

A STUDY OF THE KENOSIS

OF JESUS THE MESSIAH



“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” Phil 2:6-8

“You know about Jesus from Nazareth, that God gave him the Holy Spirit and power. You know how Jesus went everywhere doing good and healing those who were ruled by the devil, because God was with him.” Acts 10:38 (NCV)

By:

Robert L. Goldsby

May, 1999

Table Of Contents

A STUDY OF THE KENOSIS OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

Table Of Contents	i
The Issue At Hand.....	3
Sola Scriptura	3
Jesus Limited His Divine Attributes	5
The Scriptures	5
Jesus was anointed by God	6
Scriptures.....	6
Jesus: Fully God.....	7
The Scripture	8
The Anointed Man-God.....	8
The Scripture	8
What does Jesus Say?	9
Conclusions.....	10
What are we to do about this?	10
Where Now?	11
ADDENDUM	13
The Kenosis Debate: Some History	13
Jesus is True Man.....	13
Lutheran Theology	13
Theological Schizophrenia.....	15
Calvin’s Advice.....	16

The Issue At Hand

I am persuaded that Jesus performed miracles by the anointing power of the Holy Spirit rather than through His own divine attributes. That is what makes Him “The Messiah”, the Anointed One.

I am further persuaded that He remained true man during His entire state of humiliation. There was no need for Him to step back and forth between His two natures, and no indication that He did.

I am further persuaded that the plan of salvation required that Jesus, true God, live a faithful and obedient life as true Man (the second Adam fulfilling God’s intended plan for the first Adam. [1 Cor. 15:22, 42-45](#)). That, having lived a perfect life, and fulfilling the law and God’s plan, Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice which alone could pay the penalty for our sin and restore us to fellowship with the Father.

I am further persuaded that Jesus chose to live as a true man to demonstrate the life God had planned for man: complete obedience in the Holy Spirit.

I am further persuaded that the performance of miracles and supernatural knowledge in Jesus’ life is not evidence of the exercise of His divine attributes. To make this claim is to attribute deity to Elijah, Elisha, Peter, John, or any of the others who were empowered by God’s Spirit for miraculous works.

Sola Scriptura

Our task is not to exonerate my position nor to defend others, but to examine the Scriptures. We must be like the Berean Christians ([Acts 17:11](#)) who searched the Scripture diligently to see whether the things Paul preached was true.

We will examine the Bible to see if this is the view of Scripture. We are in good company when we take this approach. The Scriptures commend the noble Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul taught was true. The Bereans knew that personal opinion had no place in the teachings of the Scriptures and so it is with us today.

Neither my opinion nor the opinion of anyone else really matters. The ONLY issue is “what does the Scripture say”. Those who hold opposing views or doctrines are obligated to prove their position by the scripture. Innuendo, human logic, feelings or “I’ve always believed that”, are not appropriate tools for establishing the truth or error of a teaching.

Lutherans too have a noble “Berean” tradition. The Lutheran confessions forbid us to put them, or Luther, or anyone else, in a place to establish doctrine. Sola Scriptura is a principle upon which the Reformation was founded. We must always place the Scripture, not just first but **ALONE!**. That, among other things, is what it means to be Lutheran.

“The position accorded the symbols in the Lutheran Church is clearly defined by the Book of Concord itself. According to it Holy Scripture **alone** is to be regarded as the **sole** rule and norm by which absolutely all doctrines and teachers are to be judged.”¹ (Emphasis mine.)

A basic rule of hermeneutics is that “unclear passages must be interpreted in light of clear passages.” One of the clearest passages on the subject of what empowered Jesus to do miracles during His earthly life is Acts 10:38.

“...God anointed² Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” Acts 10:38

As we examine the following passages, ask yourself if there is compelling evidence, some strong reason to overturn the clear text of Acts 10:38. Unclear passages (that don’t “spell it out”) must be understood in the light of clear passages.

