

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

B1038 – September 19, 2010 – Doctrine Of Kenosis Applied

We've been working with the Confrontation of the King and in doing so we have four events. So far we're looking at the Birth of the King and the Life of the King, and out of the Birth of the King we associate His birth with the doctrine of the hypostatic union, that Jesus Christ is undiminished deity united with true humanity in one person without confusion forever. That doctrine is the foundation of all Christology. It's the basis upon which we understand His kenosis and impeccability. The thing to remember about the doctrine of the hypostatic union is that we have Creator and creature in one person without confusion. Once more we see that the Creator has the divine attributes of sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, immutability and eternity. The creature man has finite analogues to these attributes. Man has choice answering to sovereignty, he has conscience answering to righteousness and justice; he has love, he has knowledge which answers to omniscience, energy which answers to omnipotence, geometry or space answers to omnipresence and so forth. The point is that man is a creature made in God's image. Of all the parts of creation, man, not an extra-terrestrial, not dogs, not angels, but man on planet earth is the only part of the universe that is made in God's image and has finite analogues to Him.

With that picture we now have the hypostatic union and what does this tell us? If we know first the Creator-creature distinction, then we can now picture what's happening in the hypostatic union. We have the Creator and creature in one person. But it's not mixed, it's together, inseparable but unmixed; it's not two people, it's One Person. This is tough stuff and this is why the Bible is written in the order in which it is. The Bible does not start out by talking about Jesus Christ. It starts by talking about Creation, because it is at that point where the Creator-creature distinction is taught. Failure to understand

that lesson prevents us from accurately understanding who Jesus Christ is. You've got to have this basic concept first. This is why the Holy Spirit, being a perfect teacher, administered history pedagogically. History is actually a sequence of lessons from God to man; this is a whole other study about how God arranged history dispensationally. There's a specific sequence of lesson plans. The Lord Jesus Christ, because He is a true man, and He is true God, has all the attributes of man and God. The question is how do these attributes interplay? The hypostatic union tells us that however they interplay, all the divine attributes are undiminished, they're not diluted, they're not changed, they're not less, they remain as potent in the Son while He was walking around on this planet as they did in eternity, as they will in eternity future—never changed, never diluted and never reduced in any way! However, because He is walking around as a man He has now taken something to Himself that the 1st Person of the Trinity and the 3rd Person of the Trinity didn't take to Themselves and never will. The 2nd Person has taken to Himself true humanity, body, spirit and soul, and this makes the 2nd Person of the Trinity very, very unique, significant and challenging.

It also has all kinds of implications. One of the implications of the hypostatic union is that the Creator-creature distinction is eternal. It's never lost; it's never smeared, even in the person of Jesus Christ. If there's one place you might expect it to smear it would be in Jesus Christ, yet in Jesus Christ His humanity and deity do not intermingle. How they don't and yet He's one person we don't exhaustively understand because it's incomprehensible. We must defend the fact that Jesus was not half God and half man. He was fully God and fully man, not half and half. If that's true of Him, then it's true we will never ever, in eternity, ever know as God knows. The passage in 1 Cor 13 is about something else; we never become omniscient, we never become the Creator God in any sense, we are forever creatures.

The second implication is that God cannot reveal Himself any more than He does through man. There is magnificent beauty and splendor in creation. God has painted a masterpiece in nature, the complexities, the orchestry; God is a great artist and His brilliance is manifest everywhere around us, yet most fully He is manifest to man through man. Man is the greatest picture of God ever seen. That's why capital punishment is not only just punishment for those who murder but it's necessary. Murder is the destruction of God's revelation of Himself. So it's not just an attack on man, it's an attack on God.

For anyone to reject capital punishment in principle has to have given up the idea that man is a revelation of God. There's no other way you can reduce man's value to money.

