

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 10, Systematics: Incarnation – John 1:1-18 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 10, Systematics: Incarnation – John 1:1-18, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's Christology Session 10 focuses on the **incarnation of the eternal Son of God** as presented in **John 1:1-18**. Peterson analyzes this prologue, highlighting its significance as a foundation for understanding Christ's identity. He explores the passage's literary structure, particularly a **chiasm** centered on the incarnation, and examines key titles for Jesus like **the Word and the Light**. Peterson further discusses the **deity and humanity of Christ** as revealed in this foundational text, contrasting John's account with Old Testament parallels and addressing potential misinterpretations.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 10 – 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_Session10.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Salvation, Session 10, Systematics: Incarnation – John 1:1-18

Briefing Document: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on the Incarnation in John 1:1-18

Main Themes:

Dr. Peterson's lecture focuses on the foundational doctrine of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, using John 1:1-18 as the primary textual basis. He emphasizes that the incarnation is not merely God indwelling a human, but the eternal, almighty God taking a complete human nature to himself in Jesus of Nazareth. The lecture explores the literary context of the prologue, the significance of the titles "Word" (Logos) and "Light" applied to the Son, the affirmation of both Christ's deity and humanity within the passage, and the foundational nature of the incarnation for the rest of John's Gospel.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **The Incarnation Defined:** Peterson defines the incarnation as "nothing less than that eternal almighty God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. He did so not by super-indwelling an existing human being but by taking a complete human nature to himself."
- **John 1:1-18 as Prologue:** He views John 1:1-18 as the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, with John 1:19-12 as the "Book of Signs," John 13-20 as the "Book of Glory," and chapter 21 as the epilogue. He notes a significant break between chapters 12 and 13 due to shifts in time sayings and audience.
- **Literary Structure (Chiasm):** Peterson identifies a chiastic structure in the prologue (Word, Light, Light into the world, Word became flesh), arguing that this structure strategically highlights the miracle of the Incarnation, which is explicitly taught only here in John's Gospel but assumed elsewhere.
- "The big pattern is this. Word, Light, Light into the world, 9, Word became flesh, 14. This structure, of course, points to the miracle of the Incarnation."
- **Significance of "Word" (Logos):** Peterson asserts that John's use of "Word" is rooted in Genesis 1:1 where God creates by speaking. He sees the Word as personified, representing the Son as the revealer of God and God's powerful, definitive, and authoritative speech.
- "His Son is the sermon, the Word, the speech, the utterance."

- **Significance of "Light":** The "Light" imagery signifies the Son as the revealer who illuminates and allows understanding. Peterson connects this to Jesus' claim of being the "light of the world" and illustrates it with the healing of the man born blind in John 9, where physical sight leads to spiritual understanding.
- "Light illuminates. It shines on things. So we can see and understand. Oh, the Son is the light of the world."
- **Pre-existence and Creation:** Peterson emphasizes the pre-existence of the Son, citing John 1:3: "All things were made through him. Without him, was not anything made that was made." He argues that the pre-incarnate Son (Logos) was the Father's agent in creation and the location of eternal life.
- "This pre-incarnate Son was the Father's agent in creating all things, verse three. It's comprehensive language like this. All things were made through him. Without him, was not anything made that was made."
- **Critique of Wesleyan Interpretation of John 1:9:** Peterson critiques the King James Version's translation of John 1:9 ("The true Light which gives light to every man was coming into the world") as supporting the Wesleyan doctrine of universal prevenient grace. He argues for the NASB, NIV, and ESV translation ("The true light was coming into the world") which he sees as a statement about the incarnation itself, with the light shining on those who came into contact with the incarnate Christ.
- "Kindly I say, I don't think so. But this one does not, because it should not be translated that true light gives light to everyone as everyone was coming into the world. Rather, it is a periphrastic construction, and the NASB, the NIV, and the ESV have it right. That is, the basic thought is this. The true light was coming into the world. It's a statement of the incarnation."
- **Emphasis on the Humanity of Christ:** Peterson highlights John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." He stresses that "flesh" (sarx) signifies full humanity, countering Greek philosophical notions that viewed flesh as impure. He connects this to John the Baptist's statement in verse 15, where Jesus, though coming after him in birth and ministry, ranked before him due to his pre-existence.
- "The word became sarx, flesh. It's an earthy word. For Greek metaphysics and Greek philosophy, it's impossible. No. You can't have God associated with filthy flesh."