1 Bente, F., *Concordia Triglotta*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House) 1997.

[The Triglotta is a compilation of the Lutheran confessions in one volume and three languages: English, German and Latin]

2 Strong’s #**5548 Wf]c { khree'-o}** AV - anoint 5; 5

GK - 5987 { CrIW } 1) to anoint 1a) consecrating Jesus to the Messianic office, and furnishing him with the necessary powers for its administration 1b) enduing Christians with the gifts of the Holy Spirit

Jesus Limited His Divine Attributes

As we shall see from the Old Testament Messianic passages, God promised his people a deliverer. The Messiah would come in demonstration of power and with the anointing of God. The Gospels are written to declare the good news that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One promised by God. The Gospels reveal Jesus, the Messiah, in His role as God's chosen Redeemer and Savior.

In Acts 10:38 Peter says to Gentiles: "...you know how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him."

This is what I teach: that Jesus, the Messiah, operated under the anointing power of God and by that power he "went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."

The Scriptures

How do the following passages shed light on this issue?

- **1 Timothy 2:5-6** _____
Paul makes it very clear here that Jesus is true man.
- **Mt 26:52-54** _____
Had He been willing to exercise His own divine attributes, Jesus would not have needed an army of angels, much less ask the Father to send them. He could have, with a thought, destroyed the whole lot of them. Why didn't He? What caused Him to say that He could "ask the Father"?
Because, in His State of humiliation he was committed to NOT exercising His personal prerogatives. He had voluntarily assumed the form of a servant and became obedient to the Father (as all mankind should be), even if it meant death (Phil 2:6-8).
- **Jn 7:16-18** _____
He taught God's teaching, not speaking for Himself. Jesus did not speak on His own authority (not practicing His sovereign authority).
- **Jn 8:23-30** _____
What does the passage say about Jesus while on the earth in His Humiliation?
- **Jn 8:40, 49-51, 54-55** _____
Jesus always spoke the truth that He heard from God (not exercising omniscience).

- **Jn 10:32-37** _____
- **Jn 12:49-50** _____
As the Father taught, Jesus spoke. Jesus did not speak of Himself, but He spoke of the Father who sent Him, commanded Him, and gave Him what to speak (submitted and obedient, not exercising sovereignty).
- **Mk 6:38** _____
Jesus did not know how many loaves they had (not exercising omniscience).
- **Lk 8:45, 46** (c.f. **Mk. 5:31**) _____
Jesus did not know who had touched Him (not exercising omniscience).

Jesus was anointed by God

Jesus is the promised Messiah. The Hebrew word “Meshiach” (English Messiah) and the Greek word Christos (English Christ) are the same word and mean: “Anointed One”. The promise of God was that the coming Messiah would have a special anointing of God’s Spirit. Following are some of the common Messianic passages dealing with the anointing of the Spirit on Him.

Scriptures

- **Is 11:1-5** _____
- **Is 42:1** _____
- **Is 61:1-4** (c.f. **Lk 4:18**) _____

And the New Testament Examples of Jesus anointed by the Holy Spirit.

- **Mt 3:16** _____
God’s Spirit came upon Jesus after His water baptism. Only after this does He begin to do miracles and function as the promised Messiah.
- **Mt 11:2-6** (**Lk 7:20-23**) _____
By responding to John in this way Jesus points out to John, and his disciples, that He (Jesus) is doing the signs of the Messiah (the anointed one). They could believe in Him as “the One” because of the anointing, the signs that He did. (See also **John 7:31** where they speak of “Christ”, the anointed one.)

- **Lk 4:18** _____
Jesus claimed that it was by the anointing of God's Spirit that He preached the good news, that God anointed and sent him to heal, preach, deliver and to set at liberty the captives.
- **Jn 1:32-33** _____
- **John 2:11** _____
The miracle at the wedding feast at Cana "revealed His glory". Some understand this to be a time when He reclaimed, for the moment, the glory he had previously emptied Himself of. Afterwards he stepped back from the revelation of His glory (emptied Himself again?). They claim that Jesus did this with each miracle He did.

