

# Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 16, Systematics: Kenoticism, Humanity of Christ, Col. 1:15-20

## Resources from NotebookLM

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

### **1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 16, Systematics: Kenoticism, Humanity of Christ, Col 1:15-20, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Robert Peterson's Christology session 16 critiques Kenotic theories**, which propose Christ relinquished some divine attributes during the Incarnation, arguing this undermines the biblical understanding of God and the Trinity. **Peterson highlights several criticisms**, including the impossibility of separating God's attributes from His essence, the disruption of Trinitarian relations, and the misplacement of Christ's humiliation in the incarnation rather than the atonement. **The lecture then shifts to the humanity of Christ**, using Colossians 1:15-20 as a foundational passage. **Peterson explores various aspects of Jesus' human experience**, such as his incarnation, weaknesses, emotions, growth, crucifixion, and relationship with the Father, emphasizing their essential role in salvation alongside his deity.

**2. 21 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 16 – 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\_Session16.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Salvation, Session 16, Systematics: Kenoticism, Humanity of Christ, Col 1:15-20

#### Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas from Peterson's Christology Session 16

**Overview:** This session of Dr. Peterson's Christology course focuses on several key areas: a critique of Kenoicism (the kenotic theory), an affirmation of the full humanity of Christ, and an examination of Colossians 1:15-20 as a passage that speaks to both the deity and humanity of Jesus.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. Criticism of Kenoicism (Kenotic Theory):

- Peterson, drawing on the criticisms of David Wells, presents several significant issues with kenotic theories, which propose that Christ emptied himself of some divine attributes during the incarnation.
- **Inseparability of Divine Attributes from Divine Essence:** Critics argue it's impossible to sever attributes like omnipotence and omniscience from the very 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." This challenges the idea that Christ could lay aside certain divine attributes while remaining fully God.
- **Disruption of the Trinity:** Kenotic theories, even in moderate forms, imply a disruption in the internal relations of the Trinity. The idea that the Son's divine self-consciousness was "expunged" or contracted into "mere potentiality" suggests a temporary reduction of the Godhead, potentially leading to a "binity" rather than a Trinity during the incarnation. "The second person was on a leave of absence from Godhead, and the Trinity was at best reduced to a binity."
- **Vitiation of Divine Love:** The core motivation for the kenotic theories was to highlight the love of God in the Incarnation. However, critics argue that the "contraction of the divine inevitably led to a vitiation of that love." A. B. Bruce is quoted saying, "But the love which moved the Son of God to become man consumed itself at one stroke." This suggests that if the divine consciousness was lost, the very love the theory sought to emphasize would also be diminished.

- **Conversion of Godhead into Manhood:** Radical kenotic views are seen as violating the Nicene Creed by implying a change in the Son's being. If the Logos was stripped of divine characteristics and then united with humanity, it suggests a reduction of the divine rather than a true union. "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."
- **Misplaced Emphasis on Humiliation:** While acknowledging the costliness of the Incarnation, Peterson argues that kenotic theories can unintentionally degrade humanity by suggesting that the "emptying" was primarily about divesting divinity to become human. He posits that the humiliation of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11 is primarily associated with his atonement and death for sin, not the act of taking on human flesh itself. "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."

## 2. Affirmation of the Humanity of Christ:

- Peterson strongly emphasizes the genuine and full humanity of Jesus Christ, stating that the incarnation is the very "beginning of the humanity of the divine Son." He clarifies that Christ "didn't take to himself a human being. He took to himself a human nature, a human body and soul."
- **Proofs of Christ's Humanity:** Peterson outlines several lines of evidence for Jesus' humanity:
- **Incarnation:** The very act of the divine Son taking on human nature.
- **Human Weaknesses and Needs:** Jesus experienced tiredness, thirst, temptation, and the avoidance of danger.
- **Human Emotions:** He displayed anger, sorrow, love (for Lazarus), and distress.
- **Human Experiences:** His birth, growth (in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man - Luke 2:52), crucifixion, and death were all genuine human experiences. "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."
- **Human Relationship with the Father:** Jesus had a subordinate relationship with God the Father during his earthly ministry (John 14:28). "In John 14:28, Jesus said that the Father is greater than I." This is framed as a functional or economic subordination, distinct from an essential subordination.