The third thing that we said is that history has eternal significance. Here you have God uniting with man in history, walking around the planet for some 35 years, was crucified, raised from the dead, and then left this planet, being exalted in His humanity to the Father's right hand. And He carries the scars of history in His resurrection body on that throne. When John sees Him he describes Him as a Lamb slain. He bears the marks of the crucifixion. So always and forever, in eternity, if we are able, to constantly glimpse His body, we will be reminded of history because the scars on His body are the effects of history. What does that mean? History is not just a dream in the mind of God. That's important because some theologians have leaned so strongly on the sovereignty of God's plan that it has made history utterly insignificant. They've got things like the unbelieving elect walking around and yet the Scriptures have no such category. It is true God has a plan for history, obviously, but the plan for history and the outworking of history are two different things. God forever had a plan to create but the creation didn't exist until God created. The instant before creation there was only the plan. So history has significance.

Finally a fourth implication was that the starting point for right thinking must be Christ as the God-man, He is the ultimate definer of categories. This isn't just theory or big philosophical ideas projecting out of the mind of man. This is why Paul in Col 2:8 says do not be taken captive by the philosophy of this world, according to the elements of this world, but according to Christ - meaning that the ultimate place people ought to start with their philosophy is Christ. They ought to understand, before they even start philosophizing, the whole issue of the Creator and creature in the One Person, Christ. They should understand the interplay, and after that we can start using the tool of reason to articulate our philosophy. But everybody wants to start with reason and build a philosophy before they ever consider this, and then come back and try to fit the Bible inside their philosophy, and then we wonder why we get tied in knots, it's backwards.

Now, we want to move to the applications of the doctrine of kenosis. Just to review, let's define what we're talking about. The doctrine of kenosis is defined as the giving up of the independent use of the divine attributes

meaning that the Son had all these divine attributes but He deferred the use of them to whenever His Father willed it. Some of you may have had trouble with this so let me put it another way. Rather than defining it in terms of a giving up, which is a subtraction approach, it might help you to think of it from the other side, as the taking to Himself true humanity. From that side you're thinking in terms of an addition. The Creator taking to Himself the creature. Either way there are difficulties in stating it. By saying He gave up the independent use we can get the idea of autonomy, that Jesus Christ was autonomous and that's not what we're saying. Or, if we go this other route and say there was an addition, that can confuse because it can sound like we're making an essential change to God and that's not what we're saying either. But we're safe so long as we understand that the Lord Jesus was God all along and He took to Himself true humanity at the incarnation and then chose to submit at each instance to the Father in all of His life decisions., He said, not my will be done but Thy will. That's the idea of kenosis. Now, there's a false doctrine of kenosis that liberalism has taught the church, i.e. that Jesus Christ gave up His divine attributes. We're not saying that. Notice He didn't give up His divine attributes; He gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. The attributes didn't go away while Jesus was walking around, they remained. They could have broken forth at any time. But what impressed Paul as he reflected on the person of Christ in Phil 2:5-8, was that the 2nd Person submitted the voluntary use of His divine attributes to the moments when the Father okayed it. And apparently, the reason He did so is it was crucial to accomplishing His mission which was to secure the plan of salvation, to be a sympathetic High Priest and the model for the Christian way of life. All of this is wrapped up in this kenosis of Christ in Phil 2.

Now, this is some very controversial stuff in Christian circles. It's controversial because nobody studies basic doctrine any more; we're too busy trying to be relevant to surrounding culture. Who knows about the hypostatic union? Kenosis? The Church for the first 400-500 years knew about it, but we don't! We have Jesus Christ as the Son. Before Jesus Christ was incarnated He was the Son. The question is, before He was incarnated, what was the relationship of the Son to the Father? The Trinity still existed, always has existed, and there's always been this order in the Trinity. In the most obvious way that's why the 1st Person is called Father, and the 2nd Person is called Son. If those nouns, Father and Son, didn't denote something, maybe the names of the Trinity would be Bob, John and Fred, but God has chosen those

vocabulary words. The Father is a noun that was eternally chosen to teach us something about the relationship of the Father to the Son. And since they're eternal designations inside the Creator what would we expect inside the creation? Father-son relationships. In some way the father-son relationships we enjoy in normal human relationships are finite analogues of the Trinitarian relationships that eternally existed. It's not the other way around. It's not that we have father and son relationships first and then those terms were just accommodations chosen to apply to Him. It's exactly the reverse. The primary thing is Father and Son inside the relationship of the Creator, then, derivative of that we have father-son in the human family. We often talk about anthropomorphisms, where God is spoken of as being man-like, and I like to invert that and say man is a theomorphism, he's God-like. God is the first, we're second, and we're reflective of Him.

