

NT Framework 23
Doctrine of Kenosis

- I. Review the Life of the King. What Jesus did in His life was out of step with social customs, Pharisaic interpretations, and rabbinic teaching methods.
- II. 3 Doctrines in the Life of the King
 - A. Kenosis
 - B. Impeccability
 - C. Infallibility
- III. Background of Kenosis
 - A. Key Word: *kenoo* in Philippians 2:7, which is translated “emptied.” But what did He empty Himself of? His deity? His attributes? Some of His attributes? Use of His attributes?
 - B. Key Passage: Philippians 2:1-8. The context is practical. Paul is exhorting us to think of others as more important than ourselves. This requires having the mindset (the Gk word translated “attitude” is *phroneo*, and refers to “developing an attitude based on careful thought”) of Christ. Then he launches into a description of how Christ thought of others as more important than Himself when He took to Himself true humanity and humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross for us.
 - C. Key Idea: Practical Christian living is based on doctrine. There’s no such thing as Christian living in a vacuum. You have to have doctrine in your soul as a base for Christian living. Yet, we live in an age when “doctrine” is denigrated (2 Tim 4:3). It’s why everything is a mess in Christianity. No one wants to think anymore. It’s too hard to think. But just as I showed the application to Christian living of the Trinity in the problem of the One and the Many, so the same type of practical Christian life application is tied up in the Kenosis.
- IV. Basis of Kenosis
 - A. The basis of the Kenosis doctrine is the Creator-creature distinction. Jesus Christ is the Creator and at the incarnation He took to Himself the creature, so we have the God-man. We talked about this under the Birth of the King in the doctrine of the Hypostatic Union. This doctrine was the result of the church wrestling with the textual data for four centuries. The result was this statement: *Jesus Christ is undiminished deity united with true humanity in one person without confusion or separation forever.*
 - B. The basis of the Kenosis doctrine is the Hypostatic Union. What it’s saying is that even though Jesus Christ is God, He had to live the Christian life as a man. He didn’t get to cheat and use His deity. This is going to be important when we deal with the Doctrine of Impeccability which deals with whether Jesus was able to be tempted. As far as the Hypostatic Union and how Christ lived as a true

human, He didn't cheat and use His deity to solve His problems. He came down here as a true human and He went through what you and I go through and He proved the Christian life works. So, *the Kenosis doctrine relates directly to the Christian life and how it is lived.*

- C. The result of the Kenosis doctrine is Sanctification. Jesus exemplified humility, obedience, and sacrifice. What is the aim of sanctification? We studied this under the Conquest & Settlement, we studied it with King Solomon. What was the aim? To learn loyalty to God through His word. That's what we mean by Jesus learning obedience; He learned loyalty to God the Father. It bothers people that Jesus had to learn obedience (Heb 5:8-9) because He was always obedient, so what it means is that His obedience had to be tested. Why?
1. Example Adam: Adam was created "very good" (Gen 1:31). Theologians sometimes describe his condition as "unconfirmed holiness." They don't want to say he was righteous because they rightly observe he hadn't produced any obedience and righteousness, so they just say he was in a state of unconfirmed holiness. Adam had to be tested. If he had remained in obedience year after year he would have produced a historical righteousness, but we know that didn't happen.
 2. Example Christ: Jesus was virgin born (Mt 1:18-23). His condition was "unconfirmed holiness." To solve our problem in Adam, he had to learn obedience and produce historical righteousness. Paul is arguing for that in Phlp 2:8, that He did this even to the point of death, death on a cross, which was an unthinkable way to die.
 3. We tend to think of Sanctification as defeating sin. Jesus didn't defeat sin. He didn't have any sin to defeat. We have to defeat sin only because we're fallen in Adam. He wasn't fallen. He was paying the penalty for our sin. What this illustrates is that sanctification isn't fundamentally about defeating sin. We know this because *Jesus Christ still had to be sanctified* (Heb 2:10), and so what sanctification involves is developing a historical righteousness.
 - a) Analogy from agriculture. If you have a field you want to make productive, the first thing you have to do is clear the field of all the weeds and bugs. You have to prepare the soil. But just because you do that doesn't mean you have a crop. Then you have to plant and bring it to harvest and keep all the bugs and weeds out along the way. Because we're fallen we start with that weed and insect filled field. But Jesus started with a clear field, just like Adam. From there He had to be sanctified, which is the concept of learning obedience (Heb 2:10). He did it by trusting the Father through His sufferings and by doing so He generated a historical righteousness. That's sanctification. It occurred in His humanity.

4. Results of Sanctification. Philippians 2:9-11. Exaltation and eternal reward (Col 1:18; Eph 1:10).

V. Other Kenosis Passages

- A. Isaiah 50:4-11. The Messiah was prophesied to learn as a disciple. The great Christologist, Hengstenberg said, "the figure is taken from a teacher, who, in the morning, before he commences his instruction, summons his pupils to him." Did Jesus learn all this in His deity? Or in His humanity? If He learned this in His humanity, why was that necessary if He was deity?
- B. Matthew 24:36. Does Jesus really not know the day and the hour of His own Second Coming? If Jesus is God, and God is omniscient, then Jesus is omniscient. Then how can He not know the day or the hour? You've got to conclude either that Jesus isn't God or Jesus was talking out of His humanity here. And if he was talking out of His humanity, then it's the kenosis you are seeing. The emptying or divesting Himself of His divine prerogatives.
- C. Mark 5:1-20. Why did Jesus need to ask for the demons name if He's omniscient? Yet He does because He emptied Himself of utilizing His omniscience. That's the kenosis on display.
- D. Matthew 21:18. What do you mean Jesus got hungry? If Jesus is God and God is omnipotent, He's always brimful of energy. Why do we eat? Because we're running out of energy. So, was this a reference to Jesus's deity or humanity?
- E. Luke 11:20. Here Jesus casts out a demon. But by whose power does He cast out the demon. Jesus is omnipotent, but He doesn't always use His omnipotence. These are cases where we see the kenosis.
- F. Luke 8:22-24. Jesus is asleep in the boat, completely out. Then Jesus stands up and calms the sea. What is going on here? You see both His deity and humanity!

VI. Doctrine of Kenosis

- A. Two things have to be protected
 - 1. Not diluting the deity of Christ
 - 2. Proper emphasis on the humanity of Christ
- B. Philippians 2 is the answer. The Christ who is full deity and full humanity gave up the assertion of His deity in the incarnation so that He could learn obedience through sufferings and generate righteousness.
 - 1. If He cheated and used His divine attributes, then we don't have a historical righteousness that can be imputed to us in justification.
 - 2. If He cheated and used His divine attributes, then we don't have a model for sanctification.
- C. Definition of the Kenosis: *Jesus Christ gave up the independent use of His divine attributes.* He had them all the time. Some people say He gave them up or gave up some of them. Others say He didn't use them. The best definition is that He had them all along, but He didn't use them unless He had His Father's approval.

It was critical that He always please the Father, and the kenosis is answering to how He did that during the incarnation.