- **Perfection:** Hebrews speaks of the Son being "made perfect" (Hebrews 2:10, 5:8-9, 7:28), which pertains to his human experience and obedience, not a deficiency in his divine nature.
- **Sinlessness:** Jesus' sinlessness (affirmed throughout the New Testament, e.g., Isaiah 53, John, Hebrews, 1 Peter) is crucial but doesn't negate his humanity. Sin is a "derangement" and "distortion," not an essential part of human nature. Jesus is the "second Adam," the sinless representative of humanity.
- **Raw Expressions of Humanity:** Peterson highlights three instances where Jesus' humanity is particularly evident and historically caused discomfort for some: his temptations in the wilderness, his statement about not knowing the time of his return (Mark 13:32), and his agony in Gethsemane. These are not to be downplayed but embraced as genuine aspects of his human experience within the Father's will. "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."

### 3. Colossians 1:15-20: Deity and Humanity:

- Peterson identifies Colossians 1:15-20 as a crucial passage that powerfully teaches both the deity and the humanity of Christ, alongside John 1, Philippians 2, and Hebrews 1.
- **Deity Emphasized:** While acknowledging that the passage primarily emphasizes Christ's divine nature, highlighting his role as the "image of the invisible God," the "firstborn of all creation" (implying supremacy and priority, not merely being the first created), the one "by him all things were created," and the one in whom "all things hold together." "For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things. And in him, all things hold together."
- **Humanity Hinted At and Alluded To:** Despite the emphasis on deity, Peterson argues that the passage also alludes to and teaches Christ's humanity:
- **"Image of the invisible God":** This suggests a visible manifestation of the invisible God, which occurred in the incarnation. "The meaning is that he's the visible image, the visible manifestation; the visible revelation is a good word of God, the invisible one. How is that so? Only in his incarnation. So, already, his incarnation is hinted at."

- **"Firstborn from the dead"**: This clearly speaks to his death and resurrection, which are experiences of his humanity. "Obviously, speaking of his death refers to his humanity. He is raised, and as such, he will be the cause of our resurrection."
- **"Head of the body, the church"**: This refers to Christ's role in the new creation, which involves redeemed humanity.
- **"Making peace by the blood of his cross"**: This explicitly mentions his violent death, a central aspect of his human experience and his atoning work. "And through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. That is by his violent death."
- **"In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"**: This speaks of the union of divine fullness within the incarnate Jesus. "Who's in him? In the incarnate Jesus."

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Peterson's Session 16 provides a robust critique of kenotic theories, emphasizing the inseparability of divine attributes and the potential for disrupting the Trinity and misunderstanding Christ's humiliation. He then strongly affirms the full and genuine humanity of Jesus Christ, providing multiple biblical proofs and highlighting even the "raw" expressions of his human experience. Finally, he demonstrates how a key passage like Colossians 1:15-20, while primarily focused on Christ's deity, also contains significant allusions and teachings regarding his incarnation, life, death, and thus, his full humanity. Both the deity and humanity of Christ are presented as essential for salvation, echoing St. Anselm's sentiment that only the God-man can rescue us.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Salvation, Session 16, Systematics: Kenoticism, Humanity of Christ, Col 1:15-20

### Study Guide: Christology - Session 16

#### Key Concepts to Understand:

- **Extra-Calvinisticum:** The theological concept that the divine nature of the Son remained fully outside of Jesus even during the Incarnation.
- **Kenotic Theories:** Various theological views attempting to explain the Incarnation by suggesting that Christ relinquished some of his divine attributes while on earth.
- **Canonic Theories:** Another term sometimes used interchangeably with kenotic theories, emphasizing the "self-emptying" aspect of Christ.
- **David Wells' Criticisms of Kenoticism:** Specific arguments against kenotic theories, focusing on the impossibility of separating divine attributes from God's essence, the disruption of the Trinity, the vitiation of divine love, the conversion of Godhead into manhood, and the misplacement of Christ's humiliation.
- **Humanity of Christ:** The genuine and complete human nature of Jesus Christ, including his human body, soul, weaknesses, needs, emotions, experiences, and relationship with the Father during his earthly ministry.
- **Incarnation:** The act by which the divine Son of God took on a human nature, becoming both fully God and fully human.
- **Colossians 1:15-20:** A key New Testament passage that speaks to both the deity and the humanity of Christ, highlighting his preeminence over all creation and the new creation (the church).
- **Humiliation of Christ:** The voluntary humbling of Christ, not primarily in his incarnation but in his suffering and death on the cross for the atonement of sin.
- **Sinlessness of Christ:** The fact that Jesus Christ, while fully human, never committed sin; this is not a denial of his full humanity but rather highlights that sin is not an essential aspect of human nature.
- **Perfection of Christ (in Hebrews):** The concept in the book of Hebrews that Jesus was "made perfect" through his suffering and obedience, referring to his full qualification as the High Priest and Savior in his humanity.