Let's go to the passage we draw this doctrine from, Phil 2. This is the passage from which the word "kenosis" comes. And it comes in the middle of a very practical passage. Look at Phil 2:1, "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit; but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;" Now that's all practical Christian exhortation, how to live the Christian life. But watch what Paul does here that links the doctrine of kenosis to the Christian life. As he eases into verse 5, what were the last few things he's emphasizing in verse 3-4? "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit; but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;" the attribute of humility there. Verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Then in that context he drops in some heavy theology. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..."

One of the things that Paul does that's so different from the way the world works, and it's true of the other apostles also, is that they put these deep things in the middle of what we would call practical passages, and you wonder if they are trying to turn us into theology professors. Why do they do this? The answer, I think, is that that's how we derive energy and motivation. We don't derive energy and motivation by saying you've got to live the

Christian life, live the Christian life, live the Christian life, you've got to do this, you've got to do that, operation bootstrap; what we wind up with is frustration. We get tired of that stuff and we burn out after a while. In the Scripture the way the energy and the motivation comes is by shutting everything else off and concentrating on who God is. Ultimately that's where the energy comes from. It's like going outdoors, looking at the sun and you get warmth and healing from the sun. You receive before you can give. We have to comprehend and behold our God; if we would just go and sunbathe, if we'd bathe our spirits in His presence, understanding Who He is, He energizes us. He gives us that sustaining strength to meet the trials of life. And it's a lot easier to do than trying to do this, do that, got to schedule this, got to do that. We have to have the planning, obviously, but that's not where the energy comes from. The energy comes from somewhere else and here's a most eloquent example.

In verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." The picture of humility is the mental attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the first practical point of the doctrine of kenosis. Jesus is the model of humility and he goes on to describe it in verse 6, "who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. ⁹Therefore also God highly exalted Him, etc..."¹ Paul evidently sees the linkage or he wouldn't drop this heavy doctrine in the middle of a practical passage.

What do these eternal designations of Father and Son teach us about the relationship of Father to Son? What is it that we learn practically from the kenosis of Phil 2:5-8? We know that it has obvious applications because Paul is using it. He thought about this in the middle of a very practical letter of Christian sanctification.

Well, the first one is connected right here in Phil 2 with the virtue mentioned in verse 3. What's the virtue mentioned in verse 3? Humility. "The foundational virtue in the biblical worldview is not courage or self-righteousness as in certain pagan worldviews," it's not love, you can go to pagan literature and there were great, epical pagans. Don't ever think that

paganism is debauchery. Some people have a notion that we use the word pagan and it means debauchery, that's probably because that's the only context they've seen. Paganism has had great moral teachers. Confucius was a pagan, but he was a great moral teacher. The issue then is: what is the prime virtue? If you read these ethical teachers of the world system, business success books today, Stoicism is coming back into the business world; Stoicism is coming back into the man on the street. The average bookstore now is going to sell books with regurgitated stoicism. The problem is there's no drive, there's no underlying energy source for all that. The reason people drift to Stoicism is the pendulum problem; we've had a lot of licentiousness and hell-raising going on every since the hippies of the 60's, and people are getting tired of this. We have to have some order, so the pendulum is swinging back over. This has gone on now for a generation, and now the pendulum is swinging back and we're going to legalism. We've always done this. The legalism will last for awhile and nobody has any energy to fight the chaos any more so then we go swing back to licentiousness again. The pendulum is always swinging.

