

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 20, Systematics: Communication and Exercise of Attributes, Two States Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 20, Systematics: Communication and Exercise of Attributes, Two States, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's Christology session 20 explores the **communication of attributes** in Christ, where divine titles are paired with human qualities in Scripture to emphasize **the unity of his person**. The session highlights passages like **1 Corinthians 2** and **Philippians 2** to illustrate this concept, underscoring that descriptions apply to the **whole incarnate Son**, not separate divine or human entities. Peterson also discusses the **voluntary subordination of Christ's divine attributes** during his earthly ministry and the doctrine of the **two states** (humiliation and exaltation) as presented in Philippians 2:6-11. The lecture concludes by emphasizing the **deity and humanity of Christ** as foundational to Christian belief, contrasting it with historical and modern theological perspectives.

**2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 20 – 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_Session20.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Salvation, Session 20, Systematics: Communication and Exercise of Attributes, Two States

Briefing Document: Key Themes in Dr. Robert A. Peterson's Christology Session 20

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 20 of his Christology lectures, focusing on the humanity of Christ, the communication of attributes, the exercise of attributes, the two states of Christ, and their grounding in Philippians 2:1-11.

I. Communication of Attributes (*Communicatio Idiomatum*)

- **Definition:** Peterson defines the communication of attributes as a "scriptural phenomenon whereby, within a single sentence... scripture refers to Christ by a divine title but attributes to him what does not correspond to divinity but humanity." Conversely, it can also use a human title to attribute a divine quality within the same sentence.
- **Example 1 (1 Corinthians 2:8):** "None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Here, "Lord of glory" is a divine title, while "crucified" and "being mortal" are human qualities.
- **Example 2 (1 John 1:1-3):** The apostles "heard," "seen," and "touched" "the word of life," a clear reference to God as the agent of creation. This ascribes human sensory experiences to the divine "word of life."
- **Example 3 (Luke 1:43):** Elizabeth exclaims, "And why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" "Lord" is a divine title, while "mother" is a human designation.
- **Purpose/Cash Value:** The primary significance of the communication of attributes is that "it emphasizes the unity of the person of Christ." By ascribing both divine and human characteristics to the same individual within a single statement, Scripture underscores that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures.
- **Correction of Misunderstandings:** Peterson clarifies that this is "merely a way of speaking," a "powerful literary device," and not an "ontological sharing of attributes from the divine nature to the human so that Jesus' humanity is ubiquitous." He aligns with Calvin, stating that the divine-human Christ is at the

right hand of the Father. The communication of attributes pertains to the whole person, even when a statement emphasizes one nature more than the other.

II. Avoiding Heresies:

- Peterson uses a taxonomy to position different Christological views:
- **Nestorianism:** Divides Christ into two separate persons (divine and human). Reformed theology is presented as being closer to this than other views.
- **Monophysitism/Eutychianism:** Blends the two natures of Christ into a third, hybrid nature, so that he is neither fully God nor fully human. Lutheran theology is depicted as being closer to this end of the spectrum, although not actually embracing it.
- **Reformed and Lutheran Theology:** While differing in their understanding of the "communication of properties," both traditions agree that what is said of one nature in the Gospels pertains to the whole person, and neither embraced the heretical extremes.
- Peterson cautions against language that unintentionally separates the person of Christ, even in casual speech (e.g., simply referring to "the man").

III. Exercise of Attributes:

- **Attribution to the Whole Person:** "All biblical statements speaking of the Son of God incarnate are to be attributed to the whole person." There is no separate human entity apart from the incarnate Son. When Scripture speaks of his weariness (John 4) or his laying down his life (John 10), it speaks of the God-man.
- **Voluntary Subordination:** "Our Lord incarnate voluntarily subordinated the exercise of his divine attributes in obedience to the Father's will." This does *not* mean he lost or divested himself of his divine attributes (no kenosis). He retained them fully but chose not to exercise them independently unless it was the Father's will.
- **Examples of Divine Power Exercised:** Forgiving sins and confirming it with a visible miracle (Luke 5), knowing the thoughts of others, causing those who came to arrest him to fall back (John 18), and raising himself from the dead (John 2, 10).
- **The Father's Will:** Jesus only used his divine powers when it aligned with the Father's will. The resurrection, while sometimes attributed to Jesus, is also

frequently attributed to the Father and the Spirit, highlighting the Trinity's involvement.

- **Veiled Manifestation:** Peterson likens the manifestation of Christ's divine power during his earthly ministry to a lamp with a lampshade: usually the "lampshade was on, and the light was turned way down," but at times (e.g., the Transfiguration), the "lampshade was taken off, and the wattage was turned up."