- **Emphasis on the Deity of Christ:** Despite focusing on the incarnation, Peterson underscores the strong affirmation of Christ's deity in the prologue, particularly in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He refutes the Jehovah's Witnesses' translation of "theos" without the article as "a god," demonstrating its inconsistent application within the same chapter. He also points to the Son giving the right to become children of God (verse 12) and possessing divine attributes like glory, grace, and truth (verse 14).
- "And the word was God. A plain, straightforward affirmation of the deity of Christ before the very beginning."
- "To all who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Only God does that."
- **John 1 and Genesis 1:** Peterson stresses the foundational connection between John 1 and Genesis 1, noting the parallel opening ("In the beginning"). He sees the "Word" in John as parallel to God's speaking in creation, personifying the revealer God.
- "Make no mistake about it: the background of John 1 is Genesis 1. In the beginning is John's pointer back to the first verse in the Bible."
- **Rejection and the Incarnation:** He highlights the tragic irony of the creator entering his creation and being rejected by his own people (John 1:10-11), emphasizing the unique nature of this rejection.
- "The creator became a creature to offer himself to the covenant people, and they spat in his face, beat him up, and hung him on a cross to die. There's no rejection like that. The creatures crucified their creator."
- **The Son as Revealer of the Father:** Peterson concludes by emphasizing John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." He sees the incarnate Son as the ultimate revelation of God.
- "John begins and ends the prologue by saying the word was God and the only God who's at the father's side has revealed him. We can't miss it. The son pre-incarnate is God. The son incarnate is God."

- **Personal Reflection:** Peterson includes a personal anecdote about encouraging students to contemplate the wonder of the eternal God becoming a baby, highlighting the seemingly absurd yet profoundly significant nature of the incarnation.
- "Eternal almighty omniscient, omnipotent deity became a baby... babies are amazing... but would you ever think of worshipping that baby for a second? Of course not. It's absurd. But the shepherds worshipped the baby and later the wise men."

Overall Significance:

Dr. Peterson's lecture provides a detailed theological exegesis of John 1:1-18, emphasizing the central importance of the incarnation for understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ within the Fourth Gospel and Christian theology as a whole. He carefully examines the language and structure of the passage to build his case for the deity and humanity of Christ and the foundational nature of God becoming human.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Salvation, Session 10, Systematics: Incarnation – John 1:1-18

Study Guide: Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Christology, Session 10

Key Concepts:

- **Incarnation:** The doctrine that the eternal Son of God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth, taking on a complete human nature without ceasing to be God.
- **Pre-existence of Christ:** The belief that Jesus Christ existed as the divine Son of God before his earthly life and creation itself.
- **John 1:1-18 (Prologue):** This passage in the Gospel of John is understood as a theological introduction that presents key truths about Jesus Christ, particularly his divine nature and his coming into the world.
- **The Word (Logos):** A title for the Son of God in John's prologue, drawing connections to God's creative and communicative power.
- **Light and Darkness:** Metaphorical imagery in John's prologue representing Christ as the revealer of God and the opposition to him and his truth.
- **Chiasm:** An inverted parallelism (AB, B'A') found in John 1:1-18 that highlights the central theme of the incarnation.
- **Revelation (General and Special):** General revelation refers to God revealing himself through creation, while special revelation refers to God's direct communication, supremely through Jesus Christ.
- **Deity of Christ:** The belief that Jesus Christ is fully God, sharing the same divine nature as the Father.
- **Humanity of Christ:** The belief that Jesus Christ was fully human, possessing a complete human nature including flesh and blood.
- **Grace and Truth:** Divine attributes associated with Jesus Christ in John 1:17, contrasting with the law given through Moses.