In the Scripture, the basic virtue is humility. Notice that when Paul starts out it gets back to the Creator-creature distinction. If we have the Creator-creature distinction in our heads, we will automatically have humility in our hearts because how can you be arrogant if you're a creature and He's the Creator? How can you not be humbled by that? So the virtue underlying faith is humility. Jesus made a very startling statement in John 5, it's scary; He addresses a group of people on the street and says to them, you know, you people can't believe, you people really have a big problem here, you can't believe. And He says you can't believe because you're sitting there seeking honor from other creatures and you're not seeking honor that comes from the Creator alone. And if that's you, you can't believe, never can believe. You can sit there and say I believe, I believe, I believe, until you're blue in the face but it's all phony. Genuine faith can only be built on the humility virtue because by definition you've got to first recognize you're the creature dependent upon the Creator.

Humility is basically submission to the Creator; you've accepted who you are and once that's straight then we can trust Him. But if we've never submitted to Him as our Creator, we've never really reflected on the difference between His holiness and our sinfulness, we can't trust. And if we have reflected on

that, then we come to the problem, now I'm afraid of Him; He's righteous and His wrath is upon me so I'm like Adam and Eve in the Garden. What did they do five minutes after they fell? They're putting on fig leaves and going into hiding. So if I'm really looking at my Creator and I'm fearful then I've got to somehow get to the gospel so I see that God's righteousness has been satisfied in Christ so I can believe in Him and then I can get rest because He's saved me. His atoning blood has covered my sin, now I'm at peace with God, I can rest. But all that flows first from recognizing that I am a creature.

Christ, in His kenosis, models what the humility ought to look like... what humility *ought* to look like. That's Christ's life in the NT. Please notice, was Christ courageous? You bet! Was He every bit a man? Absolutely. But was He humble? Yes, He was. So courage and humility are not opposites, but they're not identical either and there's a more complicated connection between them. If a person is humble they can be courageous in a righteous way. If a person is not humble they can be courageous in a sinful way. So arrogance and humility can be the sources of a lot of the so-called virtues. Love can actually be a fruit of arrogance. Arrogance can produce wonderful things, arrogance can produce great artistry; arrogance can produce great music; arrogance can produce all kinds of things. Arrogance can produce wonderful personal relationship because I'm prideful and I want to show everybody that I can get along with everybody else and I'm a successful person, and I do this and that - it's all the fruit of arrogance.

Don't be deceived, being humble is not walking around looking pious. It's in our heart recognizing who we are - we're creatures. So the first thing we understand is that Jesus Christ patterns for us what humility is, and that's what Paul is saying; notice in verse 3 and 4 he was talking about humility before he got to kenosis. So Christ's kenosis is the model of humility.

There are a series of verses I give you here that we'll go through (Heb 2:10; 12:3; 1 Pet 2:21-23). Jesus followed the Father's plan even when that plan required he empty himself of the independent use of His own divine attributes. Think of what He faced. Did He not face the biggest temptation to be prideful all human history? Look at who He is? He's God. So the question is would He humble Himself to endure the abuse of rebellious creatures that He created and bear the wages of their sin? That's the "emptying." I mean, who wants to go walking in a sewer. Walking around in a sewer is probably a

very good analogy to what the Lord Jesus Christ had to walk around in in our sinful world. And He did it for us, it's His amazing grace.

The results of Him doing that, of humbling Himself to His Father is that He's exalted. What does the NT state over and over about he who is humbled? God exalts the humble. Why does God exalt them? Because they submit to Him. They respect His authority. Notice Heb 2:10, take some of these and just meditate on them, this is what it means to fix your eyes upon Jesus. It doesn't mean to sit around and think up your own thoughts about Jesus, it means to think about how the Scriptures portray Him, draw from that deep well of doctrine, that's where you get your energy. "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory," which member of the Trinity? It is clear we should be able to read this and pick up on who's being spoken of. It's the Father, "to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." Who's the author of their salvation? The Son. What does that tell us? It tells us that Jesus Christ, when He was a babe in His mother's arms, was not yet perfected. The Father perfected the Son through sufferings.

