**AS MAN HE HUMBLED HIMSELF**

***8And being found in appearance as a man,***  
***he humbled himself***  
***and became obedient to death—***  
***even death on a cross!***

**Philippians 2:8 (NIV)**

This verse is of the same form as Paul’s preceding sentence of 2:6,7. It (1) begins describing Christ’s present ‘mode’ of being, in this case, ‘*a man’*, followed by (2) the main clause, *‘he humbled himself’*, followed by (3) a modifier, explaining how he did so - by becoming ‘*obedient to death’* and is then brought to climax (4) by specifying the kind of death, ‘*death on a cross’*.

‘*And being found in appearance as a man’* (2:8). Paul has explained in 2:6 that ‘in the form of God’ He emptied Himself; now ‘*being found in appearance as a man’* HehumbledHimself.

Paul appears to be using the word ‘*appearance’* in a stylistic manner similar to ‘*in human likeness’* in the preceding verse. The word translated ‘*appearance’* was used, not to describe the essential quality of something, but how something was recognised by its externals. Having just said in 2:7 that Christ came “*in human likeness’* (2:7) Paul makes his next point, that He ‘appeared’ in such a way that was clearly recognisable as being a man (a human being). The two phrases, ‘*in human likeness’* (2:7) and ‘*in appearance as a man’* (2:8) highlight the reality of His humanity, just as ‘*being in very nature God’* (2:6) highlights His deity.

As a human being ‘*he humbled himself’ (*2:8). In His human existence He chose, in obedience, to ’take the lowest place’ (the literal meaning). Paul uses this word intentionally to contrast His being exalted ‘*to the highest place’* in 2:9.

How did He humble Himself? He humbled Himself by becoming ‘*obedient to death’* (2:8). Paul doesn’t often speak of Christ’s death in terms of obedience, but he does so here because the reason for the passage in the first place was to call the Philippians to ‘obedience’ regarding the call of 2:2-4. Paul certainly believed Christ’s death was an act of ‘obedience’ to the divine will. *‘Obedience to* *death’* points to the degree to which obedience took Him. Christ chose the path that led to death. For ordinary humanity death is a necessity but for the God-man, death was a choice. He alone as the obedient Son could choose death as His destiny. He did so because of His love, love for His Father and His redeeming purpose for the world.

‘*Even death on a cross’* (2:8). The effect of this clause lies in its repetition of ‘death’ back-to-back: ‘*and became* *obedient to death,’* death that is, ‘*on a cross.’* Here is Paul’s extraordinary understanding about God and of what God has done and is doing in our fallen world. Here is where the One who was ‘equal with God’ has most fully revealed the truth about God: that God is love and love expresses itself in self-sacrifice – the cruel, humiliating death on a cross – for the sake of those He loves. The divine ‘weakness’ (death at the hands of His creatures, His enemies) is the divine scandal. The cross was reserved for slaves and insurrectionists. The cross was God’s contradiction to human wisdom and power: that the One they worshipped as Lord of all, had been crucified as a state criminal at the hands on one of Caesar’s proconsuls.

Paul, from his Jewish roots, could not pen the words ‘*even death on a cross’* withoutthinking of Deuteronomy 21:23 that placed anyone who died by Roman crucifixion outside the pale of Israel and under the ban of excommunication from God’s covenant. This is what made the cross a stumbling-block to the Jew (1 Corinthians 1:23). But to Paul, the Christian, the cross was the centre of God’s means of reconciling the world to Himself (Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13)

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)