemporary evangelical teaching that suggests Jesus, while possessing all his divine powers, only performed miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit and never used his own divine abilities during his earthly ministry. The lecturer, agreeing with Stephen Wellum, strongly opposes this view, considering it an erroneous doctrine. While acknowledging that Jesus did miracles by the Holy Spirit (which is true), the idea that he *only* did so is seen as a form of practical kenosis that undermines the understanding of his full deity being actively present and operational during his incarnation, albeit always in accordance with the Father's will.