I do not believe that is what it means. This, the first of His miracles, revealed His glory in that the miraculous works of His ministry revealed Jesus as the promised Messiah!

- **Jn 3:33-34** _____
- **Ac 4:27** _____
- **Acts 10:38** _____
- **Heb 1:9** _____

Jesus: Fully God

Some say that if Jesus "emptied Himself" of His divine attributes He could not be God or that He would cease to be God. Frankly, I don't see the logic of that statement. I believe it is dangerous to say that God can't do something. By definition, He can do whatever He chooses.

But that is not my position anyway. I believe that Jesus emptied Himself of his "right or authority to exercise His divine attributes." Scholars can argue, if they wish, about what the "kenosis" means, or how far it goes, limitations, etc. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed one of God and God from the beginning (**Jn 17:5**).

The Scripture

- **Jn 1:14** _____
“Thus it is seen that Christ, while retaining His divine nature, was also human. In His incarnation (birth and life on earth) He was fully God and fully man at the same time. He was God manifest in human flesh.”³
- **Col. 2:9** _____
Sometimes used to prove Christ’s deity during his state of humiliation, this passage is written after Christ’s ascension concerning an Exalted Christ. To keep the passage in context we can not use it to prove anything about His State of humiliation.
- **Heb 4:15** _____
Here we learn that Jesus was tempted ‘in every way’ as you and I are tempted. How could that be if He was not living fully as a man? He shows us what God’s plan for mankind was. The perfect man, the second Adam, only without sin. Was He able to avoid sin because He was God? If so this passage would not be true. No, Jesus was fully human, not using His personal divine attributes that He might fully experience being a man and demonstrate to us what mankind was originally created to be.

The Anointed Man-God

The following passages examine the miracles Jesus did. To conclude that Jesus used His own attributes of deity to accomplish these miracles goes against Acts 10:38. Those who take that view have the burden of proof. Where is the evidence? Where is the passage proving that Jesus performed miracles based on His deity rather than under Holy Spirit anointing?

The Scripture

- **Heb 2:17-18** _____
Not an option, the Holy Spirit clearly reveals that “Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way”. If He was “like us in every way” how can we hold a contrary position that He steps out of His humanity to do His miracles?
- **Jn 4:17** _____
Jesus knew that she had no husband. Clearly, if this is not the exercise of His

³ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., The Bible Knowledge Commentary, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

personal divine attribute (omniscience), then it is evidence of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, a gift called "A Word Of Knowledge" (1 Corinthians 12:8) just as Acts 10:38 teaches.

- **Mt 17:27** _____
Jesus knew Peter would catch a fish with a coin in its mouth. Are we forced by the text to assume that it is Jesus exercising His omniscience? I believe it is more in harmony with Acts 10:38 to conclude this and all miracles are the operation of the Holy Spirit. Is there any compelling reason to teach that they were accomplished by His own power?
- **Jn 11:11-13** _____
Jesus knew the condition of Lazarus and that it was temporary, that he would be resurrected. How did it happen? Are we forced by the text to deny that it is an example of what Peter says in Acts 10:38, that the anointing of God did it?

What does Jesus Say?

- **Matthew 12:22-ff (especially verse 28)**. _____
Jesus is answering the Pharisees who are accusing him of driving out demons with the devil's power. By whose power does Jesus claim He is driving out the demons, by His own divine Attributes or the Holy Spirit?
- **Jn 5:19** _____
In His state of humiliation Jesus claimed he could do nothing without direction of the Father. That is certainly in harmony with Acts 10:38. Is there some compelling reason to deny Acts 10:38 and the words of Jesus?
- **Jn 5:30** _____
This passage speaks to this topic. What does Jesus say about His part in the coming judgement? Does He say that, in His state of humiliation, He can do something by his own power but needs the Father for other things? What does this text say?
- **Jn 6:38** _____
Jesus clearly states that He came down here from heaven not to do His own will (exercise His own power, authority and attributes?) but to do the will of the Father. How should those words be interpreted in light of **Philippians 2:6** and **Acts 10:38** and all the proceeding passages?

