

The Kenosis Controversy:

Philippians 2:7 – Christ Jesus ... “emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men.” (NASB)

Of what did Jesus empty himself? In the verses after Phil. 2:7, as well as in 2:7, we find that the context of this verse is that Jesus has humbled himself and become a servant. He goes from being in very nature God, to emptying himself and becoming a servant, to becoming a mortal man, to dying in the most humiliating and painful way possible.

It is quite obvious from the context of this passage that Christ emptied himself of his exalted position, in other words his glory. Nowhere does it say anything about him emptying himself of his deity, but since he became a man and died, he definitely lost his position as co-equal in glory with the Father. I agree with the explanation found in the NIV Study Bible:

“made himself nothing, Lit. ‘emptied himself.’ He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory (Jn. 17:5) and submitting to the humiliation of becoming man (2Co. 8:9). Jesus is truly God and truly man. Another view is that he emptied himself, not of deity itself, but of its prerogatives – the high position and glory of deity.”

In John 17:5, Jesus prays to his Father and asks Him to glorify him with the glory he had with the Father before the world began. This implies that Jesus was not glorified at the time, but that he had had glory previously. In John 1:1 we see that the Word (the God part of Jesus before the incarnation) was with God, was God, and that in him was life and that he was the light of men. Here, like in John 17, we see that the Word was glorified as co-equal with God before the incarnation. Thus, the Word lost his glory sometime between John 1 and John 17. This is what Phil. 2:7 is referring to. The Word emptied himself of his glory in order to become man and die for our sins.

However, though the Word did relinquish his glory, he did not lose it forever. His death is not the end of the story. Instead, we know that Christ resurrected from the dead and joined his Father in heaven. As we see in Phil. 2, after he died on the cross, God the Father exalted him to the *highest* place, and gave him the name *above every name*, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Thus we see that Jesus regained his previous glory, and actually surpassed it, for now that he had died for the sins of mankind, he was a hero, he had saved the world (or at least those who would believe in him), and he had remained completely obedient to the Father, and so the Father glorified him.

I believe that Christ relinquished his exalted position for several reasons. First, I believe he gave up his exalted position in order to come down to our level. He came to earth to experience what we experience, to become one of us.

Second, I believe he did this in order that we would listen to him and not feel intimidated. Since he became a man, he was not “above” us as God is. He did not come as a powerful ruler over us, but rather as a servant at our level. In doing this, he was not an intimidating figure but rather someone that we would feel comfortable to listen and talk to.

I also believe Jesus became a servant in order to be an example for us to imitate. Jesus was not a hypocrite who told us to serve others while he sat in his exalted throne on high, but rather he came here and showed us by example how we are to treat our fellow man.

Finally, Jesus humbled himself because that was what his Father willed. “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” – Luke 22:42.

All of these things further lessened his glory. His humiliating death was the ultimate blow to his glory. Yet, after all was said and done, he was glorified more than he had ever been before.