We're not talking about imperfection morally; we're talking about growth of sanctification and loyalty to God through trials and tribulations. Adam and Eve had to be sanctified, even if sin had never come into the world, there still would have been a need for sanctification because loyalty to God has to be developed in history. So sanctification can't always deal with the sin issue. For us it does because we started in the sewer; we didn't fall in, we were born in it. So for us, we can't conceive of sanctification apart from sin. But in Adam it was, in Jesus it was, because they didn't have any sin, yet still had to be sanctified. Adam failed, Christ succeeded. That's why we have the phrase the last Adam. Jesus is the last Adam because Jesus successfully learned the obedience to God that Adam never learned. Sanctification is a positive thing, it's a growth thing, it's a gradual thing that comes about by obedience, obedience, obedience, submission to His commands built on the base of humility.

Look at the next one, Heb 12:3, "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." What's the mental attitude when you face trials, what do you think about when you grow weary and lose heart? You think about what Christ

endured, that humility that as the God of the universe He could have broken out of the difficult times, think of how amazing it is that He didn't. He constantly submitted to the Father in every detail of life. Here's another one from 1 Pet 1:21, "Since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." He's an example for us in that the way He met the trials by being humble and trusting His Father, entrusting Himself to who? "to Him who judges righteously." It's a very powerful thing here. When we say humility it comes off like it's a weak, impotent thing, but actually it's the most powerful thing on earth, because it can't be defeated. Think about it. If we are in any kind of a situation and God is all these things; sovereign, righteous, just, loving, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable and eternal, and we commit our situation to Him, who's going to take Him on? Any challengers? So in our humility the greatest strength to persevere is unleashed.

Christ modeled for us the cardinal virtue of humility before God in all situations. The implication is clear: if Christ had to stoop that low to obey God, there is nothing that God can ask us to do that is too low or too humble. Thus, says Paul, 'Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.' (Phil 2:5).

Now I want to quote from the Puritans. I don't believe everything the Puritans believed, but I'll tell you what, these were some of the most courageously humble people to ever walk the earth. In England when the Puritans ruled England they said you never want to debate one of these guys. You never wanted to meet them on the battlefield either; they were very tough people. And they were very meditative, and on the inside they were very humble. Look at this, here's Richard Baxter, notice the date, 1615-91, and he's writing this to young pastors, and he's trying to get these guys to be sensitive to their flocks, and he does what the Puritans often would do. Instead of giving an imperative or a command and say all right, go ahead, what they did is they tried to persuade them by weaving a tapestry of deep theology into the practical, just as Paul wove it, because it's the deep things of theology that energize you. The deep things of theology overwhelm the world. If you catch onto Christian doctrine and theology, the world just strikes you as amazingly trivial.

Look at Baxter and how he reasons. He's talking to young men in the pastorate. "O, then, let us hear those arguments of Christ whenever we feel ourselves growing dull and lifeless. Can you hear Him saying, 'Did I die for those people, and will you then refuse to look after them? Were they worthy of my blood, and are they not worth your labor? Did I come down from Heaven to seek and to save that which was lost, and will you refuse to go next door, or to the next street or village to seek them? How small is your labor or condescension compared to mine! I debased myself to do this, but it is your honor to be so employed. Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation, and will you refuse that little that lies upon your hands?'" How do you feel after getting hit with that? Like a ten ton truck just ran over you. But do you see how powerful these Puritans are? These are the people that everybody thinks were prudes and primitives, but they never read them, they just hear about them. So the first implication of kenosis is humility, humility toward God is the cardinal virtue; it's the basis of faith.

A second implication of kenosis is the fiery topic of subordination in human relationships. Most of modern rebellion against authority in the home and in society, though triggered perhaps by poor leadership situations, comes from a misconception of subordination. This is the key, this is the lie and the deception that is rampant in our society, even in our own evangelical Christian circles: "The popular myth views subordination as one individual's being inferior in essence to another." Think of relationships you have. In the workplace you have boss and employee, in the military you have commander and commanded, in the local church you have elder and laymen. You may be in the superior or the inferior position and the way we have been programmed in our wonderful democracy is to think that everybody is equal and therefore if you don't show equality in every area all the time in every respect, then you are demeaning people.