- **Subordination of the Son:** During his earthly ministry, Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will; this is understood as a functional or economic subordination within the Trinity, not an ontological inferiority.

### Quiz:

1. Explain David Wells' first criticism of kenotic theories. According to this criticism, what is the fundamental problem with suggesting Christ relinquished divine attributes?
2. How do kenotic theories often describe the role of the Holy Spirit during the Incarnation, and what does this imply about the Trinity according to critics like Peterson?
3. What is A.B. Bruce's quote regarding the love of the Son in the Incarnation, and how does Peterson use this to criticize canonic theories?
4. According to Peterson, what prohibition of the Council of Nicaea do most canonic views violate, and why does this undermine the unity of Christ?
5. How do canonic theories tend to view the humiliation of Christ, and how does Peterson contrast this with the emphasis in Philippians 2:5-11?
6. According to Peterson, what does the incarnation prove about Christ, and what additional evidence does he cite for Christ's full humanity?
7. Explain the significance of Luke 2:52 in understanding the humanity of Christ, and why have Peterson's students sometimes found this passage difficult to fully accept?
8. Why were some early church fathers embarrassed by certain passages depicting Jesus' humanity, such as his temptations and his statement about not knowing the time of his return?
9. In Colossians 1:15, how does Peterson interpret the phrase "image of the invisible God" in relation to Christ's incarnation?
10. According to Peterson's interpretation of Colossians 1:18, what are the two realms over which Christ is preeminent, and how does this passage point to his humanity?

### Answer Key:

1. Wells' first criticism is that it is impossible to sever the attributes of God (such as omnipotence and omniscience) from the very essence of God. He argues that the biblical God is defined by these attributes, and a being with diminished power and knowledge would not be the God of Scripture.
2. Kenotic theories often propose that the Holy Spirit took on a significant role in nurturing the human Jesus, essentially acting as a surrogate for the "extinguished" or "depotentiated" Word. Critics argue this implies a disruption in the internal relations of the Trinity, potentially reducing it to a binity during the Incarnation.
3. A.B. Bruce said, "But the love which moved the Son of God to become man consumed itself at one stroke." Peterson uses this to highlight the criticism that canonic theories suggest a loss of divine consciousness and love for a period, undermining the very purpose of the Incarnation.
4. Peterson believes most canonic views violate Nicaea's prohibition against supposing the Son is subject to change by suggesting the Logos was stripped of divine characteristics. This reduction of the Logos to the dimensions of humanity removes the tension and significance of the union with human nature, diminishing the true unity of Christ.
5. Canonic theories often place the primary element of Christ's humiliation in the Incarnation itself, emphasizing the surrender of his riches. Peterson argues that Philippians 2:5-11 suggests the humiliation is primarily associated with his atonement and death, as it was sin, not human flesh, that was degraded and reprehensible.
6. According to Peterson, the incarnation proves the humanity of Christ because in it, the divine Son took on a human nature, including a human body and soul. He further cites Jesus' human weaknesses and needs (tiredness, thirst, temptation), his human emotions (anger, sorrow, love, distress), and his human experiences (birth, growth, crucifixion, death) as evidence of his full humanity.
7. Luke 2:52 states that Jesus "grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man," illustrating the development of his humanity in intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social dimensions. Peterson notes that his students sometimes struggle with this because their emphasis on Christ's deity can lead them to downplay his genuine human development.



