

Introduction to the Doctrine of *Kenosis*: The True Humanity of Christ Could Not Rely on His Divine Attributes in the Execution of the Prototype Plan; Definition of *Kenoo*; the Doctrine of Kenosis: “Keep on thinking this”; the Mind-set of Jesus, Phil 2:1–4

Jesus assumed this status at the moment of the virgin birth, therefore, He retained the attributes of deity while adding the attributes of true humanity: two natures; one Person. If we keep the two separate then there is no problem understanding His uniqueness.

However, there are certain circumstances that cause the two natures to come into *apparent* conflict and the one we have before us is an example. In Luke 2:51 we are told that the Lord “placed Himself under subordination to His parents continually.”

How is it that the perfect God of the universe places Himself in subordination to sinful humans? Because the plan of God for our salvation requires the true humanity of Christ to function without dependence on any of His divine attributes.

This situation is addressed in Philippians 2. We will note an expanded translation of the passage and then take up the doctrine of *kenōsis*.

Philippians 2:5 - Keep on thinking this within yourself which was also resident in Christ Jesus,

v. 6 - Who, though He eternally existed in the essence of God, He did not think equalities with God a gain to be seized and held,

NOTE: Verse 6 addresses the circumstance of undiminished deity taking on the attributes of true humanity. Christ did not view this additional nature as a burden to be avoided but was willing to submit to the plan of God for the purpose of our salvation.

Philippians 2:7 - but He Himself deprived Himself of the proper function of deity when He had received the form of a bonds slave although He had been born in the outward likeness of men.

NOTE: The word “deprived” is the aorist active indicative of the verb **κενόω** (*kenoō*). Of what the Lord deprived Himself was access to His divine attributes during the Incarnation when to do so would provide for Him an advantage not available to other members of the human race.

κενόω *kenoō*. Literally *make empty* and is an antonym of **πληρώω** (*plēroō*: to fill up). It is often used in a figurative sense for emptying or depriving.

The passage [Phil. 2:7] had considerable influence on the later dogmatic kenosis discussion. (**Κένωσις** [*kenōsis*], frequently used in the period of the Fathers, is not found in the New Testament.) The immediate context of [Philippians 2:7] indicates that the clause speaks of the *self-giving* humility and *self-denying* impoverishment of the divine manner of being.¹

Philippians 2:8 - In fact, although having been discovered in outward appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of spiritual death, that is, the death of the cross.

¹ Michael Lattke, “κενόω,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 2:282.

Jesus, in His true humanity, is said to outwardly appear as a member of the human race but inwardly He is different due to the absence of a sinful nature. It was in this status of inward perfection that He submitted to the divine plan of salvation all the way to His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross.

Philippians 2:5-8 develops the doctrine of the hypostatic union and the doctrine of *kenōsis*, both of which are essential to our salvation.

As noted earlier, we have already developed the doctrine of the hypostatic union. We now engage the critical principle of *kenōsis* which requires us to approach these four verses through exegesis.

XIX. The Doctrine of *Kenōsis*: Philippians 2:5-8

Philippians 2:5 - Keep on thinking this within yourself which was also resident in Christ Jesus,

The verse begins with a command for thinking, the present active imperative of the verb **φρονέω** (*phroneō*):

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| present: | Customary: denotes that which habitually occurs or may be reasonably expected to occur. It describes an action that is repeated and occurs regularly. |
| active: | The action of the verb is to be produced by those to whom Paul addresses the Epistle: “the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” (Phil 1:2). |
| imperative: | Direct command to do something, i.e., think. |

The instruction to the believers in Philippi is to habitually attend Bible class, grow in grace, and make the advance to the sophisticated spiritual life.

The capacity for sophisticated thought by those who make such an advance is superior to that of those without it. The specifics are mentioned by Paul in verses 1 through 4. Here is the corrected translation of these verses:

Philippians 2:1 - Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any comfort from occupation with Christ, if there is any partnership with the Holy Spirit, if there is any emotional response to doctrine and resultant mercies, and there is,

v. 2 - bring to completion my happiness, that you might be thinking the same thing, having the same occupation with Christ, united in soul, concentrating on the same objective of attaining the sophisticated spiritual life.

v. 3 - Do nothing motivated by contentiousness nor ambitious pride; but by means of grace orientation through sensitivity and thoughtfulness, be considering each other as better than yourselves;

v. 4 - every one of you advancing believers should not only be regarding his own personal interests but also the personal interests of others.

v. 5 - Keep on thinking this ...

The word “this” is the accusative neuter of the demonstrative pronoun **οὗτος** (*houtos*) which functions as the direct object of the verb to think. The doctrines that the advancing believer must keep on thinking are enumerated in verses 1-4:

1. Encouragement in Christ.

2. Spiritual comfort from personal love expressed by one's occupation with Christ.
3. Partnership with the Holy Spirit: filling, teaching, recall, and application of doctrine learned.
4. Legitimate emotion in response to seeing doctrine work as a result of personal application and the mercy that is afforded by God when we fail.
5. The advancing believer must strive to achieve unity of thought among those with whom he is making the advance.
6. This includes occupation with Christ instead of self, united by submission and adherence to the systematic theology revealed in Scripture.