IV. The Doctrine of the Two States (Philippians 2:6-11):

- **Two Chronological Phases:** This doctrine, articulated by the theological heirs of the Reformers, describes two chronological phases in Christ's earthly and post-earthly existence:
- **State of Humiliation (Conception to Burial):** Encompasses his conception, birth, temptations, struggles, death, and burial. Philippians 2:6-8 describes this state, highlighting his self-emptying (taking the form of a servant), his birth in human likeness, and his obedience to death on a cross.
- **State of Exaltation (Resurrection to Second Coming):** Includes his resurrection, ascension, sitting at God's right hand, the outpouring of the Spirit, his intercession, and his future second coming. Philippians 2:9-11 describes this state, emphasizing God's high exaltation of him and the bestowal of the name above every name, leading to universal bowing and confession.
- **Permanence of Incarnation:** Peterson stresses that the transition from the state of humiliation to exaltation does *not* involve Christ giving up his humanity. "The incarnation is permanent."
- **Philippians 2 and Isaiah 45:** Peterson connects Philippians 2:9-11 to Isaiah 45:22-23, where Yahweh declares that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance. This demonstrates the deity of Christ, as the attributes of Yahweh are ascribed to Jesus.
- **Universal Acknowledgment vs. Universal Salvation:** While every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord, this does not mean everyone will be saved. Isaiah 45:24 clarifies that only "in the Lord" will there be righteousness and strength, and those who were incensed against him will be ashamed. This highlights universal acknowledgment of Christ's Lordship but not universal salvation.

- **Purpose of Philippians 2:** The immediate context of Philippians 2 is to present Jesus' humility as an example for the Philippian church to follow, promoting unity.

V. Conclusion and Historical Context:

- Peterson contrasts the "start from above" Christology of the early church fathers (emphasizing the pre-existent divine Son becoming incarnate) with much of modern Christology, which often "started from below" (emphasizing Jesus' humanity and potentially diminishing his divinity). He expresses concern that the latter approach lacks the power of the true gospel.
- He reiterates the foundational importance of the pre-existence, incarnation, deity, genuine humanity (apart from sin), and uni-personality of Christ for understanding and appreciating his saving work.
- The ultimate purpose of studying Christology is to lead believers to "worship and adore and serve and bear witness to the Lord of Glory who became a servant for us sinners and our salvation."

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Salvation, Session 20, Systematics: Communication and Exercise of Attributes, Two States

Christology: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the "communication of attributes" as described in the lecture? Provide an example from Scripture cited in the lecture.
2. Why did Paul choose to preach "Christ crucified" in Corinth, given the cultural context of the time?
3. According to Dr. Peterson, what is the "cash value" or significance of the communication of attributes?
4. Explain why the idea of touching the "Word of Life" was considered blasphemous to unsaved Greeks.
5. How does Elizabeth's greeting to Mary in Luke 1:43 illustrate the communication of attributes?
6. What is Dr. Peterson's understanding of the "communication of properties" between Christ's divine and human natures?
7. Explain the difference between Nestorianism and Monophysitism/Eutychianism as presented in the lecture.
8. What are the two main points Dr. Peterson makes regarding the exercise of Christ's divine and human attributes?
9. Describe the two "states" of Christ discussed in the lecture and the chronological phases they encompass.
10. How does Dr. Peterson address the two problems that arise from the interpretation of Philippians 2:9-11 regarding universal salvation and Christ's deity?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The "communication of attributes" is a scriptural phenomenon where Christ is referred to by a divine title, but the sentence attributes to him something that pertains to his humanity, or vice versa, within the same sentence. An example is

found in 1 Corinthians 2:8, which speaks of the "Lord of glory" being crucified, a divine title associated with a human action.

