

The Lord Takes on the Status of a Bondservant by Taking of True Humanity, Phil 2:7; the Development of the Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union: the Church Councils & the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451)

The best way to convey all that is implied by this verb requires an expanded translation: "But He [Christ Jesus] deprived Himself of the proper function of deity."

This voluntary action enabled the humanity of Christ to enter into human history as a Mediator between God and man. The reflexive pronoun *heautou* means that this was a voluntary decision by the deity of Christ.

We see the impact of this decision in:

Matthew 26:39 - He went a little beyond them [the disciples], and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will. [Also see Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42]

When this decision became operational is indicated by the next verb, the aorist active participle of **λαμβάνω** (*lambanō*) which means to take on something, or, better, to receive something. What He is to receive is the status of a bondservant.

The aorist tense is constative; it contemplates the action in its entirety and gathers it into a single whole. The active voice indicates that the deity of Christ made a sovereign decision to receive the form of true humanity and to assume the position of a bondservant.

The participle is complementary which means that it completes the thought of another verb, in this case the main verb *kenōō*, to deprive Himself.

In order for the action of deprivation of the independent use of His divine attributes to become operational, the Lord had to take on the form of true humanity and in so doing take on the duty of executing the salvation plan of God.

Operation Reconciliation began with the virgin birth (Luke 2:7) and ended with the ascension and session (Acts 1:9). Between these two events are the dispensation of the Incarnation, the First-Advent phase of the hypostatic union, and the function of *kenōsis*.

The true humanity of the hypostatic union is introduced by the direct object of the verb *lambanō* "to receive." It is the accusative singular of the noun **μορφή** (*morphē*): to receive the "form" of something. Here it refers to the Lord's inner essence in His true humanity.

We encountered this word in verse 6 where the form being discussed was His undiminished deity:

Philippians 2:6 - Who, because He eternally existed in the essence [**μορφή** *morphē*] of God, He did not think equalities with God a gain to be seized and held,

The prepositional phrase "in the sphere of the essence of God" is made up of only three words in the original: **ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ** (*en morphēi Theou*).

This refers to the inner essence of Christ as being the same as the essence of God which is indicated by the possessive genitive singular of **Θεός** (*Theos*): "of God."

In verse seven the *morphē* is of a **δούλος** (*doulos*): bondservant, the inner essence of His humanity. Here we are introduced to the Lord receiving the form of a bondservant, i.e., the essence of true humanity.

In verse 6 we have the deity of Christ described by the phrase *ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ* (*en morphēi Theou*): the essence of God. In verse 7 the phrase is *μορφὴν δούλου* (*morphēn doulou*): the essence of humanity. Combined they establish the doctrine of the hypostatic union.

Note that the second phrase – *morphēn doulou* – has no definite article which emphasizes the high quality of the Lord’s bondslavery; He is the epitome of all who have placed themselves into bondage.

The word *doulos* has numerous applications in Scripture but the one in our context has to do with voluntary servitude. The deity of Christ volunteered to take on the form of true humanity in order to facilitate the execution of the salvation plan of God.

From the sovereignty of His deity, the Lord voluntarily accepted union with true humanity in which union He voluntarily deprived Himself of the independent function of His divine attributes in the fulfillment of Operation Reconciliation.

This decision is brought to light in this passage by the verb *kenoō*, to deprive oneself. From this comes the doctrine of *κένωσις* (*kenōsis*), or as it has been adopted in the English, kenosis:

ORIGIN late 19th century: from Greek *kenōsis* ‘an emptying,’ with biblical allusion (Phil. 2:7) to Greek *heauton ekenōse*, literally ‘emptied himself.’¹

This doctrine is essential to understanding the relationship between the deity of Christ and His true humanity during the Incarnation. The development of the hypostatic union’s definition goes back to the ecumenical councils of the early church of which there were seven:

1. Nicaea I, 325
2. Constantinople I, 381
3. Ephesus, 431
4. Chalcedon, 451
5. Constantinople II, 553
6. Constantinople III, 680–681
7. Nicaea II, 787

The development of defining the hypostatic union culminated in the creed of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. It was convened to discuss the teaching of Eutyches \yüt'-i-kēz\, the founder of Eutychianism \eū-tych'-i-ăn-ism\, the belief in a single divine nature in Christ.