Quiz:

1. According to Dr. Peterson, what is the fundamental doctrine discussed in John 1:1-18, and what does it mean?

2. What is Dr. Peterson's understanding of the literary structure of the Gospel of John, specifically mentioning the prologue and any major divisions?
3. Identify two key designations used for the Son of God in the beginning of John's prologue and explain what these designations reveal about him.
4. Describe the chiastic structure that Dr. Peterson identifies in John 1:1-18 and explain how this structure emphasizes the incarnation.
5. How does Dr. Peterson explain the significance of the titles "Word" and "Light" in revealing the nature and work of the Son of God?
6. What does Dr. Peterson say about the relationship between John 1 and Genesis 1, and how does this connection illuminate the role of the "Word"?
7. Explain Dr. Peterson's interpretation of John 1:9 regarding the "true light" coming into the world, contrasting it with the Wesleyan doctrine of universal prevenient grace.
8. How does John's prologue emphasize both the deity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, according to Dr. Peterson? Provide one example for each from the passage.
9. What is the significance of John 1:17 in relation to Moses and Jesus Christ, and how does Dr. Peterson interpret the contrast presented?
10. According to Dr. Peterson, what is the culminating point of the prologue (John 1:18) in affirming the nature and work of Jesus Christ?

Answer Key:

1. The fundamental doctrine is the incarnation, meaning that the eternal, almighty God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth by taking a complete human nature to himself, not merely super-indwelling an existing person.
2. Dr. Peterson sees John's Gospel as having a prologue (1:1-18), the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50), the Book of Glory (13-20), and an epilogue (chapter 21). He notes a major break between chapters 12 and 13 due to shifts in time sayings and audience.
3. Two key designations are "the Word" (Logos) and "the Light." "The Word" suggests that the Son is God's means of communication and creation, while "the Light" signifies that he is the revealer of God, illuminating truth and dispelling darkness.

4. The chiasm is Word (v. 1), Light (v. 7), Light coming into the world (v. 9), and Word became flesh (v. 14). This AB, B'A' structure strategically places the incarnation at the center, emphasizing its importance.
5. "Word" indicates that the Son reveals God as our words communicate our thoughts, making God known. "Light" signifies that the Son illuminates, allowing us to see and understand spiritual realities and the nature of God.
6. Dr. Peterson states that the background of John 1 is plainly Genesis 1, where God created by speaking. He sees the "Word" in John 1 as parallel to God's spoken word in creation, personifying the Son as the active agent of God.
7. Dr. Peterson interprets John 1:9 as stating that the true light (Christ) was coming into the world (a statement of the incarnation under light imagery), rather than that he enlightens every person as they are born, which is used to support universal prevenient grace.
8. The deity of Christ is emphasized in verses like 1:1 ("the Word was God") and 1:18 ("the only God"). His humanity is highlighted in verse 1:14 ("the Word became flesh") and verse 1:15 where John the Baptist refers to Jesus coming after him in time.
9. John 1:17 contrasts the law given through Moses with the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. Dr. Peterson interprets this as not an absolute denial of any grace or truth in the Old Testament, but as emphasizing the surpassing and definitive revelation in Jesus.
10. According to Dr. Peterson, John 1:18, stating that "the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known," serves as a bookend to the prologue, reiterating the deity of the Son and his role as the ultimate revealer of God.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze Dr. Peterson's understanding of the structure and purpose of John 1:1-18 as the prologue to the fourth Gospel. How does this prologue set the stage for the rest of the book?
2. Discuss the significance of the titles "Word" (Logos) and "Light" in John 1:1-18, according to Dr. Peterson. How do these titles contribute to our understanding of the pre-incarnate and incarnate Christ?
3. Explain Dr. Peterson's argument that the incarnation is the central and foundational doctrine presented in John 1:1-18. What textual evidence does he use to support this claim, and why is this doctrine so crucial for the rest of the Gospel?
4. Compare and contrast Dr. Peterson's interpretation of John 1:9 with the Wesleyan doctrine of universal prevenient grace. What are the key differences in their understanding of this verse, and what theological implications do these differences have?
5. Explore how John 1:1-18, as interpreted by Dr. Peterson, emphasizes both the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ. Why are both of these aspects essential to the doctrine of the incarnation?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Christology:** The branch of Christian theology concerned with the person, nature, and work of Jesus Christ.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ, taking on a full human nature while remaining fully God.
- **Pre-existence:** The doctrine that Christ existed in divine form before his conception and birth as a human being.
- **Prologue:** An introductory section of a literary work, often setting forth themes or providing background information. In the context of John's Gospel, it refers to John 1:1-18.
- **Logos:** A Greek term meaning "word," "reason," or "divine expression." In John's Gospel, it is used as a title for the pre-incarnate Son of God, highlighting his role as God's agent in creation and revelation.
- **Chiasm (Chiastic Structure):** A literary device in which parallel elements are presented in an inverted order (e.g., A, B, C; C', B', A'), often emphasizing a central point.
- **General Revelation:** God's communication of himself to all people through the created order.
- **Special Revelation:** God's communication of himself through specific means, such as scripture, miracles, and ultimately through Jesus Christ.
- **Deity:** The state or quality of being God; divine nature.
- **Humanity:** The quality or state of being human, possessing human nature, including physical, mental, and emotional aspects.
- **Grace:** Unmerited favor from God.
- **Truth:** Conformity to fact or reality; in a theological context, often refers to God's revealed word and nature.
- **Binitarianism:** A theological perspective that emphasizes the two primary divine persons, the Father and the Son, often with a less developed understanding of the Holy Spirit's distinct personhood.