8. Some early church fathers were troubled by passages depicting Jesus' raw humanity because they feared it would detract from his deity. They sometimes attempted to interpret these passages in a way that minimized the extent of his human limitations or struggles, rather than embracing the fullness of his Incarnation.
9. Peterson interprets "image of the invisible God" in Colossians 1:15 as referring to Christ as the visible manifestation and revelation of the otherwise unseen God, and he connects this directly to the Incarnation, the act by which God became visible in human form.
10. According to Peterson's interpretation of Colossians 1:18, Christ is preeminent over both creation (verses 15-17) and the new creation, which is the church (verses 18-20). The passage points to his humanity through references to his death ("firstborn from the dead"), his body (the church), and the reconciliation achieved through the "blood of his cross."

### **Essay Format Questions:**

1. Critically analyze David Wells' arguments against kenotic theories of the Incarnation. What are the strengths and weaknesses of his criticisms, and how do they impact our understanding of Christ's divine and human natures?
2. Explore the significance of Christ's full humanity as presented in the lecture. Why is it essential for salvation, according to Peterson, and how do seemingly "embarrassing" passages like the temptations and Jesus' statement about the timing of his return contribute to this understanding?
3. Discuss the theological implications of the "extra-Calvinisticum" in relation to the kenotic theories of the Incarnation. How does the concept that the Son remained fully outside of Jesus inform Peterson's critique of kenoticism and his understanding of Christ's humanity?
4. Analyze the passage of Colossians 1:15-20, explaining how it speaks to both the deity and the humanity of Christ. According to Peterson, what specific phrases or concepts in this passage highlight each of these aspects of Christ's person?
5. Compare and contrast the concept of Christ's humiliation in kenotic theories with Peterson's understanding, drawing on Philippians 2:5-11. What is the central point of disagreement, and what are the theological consequences of each perspective for understanding the work of redemption?

## Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Atonement:** The work Christ did in his life and death to reconcile humanity to God, typically understood as involving the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a right relationship.
- **Chalcedon:** Refers to the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), which produced a crucial definition of the two natures (divine and human) of Christ in one person.
- **Deity:** The state or quality of being God; divine nature.
- **Economic Subordinationism:** The theological view that within the Trinity, particularly in the work of redemption, the Son and the Holy Spirit willingly submit to the Father's authority and plan, without implying any inferiority in their divine nature.
- **Essence of God:** The fundamental nature or being of God, encompassing all his essential attributes.
- **Extra-Calvinisticum:** A theological term, particularly associated with Reformed theology, referring to the belief that the divine nature of the Son was not confined to or limited by the human nature assumed in the Incarnation, but remained fully outside of it.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the eternal Son of God took on human nature, becoming both fully God and fully human in the person of Jesus Christ.
- **Kenosis:** From the Greek word meaning "to empty," referring to the theological concept, often based on Philippians 2:7, that Christ voluntarily relinquished some of his divine attributes or privileges during his earthly life.
- **Logos:** A Greek term meaning "word," "reason," or "order," often used in theology to refer to the pre-existent Son of God, through whom all things were created (John 1:1-3).
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God is one being in three co-equal and co-eternal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Session 16, Systematics: Kenoticism, Humanity of Christ, Col 1:15-20, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on Christology

**1. What is Kenoicism, and what are the main criticisms against it according to the source?** Kenoicism, or kenotic theory, proposes that when the Son of God became incarnate as Jesus Christ, he voluntarily relinquished or emptied himself of some of his divine attributes. Dr. Peterson, citing David Wells' criticisms, outlines several issues with this viewpoint. First, it suggests a severance of God's attributes from his essence, implying a "diminished" god, which contradicts the biblical portrayal of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent God. Second, kenotic theories imply a disruption within the Trinity, potentially reducing it to a "binity" by suggesting the divine self-consciousness of the Son was expunged or his divinity contracted into mere passivity, with the Holy Spirit acting as a surrogate. Third, some critics argue that the "self-emptying" as described by kenotic theories diminishes the very love that the Incarnation was meant to display, suggesting a temporary loss of divine consciousness. Fourth, these views can lead to a conversion of Godhead into manhood, violating the Nicene Creed's prohibition against supposing the Son is subject to change and undermining the true unity of Christ by implying a mere compatibility rather than a profound union of distinct natures. Finally, some argue that kenotic theories misplace the element of humiliation, associating it with the Incarnation itself rather than with Christ's atoning death for sin.