Sorry! We cannot go along with that. The whole divine institution of family starts out with parents and children; fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. Right there you have an authority structure built into the relationship. When that unravels, like it is in our society, then it's going to unravel everywhere else because that's where humility and authority are learned, the home. And if humility and authority are never learned in the home, then the policeman is going to teach humility and authority or worse

than that, you're going to meet somebody that's going to knock your block off because you're so arrogant. And it'll happen somewhere, someone will show you. And if it doesn't happen in this life, it will happen in heaven or hell. You're going to learn authority, that's the way God made the universe.

“The popular myth views subordination as one individual's being inferior in essence to another. This myth flies in the face of the Trinity and kenosis. Even in the extreme case of subordination in kenosis, the Son was not inferior in essence to the Father.” He was subordinate to the Father, but He was not constitutionally inferior to Him. This person that may be in charge, he may be an elder, he may be a Colonel, he may be superior in your company, he may be an idiot, but in the authority structure that's the way it is and you follow it because of the office. You may not like the person holding the office but you have to respect the office. That doesn't mean there are no appeals and that kind of thing. I'm just saying that subordination doesn't necessarily imply inferiority of essence. The person in the subordinate role may be a much better person than the person in the superior role. A wife may be married to a husband who's a jerk and she may be a wonderful Christian person, but because she's subordinate and she's the wife, doesn't mean she means less, doesn't mean she's valued less, doesn't mean God values her life less, but in the order of relationship it's not about value. That's the thing you want to remember with kenosis and Trinity, because if you get this screwed up, it affects the way you think in everyday life and you've got to keep going back to the Trinity and kenosis, the Son is subordinate to the Father and yet the Son is not inferior in essence to the Father.

One example of the misunderstanding of subordination due largely because of a failure to understand the doctrine of kenosis and Trinity is the view of it within the Women's Liberation movement. This movement assumes that woman's subordination in marriage to the husband is one of essence, not of role. Christian feminist writers like Scanzoni and Hardesty try hard to defend their notion that all subordination is repulsive so they seek to refashion the subordination of the Trinity and kenosis. Notice what goes on here, I've warned you before and I warn you again. We come along and we create categories starting with ourselves rather than the hypostatic union, and we develop these ideas and then we come back to the Scriptures and try to force fit God into the mold. It's exactly the reverse. Here's what it causes. Scanzoni and Hardesty have done us a favor in demonstrating what this

causes. Look at what they write; this came out thirty years ago but this is the Bible of the whole movement in evangelical circles. This book that I'm quoting from, this is where it all started in evangelical circles.ⁱⁱ

“Is Christ subordinate to the Father? ...Christ as God and man both rules and submits. He voluntarily, out of love, set aside the privileges of the Godhead to assume the work of redemption as a man,” that’s okay, “but he has now ascended into heaven to resume all his divine attributes.” Excuse me! Resume all His divine attributes? When did He lose them? See, they started with an unbiblical idea of subordination, that subordination must refer to everything, all aspects, then they came to the biblical text and saw Jesus Christ in the Gospels and they can’t conceive of Him walking around here with divine attributes. They just can’t imagine Christ walked around in a subordinate relationship, so what does He empty Himself of? His divine attributes, didn’t even have them walking around down here so when He ascends He’s got to go pick them up again. No, that’s not the doctrine of kenosis and that’s how you start philosophizing before you get your categories shaped by the God-man. I just quote that because it’s a great quote out of their book because it shows you how these ideas get going and then they control how you interpret. So it’s critical we have the right ideas, biblical ideas first so they control our ideas and not our ideas controlling how we handle the text. Their theology is heretical. Christ did not ascend to heaven ‘to resume all His divine attributes’ because He had them always while He was on earth as John’s Gospel particularly shows. As the 2nd Person of the Trinity in heaven the Son has an eternally ordered relationship with the Father that can be understood only in terms of subordination of earthly sons to earthly fathers. Why else do we call them “father” and “son?” “The very citation of 1 Cor 15:27-28 refutes their point: the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, not just when He was under kenosis.”