- **Jn 8:28**
Jesus said: “I do nothing on my own....” That speaks against the idea that He acted by His own power.
- **John 14:12-17** _____.
This is a challenging passage. It caused me to search the Scriptures on this topic.

The question I asked is: “How can I do the works Jesus did? I’m not God and I’m never going to be?” Then, through study of the Bible and the teaching of men like Dr. Walter Martin, I began to see that the “works” were not done by Jesus personal divine attributes, but by the anointing power of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Scriptures we are told to “follow Jesus”, to “do the works He did” (**Jn 14:12**), to “grow up to a full measure of the stature of Jesus Christ” (**Eph 4:13**). John **14:12-ff** is meaningful only if Jesus was living as a true MAN, restricting His attributes of deity (emptying Himself) and working under the anointing of the Holy Spirit as our example. Then I can see that the Holy Spirit could use us in “a measure of the full stature of Jesus Christ” (**Ephesians 4:11-16**, especially verse 13).

Conclusions

- Jesus is true and very God, the God Man and the Man God.
- Jesus humbled himself to live as man and submitted in every way to the Father.
- Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit, evidently at His water baptism when the Holy Spirit came on Him in a public way. Before then He did no miracles. Afterward He began to do many signs and wonders just as it was promised that the Messiah (Anointed One) would.
- Jesus Himself referred to being anointed by the Father.
- We have seen, in fact, that He was anointed without measure (as a sinless man His anointing is significantly greater than any of us could expect).

What are we to do about this?

- **Jn 13:15** _____
Jesus clearly indicated that His actions, as servant and washing their feet, were an example that His disciples should be servants even as He was.

- **Mt 28:20** _____
Jesus commanded the twelve to make disciples, teaching them (that means us) to do everything He commanded them.
- **John 14:12** _____
Jesus said that those who believe in Him would do the works He did, and greater.
- **1 Peter 2:21** _____
Christ left an example that believers should follow.

Where Now?

I have presented the Scriptural evidence for what I have referred to as the Messianic Anointing. I appreciate the opportunity because it has caused me to research the issues and clarify the details.

The Scriptures teach that Jesus did not exercise His divine power while in His State of humiliation but that He worked under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 10:38**, & pg 8). He commanded all who follow Him, to tarry (wait expectantly) for the Holy Spirit. He promised that they would have “power to be My witnesses”. This is not an after thought. The Father promised long before that the Holy Spirit would be given to God’s people. The evidence and testimony of the Holy Spirit’s ministry continues through the New Testament, Pentecost and today. (See **Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:27-32; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:4-10; Acts 2:16-17; Acts 2:33; Acts 11:16**).

Thank you for allowing me to share this time and study with you.

Robert L. Goldsby

ADDENDUM

In preparation for this study I examined the historical record, the theological works available to me, and the writings of the Church Fathers. I was unable to find any debate on the specific topic at hand. Perhaps it is because there was no disagreement about Jesus as Messiah and the work of the Holy Spirit in and through Him.

There is significant debate about the two natures of Christ and the ramifications of those two natures. In the process of those debates positions were taken, sometimes strongly, without thorough Biblical support or even good logic.

For those who wish to do further research I offer these brief comments. The footnotes will lead you to the volumes where still more research can be made.

The Kenosis Debate: Some History

To understand [Philippians 2:6](#), it is necessary to know that Jesus has two natures: He is True God and True man. Scripture clearly supports this conclusion. Scholars argue over when Jesus moved between those two natures and/or how and what the effect was. “Was He true Man from the beginning, or was that nature added at the incarnation? Did the divine nature accompany Him while on earth (during the State of humiliation)? If so, what does Philippians 2:6 mean (of what did He empty Himself)? After he ascended and was received back into His State of Exaltation, did He go as true Man, true God, or both?”