- **Trinitarianism:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being in three co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **Prevenient Grace:** In Wesleyan theology, the grace of God that precedes human decision and enables individuals to respond to God's offer of salvation.
- **Efficacious Grace:** Grace that inevitably produces its intended effect (e.g., salvation).
- **Regeneration:** A spiritual rebirth or renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit, resulting in a new nature and a turning towards God.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Session 10, Systematics: Incarnation – John 1:1-18, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Incarnation in John 1:1-18

1. What is the central meaning of the incarnation as presented in John 1:1-18? The incarnation, as described in John 1:1-18, fundamentally means that the eternal Son of God, who existed with God from the beginning and is himself God (the Word/Logos), became a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This was not a matter of God merely indwelling an existing human but of the Son taking a complete human nature to himself.

2. Why does the prologue of John's Gospel begin by referring to Jesus as "the Word" (Logos)? John's use of "the Word" (Logos) is deliberate and draws a parallel to God's creative act in Genesis 1:1, where God speaks and creation comes into being. The Word is personified as the second person of the Trinity and highlights Jesus as God's means of communication, his "speech" or "utterance" to humanity, and the revealer of God's thoughts and nature.

3. What is the significance of the chiasmic structure in the prologue of John (Word, Light, Light into the world, Word became flesh)? The chiasmic structure (AB, B'A') in John 1:1-18, moving from "Word" to "Light," then "Light coming into the world," and finally "Word became flesh," strategically emphasizes the central miracle of the incarnation. This literary pattern highlights how the pre-existent Word, who is also the true Light, entered the world in human form, becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

4. How does John 1:1-18 affirm both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ? The passage strongly affirms Jesus' deity by stating, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). It also declares that all things were made through him (John 1:3). The humanity of Christ is explicitly taught in verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The use of the term "flesh" (sarx) emphasizes his complete human nature, like ours in all respects except for sin.

5. What are the roles of "Word" and "Light" as descriptions of the Son of God in this prologue? Both "Word" and "Light" are key designations that reveal the nature and function of the Son. As the "Word," Jesus is the revealer of God, communicating God's thoughts and will to humanity. As the "Light," he illuminates, allowing people to see and understand divine truth, contrasting with the darkness of ignorance and sin in the world. He is the source of spiritual understanding and revelation.

6. How does John 1:1-18 connect the pre-incarnate Son with the creation of the world?

Verse 3 states, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." This explicitly identifies the pre-incarnate Son, the Word, as the Father's agent in the creation of everything. This foundational role underscores his divine nature and authority.

7. What does John mean when he says, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9)?

The statement emphasizes the incarnation as the arrival of the true source of spiritual illumination into a world characterized by darkness (ignorance and sin). While some interpretations suggest this refers to a universal prevenient grace giving everyone the ability to believe, the primary meaning within the context of John's prologue is the historical event of the incarnate Word, the true light, appearing in the world, revealing God to those who encountered him.

8. What is the significance of the statement "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18)?

This verse highlights Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, as the ultimate and unique revealer of God. Because he is "at the Father's side" and is himself "the only God" (a debated translation, but indicating his divine nature), he is uniquely qualified to make God known to humanity in a way that no one else ever has. The incarnation, therefore, is God's definitive self-disclosure.