2. Paul preached "Christ crucified" in Corinth, despite the Greek emphasis on rhetoric and wisdom, because he determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He recognized that while this message was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, it was also the wisdom and power of God.
3. The "cash value" of the communication of attributes is that it emphasizes the unity of the person of Christ. By using divine titles alongside descriptions of his humanity, Scripture underscores that the same person is both fully God and fully human.
4. The idea of touching the "Word of Life" was blasphemous to unsaved Greeks because their Hellenistic philosophy held that God was immaterial and could not be physically perceived or touched. The incarnation, where God took on a tangible human form, was utterly contrary to this worldview.
5. Elizabeth's greeting, "the mother of my Lord," illustrates the communication of attributes by referring to Mary as the mother of Jesus, using the divine title "Lord." This highlights the unity of Christ's person, where the eternal Lord took on human flesh and therefore had a human mother.
6. Dr. Peterson agrees with Calvin that the communication of properties is primarily a way of speaking, not an ontological sharing that would alter the nature of Christ's humanity. When Scripture speaks of one nature, it pertains to the whole person, emphasizing the unity of Christ without suggesting a blending of attributes.
7. Nestorianism divides Christ into two separate persons, a divine Christ and a human Jesus. In contrast, Monophysitism or Eutychianism blends the two natures of Christ into a single, new nature, which is neither fully divine nor fully human.
8. The two main points are: first, all biblical statements about the incarnate Son of God are to be attributed to the whole person, even if they specifically reference one nature. Second, Christ voluntarily subordinated the independent exercise of his divine attributes in obedience to the Father's will while retaining those attributes in full.
9. The two states of Christ are the state of humiliation, which encompasses his conception, birth, temptations, life struggles, death, and burial, and the state of exaltation, which includes his resurrection, ascension, sitting at God's right hand,

the sending of the Spirit, his intercession, and his second coming. These are two chronological phases with corresponding conditions.

10. Dr. Peterson clarifies that while Philippians 2 indicates every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, drawing from Isaiah 45, this signifies a universal acknowledgment of Christ's Lordship, not universal salvation. Many who bow and confess will still be lost; the passage also clearly teaches Christ's deity by applying language about Yahweh directly to the Son.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the "communication of attributes" in understanding the person of Jesus Christ. Use specific examples from the provided text to support your answer.
2. Compare and contrast the theological positions of Nestorianism and Monophysitism/Eutychianism, and explain why Dr. Peterson emphasizes the importance of avoiding both in Christology.
3. Analyze Dr. Peterson's teaching on the exercise of Christ's divine attributes during his earthly ministry. What does he mean by "voluntary subordination," and how does it relate to the unity of Christ's person?
4. Explain the doctrine of the "two states" of Christ (humiliation and exaltation) as presented in the lecture, and discuss how Philippians 2:6-11 is central to this understanding.
5. Examine Dr. Peterson's approach to interpreting Philippians 2:9-11, particularly his engagement with Isaiah 45. How does he resolve the apparent issues of universal salvation and the affirmation of Christ's deity in this passage?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Communication of Attributes (Communicatio Idiomatum):** A theological concept describing how the divine and human attributes of Christ, while remaining distinct in their natures, are both ascribed to the single person of Jesus in Scripture.
- **Nestorianism:** A Christological heresy (condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD) that taught that there were two separate persons in Christ, a divine Son of God and a human Jesus, loosely joined together.
- **Monophysitism:** A Christological heresy (condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD) that asserted that Christ had only one nature, a fusion of the divine and human, rather than two distinct natures.
- **Eutychianism:** A more extreme form of Monophysitism, named after the 5th-century archimandrite Eutyches, which taught that Christ's human nature was swallowed up by his divine nature.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.
- **Kenosis:** The concept, often based on Philippians 2:7, that Christ "emptied himself" in the incarnation. Interpretations vary, but Dr. Peterson clarifies that it refers to the voluntary subordination of the exercise of his divine attributes, not a divestment of them.
- **Hypostatic Union:** The orthodox Christological doctrine affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon, stating that in the one person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures, divine and human, united without confusion, change, division, or separation.
- **Two States (of Christ):** A post-Reformation theological doctrine that describes the two chronological phases in the life of Christ: the state of humiliation (from conception to burial) and the state of exaltation (from resurrection to the second coming).
- **Ontological:** Relating to or concerning the nature of being. In this context, it refers to the fundamental reality and characteristics of Christ's divine and human natures.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Session 20, Systematics: Communication and Exercise of Attributes, Two States, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Person and Work of Christ

1. What is the "communication of attributes" in Christology, and can you provide an example from Scripture?

The "communication of attributes" (sometimes called the *communicatio idiomatum*) is a theological concept that describes how Scripture refers to Christ by divine titles while simultaneously ascribing to him qualities that pertain to his humanity, and vice versa, all within the unity of his one person. This doesn't mean the attributes themselves are transferred between the divine and human natures, but rather that statements about one nature can be predicated of the whole person of Christ.

An example is found in 1 Corinthians 2:8: "...if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Here, the divine title "Lord of glory" is attributed to the one who was crucified, a distinctly human experience and act of mortality. This single sentence highlights the unity of Christ, who is both divine ("Lord of glory") and human (capable of being crucified).

