

CHRISTOLOGY (37)

When all of these proofs are seen, it becomes very clear that the Bible affirms, time and time again, that Jesus Christ is God!

QUESTION #16 – What is the “kenosis”?

When it comes to Christology, a critical doctrinal matter is the “kenosis.” The term “kenosis” comes from the Greek verb “ekenosen,” which is from the verb “keno-o,” which is found in Philippians 2:7. The verb means to make empty, to make vain or to make of no effect.

The KJV translates this verb, “made Himself of no reputation.”
The NIV translates this verb, “but made Himself nothing.”
The NASV best translates this verb, “but emptied Himself.”

The verb is used in several N.T. passages.

1. In Romans 4:14, it is translated “made void.”
2. In I Corinthians 1:17, it is translated “made void.”
3. In I Corinthians 9:15, it is translated “empty” boast.
4. In II Corinthians 9:3, it is translated “be made empty.”

The verb used in Philippians 2:7 is aorist tense, meaning at one moment in time or at one point of time Jesus Christ “emptied Himself.” The obvious theological question that is at stake is, “Of what did Jesus Christ empty Himself?” What specifically did Jesus Christ empty Himself? When Jesus Christ came to this earth, of what did He empty Himself?

It is this issue that has become a battleground for theologians and as a result of this, many false conclusions have been drawn concerning Jesus Christ. There are at least four false views pertaining to what Christ gave up:

False View #1 - Jesus Christ gave up some of His attributes.

This view basically divides God’s attributes into two categories:

- 1) Those attributes He must have in order to be God—His ethical and moral attributes such as holiness, justice, righteousness, wisdom, etc.
- 2) Those attributes He has in order to relate to the physical world but doesn’t emphatically need them—His relative or physical attributes such as omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. It is claimed that this group of attributes could be surrendered by Christ when He became a man.

There are many reasons why this view is false:

(Reason #1) - God does not and cannot change. James 1:17

(Reason #2) - Jesus Christ does not and cannot change. Hebrews 13:8

(Reason #3) - Jesus Christ demonstrated various attributes at various times:

- A. Omnipresence—John 1:47-48
- B. Omniscience—John 1:47-48; 2:24-25; 4:29
- C. Omnipotence—Luke 4:36; John 11:37-44

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(Reason #4) - God cannot be divided by His own attributes since the attributes make God, God. To tamper with the attributes of Christ is to tamper with the Deity of Christ.

False View #2 - Jesus Christ gave up all of His attributes.

The weaknesses of this view are many, but we may sum up by saying this view totally denies what the Bible reveals. As we have already observed, time and time again, Jesus Christ demonstrated His attributes while here on earth. To claim that He gave up all of His attributes is to claim something contrary to scriptural revelation.

This view emphatically attacks the Deity of Jesus Christ because it attacks all of His attributes. This view also attacks the hypostatic union and is so absurd that Dr. Charles Feinberg said "...it needs no minute refutation."

False View #3 - Jesus Christ exchanged His Deity.

This view says Christ made as exchange—He exchanged His eternal character (His form as God) for a temporal character (His form as man).

The problem is this attempts to separate Christ's Deity from His humanity and, as Dr. Walvoord says, "...it in effect denies that He was actually God simultaneously with His human experience" (*Jesus Christ Our Lord*, p. 141).

False View #4 - Jesus Christ restricted His Deity.

This view teaches that Christ limited or restricted His Deity to the limitations of His humanity. He somewhat lessened His attributes of Deity, confining them to the limitations of His humanity. When we examine scriptural evidence, it is clear that Christ was not limited by His humanity in any way and, at times, did, knew and said things that were far beyond the boundaries of human limitation (i.e. John 3:13).

This view attacks the Deity of Jesus Christ and lessens His character. This view also falls far short of the true interpretation.

Having examined the false views, it is now important to examine the true interpretation. We begin by concluding that **Christ did not empty Himself of His Deity in any way**. So this naturally leads us to ask the question of what did He empty Himself? There are three main factual realities we want to consider:

(Factual Reality #1) - Jesus Christ emptied Himself of His visible glory .

Philippians 2:6 really makes this contextual point. The word "form" is one that means appearance, form and shape (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 296).

