

**Lecture 6:
The Doctrine of Kenosis
What did Jesus Christ Empty Himself of?**

Philippians 2:5-11

*Does this passage discuss at all the question of **how** or **how much** Christ's glory was veiled? Does this passage say anything about **the use or restriction** of divine attributes?*

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The question of Christ's "*self-emptying*" or *kenosis* (from the Greek verb in Philippians 2:7) has been discussed throughout church history. For example:

The Synod of Antioch in 341 A.D. said that Christ emptied Himself of "*the being equal with God*" while clearly defending the full deity of Christ.

During the Reformation the discussion centered on the possibility of Christ emptying Himself of the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence without affecting essential Deity.

In the seventeenth century some boldly asserted that Christ was actually less than divine.

The nineteenth century brought an almost new form of Christology with the appearance and spread of many false ideas of the *kenosis*. This was due to the inroads of scientific theories like naturalism, evolution, and radical criticism of the Bible. It also brought an emphasis on trying to "*rediscover*" the "*real*" humanity of Jesus and with it the magnitude of His self-denial and self-emptying.

II. WORD STUDY:

The central passage on the *kenosis*, Philippians 2:5-11, begins with an exhortation to humility of mind, following the example of Christ who left glory to suffer on the cross.

Vs. 6 "*form.*" This word is the outward display of the inner reality or substance. Here it denotes the outward display of the divinity of the preexistent Christ, in the display of His glory as the image of the Father.

"*exist*" is a present active participle (to be). The word expresses continuance of a state or condition.

“*robbery*” is a prize, something to hold onto. The word has either an active sense “*robbing*” or a passive sense “*prize gained through robbery.*” Perhaps the meaning is that Christ did not use His equality with God in order to snatch or gain power or dominion, riches, pleasure, or worldly glory. He did not reach out of His favored place and grasp at authority.

“*to consider*” in connection with the previous noun, it means, “*to treat as a piece of good fortune,*” “*to regard as a lucky find,*” *to prize highly,*” “*to welcome eagerly.*”

“*equal*” means equal, exactly equal, equal in number, size, quality. “*to be equal with God.*”

So, “*He did not regard the being equal with God as a robbing*”

Vs. 7

“*himself*”, this pronoun is emphasized by its position in the sentence.

“*empty*” (kenosis means empty) is an aorist indicative active tense verb which means “*to empty, to make empty, to make of no effect.*” The word does not mean He emptied Himself of His Deity, but rather He emptied Himself of the display of His Deity for personal gain.

“*to take*” is an aorist active participle. It is a participle of means meaning that His mode of manifestation resembled what men are. The apostle views Him solely as He could appear to men. This, however, does not deny His true humanity.

Vs. 8

“*outward appearance.*” The word was used of a king who exchanges his kingly robe for sackcloth.

III. QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Did Christ surrender some or all of His attributes at His incarnation?

Did Christ appear as a Man by disguising His Deity?

Did Christ give up independent use of His attributes?

Based upon Philippians 2:5-11, did the God-Man experience limitations in His earthly state?

Did the God-Man evidence the prerogatives of Deity?

IV. MAJOR VIEWPOINTS REGARDING KENOSIS:

True or False

1. _____. The Son of God laid aside his participation in the Godhead when he became a man. All the attributes of His deity literally ceased when the incarnation occurred. The Word (Logos) became a soul residing in human Jesus.

Christ Emptied Himself of Divine Consciousness

2. _____. The Logos exchanged his eternity-form for a time-form bound by human nature. In this time-form Christ no longer had all the attributes commensurate with Deity, though he could use supernatural powers.

Christ Emptied Himself of the Eternity Form of Being.

3. _____. Christ emptied Himself of those attributes related to the created universe such as omnipotence and omnipresence but not the essential attributes such as truth and love.

Relative Attributes of the Deity.

4. _____. At Christ's incarnation the Word took up a double life. One "life center" continued to function consciously in the Trinity while the other became incarnated with human nature, unaware of the cosmic functions of deity.

Christ emptied himself of the integrity of infinite divine existence.

5. _____. The Word possessed the divine attributes but chose not to use them.

Christ Emptied Himself of the use of the Divine Attributes.

6. _____. The Word always possessed and could utilize the prerogatives of Deity but always in submission to and by the power of the Father (and of the Holy Spirit). The incarnate Christ never did anything independently by virtue of His own deity.

Christ Emptied Himself of the independent use or exercise of the Divine Attributes.

7. _____. The Word emptied Himself of the outward form of Deity.

Christ Emptied Himself of the insignia of majesty, the prerogatives of Deity.

8. _____. The Word retracted the mode of the divine attributes from the realm of the actual to the potential. He retained His divine consciousness but renounced the conditions of infinity and its form.

Christ Emptied Himself of the actual exercise of divine prerogatives.

9. _____. The Word turned over all of His divine roles and duties to the Father. The incarnate Logos was unaware of the happenings within the Godhead.

Christ Emptied Himself of the divine activity.

10. _____. In the Kenosis Christ emptied Himself of retaining and exploiting His status in the Godhead and took on humanity in order to die.

Christ veiled His preincarnate glory.

Popular Views Held By Evangelicals:

1. Kenosis means the veiling of Christ's preincarnate glory. However, was this true all the time during His earthly ministry? (Matthew 17:1-8; John 1:14; 17:5).
2. Kenosis means that Jesus Christ emptied himself of the independent exercise of the divine attributes of deity. "I only do what the Father commands me to do." "I only do the Father's will." How do we reconcile these passages of Scripture?
 - a. John 1:48
 - b. John 2:24
 - c. John 16:30
 - d. Did he only do miracles in the power of the Spirit or did He ever do some of them in His own power:
 - i. Luke 22:51
 - ii. John 18:6