Jesus is True Man

The historical debates concerning the KENOSIS (emptying, Phil 2:6) are full of false ideas about Christ. Some say that He was not God during His state of humiliation but was man only (not true God). Others claim that when He ascended He left His manhood behind and, in His exalted state, is God only (no longer also true Man).

Lutheran Theology

Lutheran theology is that Christ’s state of humiliation is manifested by Christ’s choice to restrain His divine power and glory. He did this even though sinful men would treat Him shamefully and put Him to death. Had Christ not willingly withheld His power, chosen to not exercise His divine power, He could not have been treated so shamefully and He could not have died! At the same time, Jesus claimed repeatedly to be God.

Edward W. A. Koehler writes in His highly respected **A Summary Of Christian Doctrine**:

“**Definition.**-What the humiliation was like, we may make clear to ourselves by an illustration. A giant has great strength of body, but if he does not make use of it, weak children can bind him and put him to death. Thus it was with Christ. In His divine nature Christ always and fully did use His majesty and power (John 5: 17; Hebr. 1: 3); but in His human nature, to which all this majesty and power had been communicated, He did not make constant and full use of the same. The humiliation of Christ, therefore, consists in the non-use of the divine power and majesty which He possessed also in His human nature.”⁴

The Book Of Concord, as contained in the Triglot (Lutheran Confessions), states:

The *Formula of Concord* plainly teaches, both that, in virtue of the personal union by His incarnation, Christ according to His human nature possesses also the divine attribute of omnipresence, and that He can be and is present wherever He will. In the Epitome we read: This majesty Christ always had according to the personal union, and yet He abstained from it in the state of His humiliation until His resurrection, “so that **now** not only as God, but also as man He knows all things, can do all things, *is present with all creatures*, and has under His feet and in His hand everything that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth ... And this His power He, *being present*, can exercise everywhere, and to Him everything is possible and everything is known.” (821, 16. 27. 30.) The Thorough Declaration declares that Christ “truly fills all things, and, being present everywhere, not only as God, but also as man, rules from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth.” (1025, 27ff.) Again: “We hold ... that also according to His assumed human nature and with the same He [Christ] can be, and also is, present where He will, and especially that in His Church and congregation on earth He is present as Mediator, Head, King, and High Priest, not in part, or one-half of Him only, but the entire person of Christ, to which both natures, the divine and the human, belong, is present not only according to His divinity, but also according to, and with, His assumed human nature, according to which He is our Brother, and we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone.” (1043 78f.) In virtue of the personal union Christ is present everywhere also according to His human nature; while the peculiarly gracious manner of His presence in

4 A Summary Of Christian Doctrine, Edward W.A. Koehler, D.D., Concordia Publishing House; 1952

the Gospel, in the Church, and in the Lord's Supper depends upon His will and is based upon His definite promises.⁵

The Reformer's debate revolved around the effect the two natures of Christ had on each other. Did Christ's human nature mean that His divine nature was any less than it was before His incarnation? Lutherans insisted:

1. Both the human and the divine natures were fully united in Christ without infringing upon the other or demeaning or limiting the other.
2. That during His state of humiliation Jesus abstained from the majesty of His divine nature until His resurrection.
NOTE: The confessions do teach, however, that Christ did, at times, exercise the attributes of His divine nature. See quotes below.
3. That after his resurrection the human nature is still fully human, and Christ is our brother. All of this without restricting or hindering in any way the full reality and exercise of His divine nature.

I agree. Christ's state of humiliation is that he chose to refrain from exercising his divine attributes. This choice resulted in humiliating treatment at the hands of sinful men. **Note:** It is not humiliating that He became a man. He remains fully man today in his state of Exaltation. Lutheran theologians are agreed (so far as I can determine) that His humiliation was, as Koehler and Bente state, that He chose to refrain from the exercise of His divine attributes, making Himself vulnerable to the worst mankind could do to Him.