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The participle “existed” is present tense, referring to a continual existence. The idea stated in this verse is that Jesus Christ was continually existing in the same glorious form and appearance as God the Father, prior to coming to earth. He was willing to give this up to come to this earth. In fact, when Christ was on earth, He spoke of His previous, visible glory— John 17:5.

Although this glory was never surrendered in an absolute sense, for the most part, Christ veiled His visible glory from men. There were certain moments when men were permitted to get a glimpse of it (i.e. Lk. 9:29-32). However, for the most part, Christ’s glory was hidden from earthly eyes. Dr. Walvoord made an interesting observation when he said: “After the ascension Christ is never seen except in His glorified state” (Walvoord, p. 243).

(Factual Reality #2) - Jesus Christ emptied Himself of His exalted state.

This idea is very closely linked to the previous one; however, it does contain a slight variation. Philippians 2:6-7 makes it clear that Jesus was on an equal level with God the Father. Verse 6 states that He did not regard this equality as a thing to be grasped. In other words, He was willing to temporarily set aside and not hold on to His exalted state and was willing to be made in the form of a man. He was willing to condescend from His very high position to a very lowly one. As Bancroft said, Christ was willing to make a stately change, “the form of a servant from the form of God” (p. 147).

There is no question that Christ’s work on Calvary demanded a humanity that required Him to set aside His exalted, glorified state. The purpose was redemptive. When we take into consideration the perpetuity of the incarnation, it is amazing to realize that this willingness to not hold on to His exalted state is a decision that affects Him forever. We know we shall behold Christ in all of His glory, but we shall also behold Him as the glorified God-man. Had He not condescended, we would have only seen Him as the Glorious God when we faced Him at our condemnatory judgment.

(Factual Reality #3) - Jesus Christ emptied Himself of the independent use of His attributes.

Although Jesus Christ did manifest His Divine attributes continually, He used them in accordance with the program connected to the entire Godhead. In other words, Christ never used His attributes for personal gain or to make life easier for Himself. Even though He had the power to do whatever He pleased, He never once used His attributes in a way not consistent with the entire plan of the Trinity. Dr. Walvoord writes: “In a word, He restricted the benefits of His attributes as they pertained to His walk on earth and voluntarily chose not to use His powers to lift Himself above ordinary human limitations” (*Ibid.*, p. 144).

There were times when Christ voluntarily chose to be dependent upon God the Father and God the Spirit in the utilization of His attributes—Matt. 12:28; Lk. 4:14-18. Even though there are these unique and rare moments, it does teach us that Christ was willing to use His attributes in connection with the program of God.

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We cite Dr. Walvoord: “The act of kenosis as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of Deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living with men and their limitations” (*Ibid.*, p. 144).

When it comes to this matter of kenosis, or for that matter to true Christology, there are three important theological words that need to be understood.

Word #1 - Condescension –This term refers to the fact that Jesus Christ willingly left His native, heavenly sphere to become a man.

Word #2 - Humiliation –This term refers to the fact that Christ, as God-man, was willing to suffer all of the negatives which He endured, which culminated in His death by crucifixion.

Word #3 - Exaltation –This term refers to the fact that after His humiliation, He arose from the dead and eventually ascended back into heaven where He is now exalted at the right hand of God the Father.

Although all three concepts are referred to in Philippians 2:7-9, the kenosis matter is primarily one concerned with Christ’s condescension.

QUESTION #17 – What were the offices held by Jesus Christ and the God-man?

Eusebius, who has been called the “Father of Church History” because he was the first to write a valuable history of the Christian Church from the time of the apostles down to his own time, approximately A.D. 325, was the first to classify Christ’s work into three major offices. We may observe then that Christology has its roots in the early development of God’s Church. Eusebius lived, researched and wrote from A.D. 263-339.

Office #1 - Jesus Christ held the office of a prophet.

Dr. John Walvoord writes: “Without question, Christ is the greatest of the prophets. His teachings, contained in the four Gospels, demonstrate a greater variety of subjects, a broader scope of prophecy and a more comprehensive revelation than is found in any of the Old Testament records of the prophets” (Walvoord, p. 136). The fact that Jesus Christ held the office of a prophet is clearly established in Scripture:

(Proof #1) - It was established by prediction of Moses. Deut. 18:15-19

Dr. C.I. Scofield’s note on these verses is worth noting—“That the allusion in vv. 15-19 is to the Lord Jesus Christ is made clear by the N.T. (John 1:21, 45; 6:14; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).”