2. Why is the communication of attributes important for understanding Christ?

The communication of attributes underscores the fundamental unity of the person of Christ, who is both fully God and fully man. It demonstrates that the actions and experiences of Jesus in his earthly life were not those of a separate "man" distinct from the divine Son, nor were they solely divine acts with a human façade. Instead, they were the acts of the one incarnate Son of God. This concept helps us avoid heretical views that divide or conflate Christ's two natures, emphasizing that the person who is divine is the same person who experienced human life, suffering, and death.

3. How does the concept of the communication of attributes relate to biblical passages like 1 John 1:1-3?

1 John 1:1-3 provides a powerful example of the communication of attributes. John writes about "that which was from the beginning," a clear reference to the eternal Word of God (John 1:1). Yet, he goes on to say, "...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." Here, divine attributes associated with the eternal Word ("from the

beginning," "word of life") are directly connected to sensory experiences – hearing, seeing, and touching – which are distinctly human ways of interacting with the physical world. This passage emphasizes that the eternal Word became incarnate and was tangible, highlighting the unity of the divine and human in the person of Christ.

4. What is meant by the "exercise of attributes" in Christology, and why is it significant?

The "exercise of attributes" refers to how Christ, being both God and man, utilized his divine and human attributes during his earthly life. While Christ possessed the full attributes of both his divine and human natures, the Scriptures suggest that he voluntarily subordinated the independent exercise of his divine attributes in obedience to the Father's will during his state of humiliation. This doesn't mean he lost his divine attributes, but rather that he didn't always overtly manifest them.

This concept is significant because it helps us understand how Jesus could experience human limitations (weariness, hunger, ignorance of certain things like the timing of his return) while still being fully God who possesses all power and knowledge. It highlights his self-humiliation and obedience, as seen in Philippians 2:6-8, where he did not exploit his equality with God but took on the form of a servant. However, Scripture also records instances where he clearly exercised divine power and knowledge, demonstrating his deity. The exercise of attributes underscores the delicate balance between Christ's two natures within the unity of his person.

5. What are the "two states" of Christ, according to this theological framework?

The "two states" of Christ refer to two chronological phases in his earthly existence: the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation.

- **State of Humiliation:** This encompasses the period from Christ's conception and birth to his burial. It includes his incarnation, his earthly life of obedience, his temptations, his suffering, his death on the cross, and even his burial. This state is characterized by his voluntary submission and the veiling of his divine glory.
- **State of Exaltation:** This begins with Christ's resurrection and continues through his ascension, his session at the right hand of the Father, his pouring out of the Holy Spirit, his intercession for believers, and culminates in his second coming. This state is characterized by the full manifestation of his glory and the exercise of his kingly authority.

These two states help explain the progression of Christ's work and his current status in glory, while affirming the permanence of his incarnation.

6. How does Philippians 2:6-11 illustrate the doctrine of the two states?

Philippians 2:6-11 is a central passage for understanding the doctrine of the two states. Verses 6-8 describe Christ in his state of humiliation: "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." This depicts his voluntary self-emptying and descent to the lowest point of human suffering and death.

Verses 9-11 then describe his state of exaltation: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This illustrates his being raised to the highest place of honor and authority by the Father as a result of his obedience in the state of humiliation.

7. Does the universal bowing and confessing in Philippians 2:10-11 imply universal salvation?

No, the universal bowing of every knee and confession of every tongue that "Jesus Christ is Lord" in Philippians 2:10-11 does not imply universal salvation. While every creature will ultimately acknowledge Jesus' lordship, as this passage draws upon Isaiah 45:22-23 where Yahweh declares that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance, the context in Isaiah and the broader teaching of the New Testament clarifies that this acknowledgment does not equate to saving faith for all. Some will bow and confess willingly as worshippers, while others will be constrained to do so, acknowledging his lordship even in their condemnation. Therefore, this passage speaks to the universal authority and glory of Christ, not the universal salvation of all individuals.

8. How does the understanding of Christ presented here contrast with modern theologies that might start "from below"?

The Christology presented in these sources emphasizes starting "from above," affirming the pre-existence and deity of the Son of God who then became incarnate. This contrasts with many modern theologies that start "from below," often focusing primarily on the humanity of Jesus and potentially downplaying or denying his pre-existence and full deity. The concern raised is that theologies starting from below risk creating a human Christ who is not truly divine and therefore not capable of accomplishing salvation. The traditional approach emphasizes the divine Son taking on human nature as the foundational miracle that undergirds the entirety of his saving work, including his crucifixion and resurrection. A Christology that diminishes the deity of Christ is seen as lacking the true gospel.