Turn to 1 Cor 15:27, this is the one they quote. You look at this and see if you get the same thing out of it they got out of it. This was their key proof text. This is where they said see, when Jesus went to heaven after all the work was done, then He got back His divine attributes. Let’s read verses 27-28 carefully. “For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. ²⁸And when,” now look at verse 28 carefully, “And when all things are subjected to Him” which member of

Trinity is that, 1st, 2nd or 3rd? “when all things are subjected to Him,” the subject here is Christ. So, “when all things are subjected to Him,” they like that, everything’s subjected to Christ, the 2nd Person is over everything. Wow, I like that, but what do you do with the next clause, “then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him,” and who’s that talking about? The Father. So sorry! The proof text doesn’t prove what they’re wanting to prove from the text.

The third implication of kenosis is related to the Creator’s knowledge and the creature’s knowledge and this is so hairy we’ll just touch on it today. The incarnation introduces a complexity here in that Christ as Creator has all knowledge but since the Creator’s knowledge is not identical to creature knowledge now that He has taken to Himself the creature He knows, from a human standpoint, what it’s like to walk around on earth as one of us. This has a number of exciting implications, one of which is it qualified Him to be our great sympathetic high priest. In John 1:14 it says, “And the Word became flesh,” there is no other religion on earth where the Creator takes to Himself the creature. The ones who claim... like Hinduism, some kind of incarnation thing, is not a genuine claim because in Hinduism there is no distinction between Creator and creature. So what, God is the rock, God is the bug, or whatever, it doesn’t make any difference because there is no difference between the Creator-creature. Even in so-called Biblical faiths of modern Judaism and Islam, they don’t have anything like John 1:14, there’s nothing in there like that. God doesn’t become flesh, God doesn’t walk around down here, Allah doesn’t have to go through the pain of suffering that we have to go through. And he doesn’t know what it’s like to be one of us. But the God of the Bible did become flesh and He knows what it’s like.

We’ve covered three of the applications of the doctrine of kenosis, and we’ll expand the third one next week, there are more ideas to flesh out that third point. But the first implication is that the kenosis supports the concept that the cardinal virtue, unlike Greek literature where it’s love, or its courage, or it’s whatever, in the Bible the cardinal virtue is humility. A good verse to remember, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” Prov 1:7. That “fear of the Lord” that’s humility, that’s the kind of humility. We’re not talking about weakness; we’re talking about recognizing the fact we’re just creatures. He’s the Creator, I’m dependent upon Him, it’s that vertical sense of humility that we’re talking about.

The second application we dealt with is the issue of subordination in relationships, and there we're saying that subordination of role does not mean inferiority of essence, that's wrong. Because if it does, then when we work backward up to the Trinity, logically that would mean the Son was inferior in essence to the Father and now we've rejected the Trinity which is false.

The third application deals with Christ's knowledge from the human standpoint and how this qualifies Him to be not merely a High Priest, but a sympathetic high priest, He knows what you're going through because He walked through this world like you.

ⁱ We quote that and read it usually in connection to the Christian life and sanctification, and properly so. But notice the foundation underneath the Christian life and sanctification. There is very deep stuff underneath. The Bible is not just a book on ethics, like the ethics books you get in the workplace. They can all talk about what's right, what's wrong and this and that. But you'll notice when Paul goes to talk about what's right and wrong, he insists on bringing in the God-man as the foundation for what he's saying, which ought to warn us that without that basis we can't have our ethics, we can talk about morality. I want you to take note of how these doctrines, while they're very difficult to understand, they're woven into the tapestry of the NT. You can't extricate them and hold on to the morality. That's what the moral majority want to do in America. Talk, talk, talk about morality but we don't talk about the doctrine underneath the morality. You're only floating and if you're floating you aren't grounded and that means your morals aren't stable and they drift. The Bible insists the only way to stabilize them is to ground them on the foundation of the God-man. So it does matter what we believe.

ⁱⁱ *All Were Meant to Be*, Scanzoni and Hardesty (1974).

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2010