This false doctrine was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon which excommunicated and banished him.²

The false doctrine of Eutychianism led to clarification of the hypostatic union but not until after spirited debate over choices of words. This excerpt amplifies the reasons:

¹ *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, eds. Elizabeth J. Jewell and Frank Abate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 930.

² “Eutychian \eū-tych'-i-ăn\, a follower of Eutyches, a monk of Constantinople in the fifth century, who held that the divine and human natures of Christ, after their union, became so blended together as to constitute but one nature” (*Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary: Unabridged*, 2d ed., s.v.: “Eutychian”).

Human language, especially about the divine, is always very imperfect, so that the creedal formulas of councils must be seen as boundary fences marking danger areas and as signposts to the future, as much as inadequate descriptions. The first two councils, Nicaea I and Constantinople I, were concerned with language about the Trinity; Ephesus and Chalcedon moved on to Christology, the relationship between divinity and humanity in Christ. How could Greek—the dominant language of the eastern empire and already complicated from the Christian point of view by being the medium of the sophisticated philosophy of Plato and Aristotle—be harnessed to express the relatively new concepts of Christian theology? Some idea of the difficulties facing the early councils may be gained from looking up in a dictionary of classical Greek the three words that were eventually accepted as keys: οὐσία [ousia] for being, as in the one being of God; ὑπόστασις [hupostasis] for person, as in the three persons of the Trinity; and φύσις [phusis] for nature, as in the two natures, human and divine, of Christ. All three words, as the dictionary shows, could express a wide range of different ideas and concepts. There was considerable overlap in the meaning of the three words. To some extent the debates of the early church were exercises in linguistic analysis.³

The three words Tanner gives as examples of linguistic analysis in many ways are synonymous as can be seen from the classical Greek:

1. οὐσία [ousia]: that which is one's own, one's substance. Immutable reality. Substance, essence. True nature. (p. 1274)
2. ὑπόστασις [hupostasis]: standing under, supporting. Foundation and substructure. Substantial nature, substance. Actual existence, reality. Real nature, essence. (p. 1895)
3. φύσις [phusis]: Origin; the natural form or constitution of a person. Outward form, appearance. One's nature, character. Natural properties.⁴ (p. 1964)

Therefore, defining doctrines required precise selection of words followed by definitions of the terms so that doctrines could be understood by all who sought to remain orthodox. These three words are defined as follows in the Koine Greek:

1. οὐσία [ousia]: Being, which is the present participle of *eimi*, to be. Essence, substance, nature. In the New Testament, it usually refers to that which belongs to someone, or his substance. (p. 1076)
2. ὑπόστασις [hupostasis]: In general, that which underlies the apparent, hence, reality, essence, substance. Substance, what really exists under any appearance, reality, essential nature. It approximates *ousia*, existence, substance, and *phusis*, nature. (p. 1426)
3. φύσις [phusis]: Nature, essence, essential constitution and properties.⁵ (p. 1459)

These words were carefully considered in the drawing up of the Creed of Chalcedon; the essential statement follows:

³ Norman P. Tanner, *The Councils of the Church: A Short History* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2001), 31–32.

⁴ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 1274, 1895, 1964.

⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1076, 1426, 1459.

Following the saintly fathers [those of the Councils of Nicaea I, Constantinople I, and Ephesus], we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer,⁶ as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.⁷

The Creed of Chalcedon is an adequate definition of the doctrine of the hypostatic union, however, more precise and laconic definitions have been developed since. The one we use is an example:

In the Person of the incarnate Christ are two natures, divine and human, inseparably united without mixture or loss of separate identity, without loss or transfer of properties or attributes, the union being personal and eternal. Jesus is different from God and the Holy Spirit in that He is Man. He is different from true humanity in that He is God. As Man He is superior to man because He is perfect and impeccable.

The mystery of how the two natures of Christ function during the Incarnation is brought out by the doctrine of *kenōsis* and requires us to observe it as the Doctrine of Humiliation.

⁶ A false doctrine that asserts Mary is the “mother of God.” It was favored by the Alexandrian School of theologians from the time of Origen [c. 185–254] onward. In the fifth century it was attacked by Nestorius who wanted to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. *Theotokos*, however, had the militant support of Cyril of Alexandria, and it was approved by the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. (See: J. D. Douglas, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978], 968).

⁷ Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, 28–29.