**2. What is the "extra-Calvinisticum" mentioned in the source, and how does it relate to the Incarnation?** The "extra-Calvinisticum" refers to the theological understanding that when God the Son became fully incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, he remained fully God and did not cease to exist outside of his human nature. In other words, the Son's divine nature was not confined or limited to the person of Jesus but continued to exist and function fully outside of his humanity. This concept emphasizes that while the Son truly became human, he did not diminish or lose his divine being or attributes during the Incarnation.

**3. How does the source argue for the full humanity of Christ?** The source presents several lines of evidence for Christ's full humanity. It begins with the Incarnation itself, stating that the divine Son took to himself a human nature, including a body and soul, for the purpose of redemption. Furthermore, it highlights Jesus' human weaknesses and needs (tiredness, thirst, temptation, avoidance of danger), his display of human emotions (anger, sorrow, love, distress), and his human experiences (birth, growth intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially, crucifixion, and death). The source also points to Jesus' human relationship with his Father, including his subordination and obedience, and the fact that Hebrews speaks of the Son being "made perfect" in his humanness. Finally, it emphasizes the raw humanity displayed in his temptations, his statement about not knowing the timing of his return, and his anguish in Gethsemane, arguing that these are as crucial to understanding him as are the passages detailing his deity.

**4. What does Colossians 1:15-20 reveal about both the deity and humanity of Christ according to the source?** According to the source, Colossians 1:15-20 is a passage rich in both the deity and humanity of Christ. Regarding his deity, the passage calls him "the image of the invisible God," "the firstborn of all creation" (implying supremacy as the agent of creation), states that "by him all things were created," that "he is before all things," and that "in him all things hold together." It also says that "in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Concerning his humanity, the passage hints at his incarnation by calling him the "image of the invisible God," suggesting a visible manifestation. It refers to him as "the firstborn from the dead," clearly speaking of his death and resurrection, which are human experiences. The reference to "the blood of his cross" further underscores his violent, human death as the means of reconciliation. The passage also speaks of him as the "head of the body, the church," signifying his role in the new creation alongside his role in the original creation.

**5. How does the source address the apparent contradiction of Jesus, being God, experiencing human limitations such as not knowing the time of his return?** The source argues that Jesus' statement about not knowing the time of his return (Mark 13:32) does not contradict his deity but rather underlines his humanity during his state of humiliation. It explains that while Jesus possessed divine knowledge and sometimes exercised supernatural knowledge according to the Father's will, it was not the Father's will for him to know the timing of his second coming during his earthly ministry. This willing submission to the Father's will and the non-exercise of certain divine attributes at specific times for the sake of his mission highlights his genuine humanity and obedience.

**6. Why does the source emphasize the importance of Christ's genuine humanity for salvation?**

The source stresses that Christ's full humanity is absolutely essential for our salvation, echoing St. Anselm's view that only the God-man can rescue us. It argues that God in heaven, or even God on earth without human nature, could not die to save us, could not experience temptations successfully in our place, and could not rise from the dead if he had not truly died. These human experiences, including his death on the cross, are the very means by which he accomplished our redemption. Furthermore, his sinless humanity demonstrates that sin is not an inherent part of human nature and provides a model for humanity.

**7. What is the significance of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness according to the source?**

The source highlights Jesus' temptations in the wilderness as a raw display of his humanity. It emphasizes that he was truly tempted and that it was the Father's will for him not to use his divine powers to overcome these temptations. Instead, Jesus relied on the Word of God and engaged in spiritual battle with the devil as a human being. This demonstrates his genuine vulnerability and his commitment to fulfilling the Father's will through his human nature, setting an example for believers.

**8. How does the source interpret the concept of Jesus being "made perfect" as mentioned in the book of Hebrews?**

The source acknowledges that the language of Jesus being "made perfect" in Hebrews (2:10, 5:8-9, 7:28) can be unsettling given his deity and sinlessness. It suggests that this perfection pertains to the whole person of the Son, particularly with reference to his humanness and his role in salvation. While the source doesn't provide a definitive explanation within the excerpt, it implies that this "perfection" is related to his being fully equipped and qualified through his human experiences, including suffering and obedience, to be the perfect Savior and High Priest for humanity.