Theological Schizophrenia

The theologians are not consistent, however. They taught that Christ did, at least in some instances, exercise His divine nature, evidently while on earth. The Formula of Concord states:

This majesty He [Christ] always had according to the personal union, and yet He abstained from it in the state of His humiliation, and on this account truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men; therefore He exercised this majesty, not always, but when [as often as] it pleased Him, until after His resurrection He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the [human] nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and

⁵ Bente, F., *Concordia Triglotta*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House) 1997.

declaration of the divine majesty, and thus entered into His glory,
Phil. 2:6 ff,⁶

However, this majesty He had immediately at His conception, even in His mother's womb, but, as the apostle testifies [Phil. 2, 7], laid it aside; and, as Dr. Luther explains, He kept it concealed in the state of His humiliation, and did not employ it always, but only when He wished.⁷

This somewhat schizophrenic view of the two natures of Christ persists today. The various doctrinal views seem to have started in a defense of Jesus true human and divine nature. It deteriorated when dogmaticians overstated their views without having clear Biblical support. The result? You find a wide diversity of explanations and teaching on the subject.

Calvin's Advice

That is a perfect example of why we must expound the Scriptures. Calvin is said to have taught his students: "Gentlemen, please. When you come to Scriptures, let them say what they DO say, not what you want them to say."

Amen!

6 ibid

7 ibid

THE KENOSIS OF CHRIST

The meaning of [Philippians 2:1-11](#) has been greatly debated in relation to the person of the incarnate Christ. It is the connotation of the verb that appears in verse 7 that is disputed (*kenoō*, from which comes the name of this doctrine, kenosis, translated “made himself of no reputation” in the AV and “emptied himself” in the RSV). Simply stated, the question is, Did Christ empty Himself of some or all aspects of deity when He came to earth?

That He possessed the attributes of deity before the incarnation is stated in verse 6, for He continued to subsist in the form of God (the participle *huparchon* having this meaning). Indeed, it seems to say that even during the incarnation He continued to subsist in the form of God. The word “form” means not external accidents but essential attributes of deity. He did not merely appear as God; He was God. “Form of God” must have as much reality as the parallel phrase, “form of a servant” in verse 7. If He was really a servant (human being), as those who deny His deity are quite happy to admit, then He was also really God. You cannot have the reality of one without the reality of the other, according to this passage.

But in what sense does Paul mean that Christ emptied Himself at the incarnation? “Emptied” may be a misleading translation because it connotes Christ’s giving up or losing some of His divine attributes during His earthly life, and that was not the case. Therefore, the kenosis cannot be understood to mean a subtraction of deity but the addition of humanity with its consequent limitations. Indeed, in the passage itself, the verb “emptied” is explained by three participles which follow—(1) taking the form of a servant, (2) becoming in the likeness of men, and (3) being found in fashion as a man. The kenosis is further explained in the text by the parallel clause which follows, “He humbled himself.” The idea is that by taking on humanity with its limitations, there was a humbling which, although real, did not involve the giving up of any divine attributes.

If our Lord did surrender some of His divine attributes when He came to earth, then His essential character would have been changed, and He would not have been fully God while on earth. You cannot subtract any attributes without changing the character of the person. Often those who do subtract take away the omni attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence), but we have already seen in the section on the deity of Christ that He possessed these particular attributes during the period of His incarnation ([Mt 28:18](#); [18:20](#); [Mk 2:8](#)). Thus any doctrine of kenosis which says Christ surrendered attributes at the incarnation is in direct conflict with scriptural evidence concerning His person during the incarnation.

What is included in a proper statement of the true doctrine of the kenosis? The concept involves the veiling of Christ’s preincarnate glory ([Jn 17:5](#)), the condescension of taking on Himself the likeness of sinful flesh ([Ro 8:3](#)), and the voluntary nonuse of some of His attributes of deity during the time of His earthly life ([Mt 24:36](#)). His humanity was not a glorified humanity and was thus subject to temptation, weakness, pain, and sorrow. Choosing not to use His divine attributes is quite different from saying that He gave them up. Nonuse does not mean subtraction.

Ryrie, Charles C., *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press) 1972.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

IN THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Gabriel told Mary plainly that the baby to be born to her would be conceived by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35), and Joseph was informed of the same fact by an angel (Mt 1:20).

IN HIS LIFE

Christ was anointed by the Spirit in some special way at the time of His baptism (Lk 4:18; Jn 1:32). This empowered Him for service for God (Ac 10:38). Our Lord was also filled with and led by the Spirit (Lk 4:1; see also Jn 3:34; Is 42:1) and He was empowered by the Spirit to do miracles (Mt 12:28). The obvious fact that Christ depended on the power of the Spirit illuminates the depth of His condescension, and it is a sharp reminder of our need of the Spirit's power as we live our lives on earth. If He depended, how much more must we?

IN HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

If Hebrews 9:14 refers to the Holy Spirit (and not to Christ's own spirit as some believe), then He offered Himself as a sacrifice through the Spirit. Romans 1:4 (and some think 1 Pe 3:18) may refer to the Spirit's work in His resurrection. Too, He gave commandments to the apostles and through them to us by the Spirit (Ac 1:2).

¹Ryrie, Charles C., *A Survey of Bible Doctrine*, (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press) 1972.

2:6-8. The word translated **nature** (*morphē*) in verses 6 and 7 is a crucial term in this passage. This word (trans. “form” in the KJV and NASB) stresses the inner essence or reality of that with which it is associated (cf. Mark 16:12). Christ Jesus, Paul said, is of the very essence (*morphē*) of God, and in His incarnation He embraced perfect humanity. His complete and absolute deity is here carefully stressed by the apostle. The Savior’s claim to deity infuriated the Jewish leaders (John 5:18) and caused them to accuse Him of blasphemy (John 10:33).

Though possessing full deity (John 1:14; Col. 2:9), Christ did not consider His **equality with God** (Phil. 2:6) as **something to be grasped** or held onto. In other words Christ did not hesitate to set aside His self-willed use of deity when He became a man. As God He had all the rights of deity, and yet during His incarnate state He surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly as the God of all splendor and glory.

Christ’s humiliation included His making **Himself nothing**, taking the **very nature** (*morphē*) of a **servant**, and **being made in human likeness** (v. 7). These statements indicate that Christ became a man, a true human being. The words “made Himself nothing” are, literally, “He emptied Himself.” “Emptied,” from the Greek *kenoo*, points to the divesting of His self-interests, but not of His deity. “The very nature of a servant” certainly points to His lowly and humble position, His willingness to obey the Father, and serve others. He became a man, a true human being. “Likeness” suggests similarity but difference. Though His humanity was genuine, He was different from all other humans in that He was sinless (Heb. 4:15).

Thus it is seen that Christ, while retaining the essence of God, was also human. In His incarnation He was *fully* God and *fully* man at the same time. He was God manifest in human flesh (John 1:14).

Some have wrongly taught that the phrase, **being found in appearance as a man** (Phil. 2:8), means that He only *looked* human. But this contradicts verse 7. “Appearance” is the Greek *schēmati*, meaning an outer appearance which may be temporary. This contrasts with *morphē* (“very nature”) in verses 6 and 7, which speaks of an outer appearance that reveals permanent inner quality.

The condescension of Christ included not only His birth—the Incarnation in which He became the God-Man— but also His **death**. And it was the most cruel and despicable form of death—**even death on a cross!** (v. 8) This form of capital punishment was limited to non-Romans and the worst criminals.

No better example of humiliation and a selfless attitude for believers to follow could possibly be given than that of Christ. With this example before them, the saints at Philippi should be “like-minded” (v. 2) and live humbly before their God and each other.

Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

trans. translation, translator, translated

cf. *confer*, compare

v. verse

v. verse

v. verse