



PHILIPPIANS

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And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:8

The division of this verse is not entirely certain. Some translations place the words "And being found in appearance as a man" as part of the previous verse –

"But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." Douay Rheims

This is a point to be made aware of, but the substance of the message is not largely affected by the change. There is just a more abrupt nature to the introduction of the next sentence because of it. As for the words, "And being found in appearance as a man," they are speaking of the fashion of Christ rather than His form. In other words, the previous verse spoke of His morphé (form) of a bondservant. This verse now speaks of His schéma (fashion) of appearance.

The schéma is that which is outward and visible. It "is used of Jesus' earthly body. Christ incarnated into a genuine physical body, which was not an 'exact match with typical humanity' because His body was never touched or tainted by sin (even original sin)" (HELPS Word Studies). This fashion of body was one specifically referred to 700 years earlier by Isaiah –

"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;

And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.” Isaiah 53:2

The humanity of Jesus was not one of marvelous physical looks. He was not an impressive figure in size or in musculature. He was not formed with great height, or exceptionally broad shoulders. He was just a common looking person that, when passed by on the street, would draw nobody’s attention to Him. This simple and unadorned fashion of Christ was what we saw in Him as a Man. And, in this plain appearance “He humbled Himself and became obedient.”

The Deity of Christ, which bore all the fashion and glory of the infinite Creator God, and which held all the power of the universe and beyond, was set aside. He took on a lowly fashion and form, and He submitted to the will of His Father and to the law which He had written, binding Himself to it in a state of human limitation. The idea of His humility here is not the same as that of His emptying Himself noted in the previous verse. Rather it is a definition of that emptying. The word is tapeinoó. It indicates a complete and absolute reliance on another. He so humbled Himself that He was left completely open and exposed to the will of Another, trusting in the God and not Himself. This is reflected in His words of John 6:38 –

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

The author of Hebrews picks up on this aspect of Christ as well, noting His obedience to the will of the Father. This obedience, reflected in His humility, is then explained in its most magnificent sense by the words, “to the point of death.” Christ was born in order to die. The death would be an atoning death for the sin of the world. This is seen in Revelation 13:8. However, His atoning death is not the focus here. Rather, His obedience is what is highlighted, even to the point of death. Thus, it sets a pattern for those who would follow Him (“Let this mind be in you...” – verse 5).

But there is yet more to Paul’s words. Christ was obedient to the point of death, but as he highlights, “...even the death of the cross.” The Law of Moses said –

“If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:22, 23

Christ died on a tree and Paul explains the magnitude of this in Galatians 3:13 –

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)...”

Christ’s death on the cross was, to the people of Israel, a point of shame. This is reflected again in the words of Hebrews 12:2 which specifically notes this. Further, in the Greek of this verse, there is no article in front of “cross.” It says “even cross death.” The utterly shameful nature of the death is brought forth in Paul’s choice of words. It shows the enormity of the level of obedience and humility which Christ endured for us. This... this is what Paul asks us to have in our minds. It is what he asks for us to emulate.

Life application: How willing are you to be obedient to the word of God? Christ went to an extreme that we cannot even comprehend. Let us endeavor to follow Him, even to the point of the highest shame before our fellow man.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, Philippians 2:9

“Therefore” is based upon the words of verses 5-8. Because of His work, setting aside His authority, power, and glory which resulted in His passion and death upon the cross for sinful man, “God also has highly exalted Him.” This is realized in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. He was found worthy, and thus death could not hold Him. He was raised by the power of God to an indestructible life, and He was raised further still to the place of all power and authority. The aorist verb translated as “highly exalted” refers to the documented facts concerning both the resurrection and ascension.

Along with this exaltation, it says that God has “given Him the name which is above every name.” Again, this is an aorist verb, and it thus also points to the resurrection and ascension. These two events prove that His work was sufficient and that He had faithfully carried out the work the Father had set forth for Him to accomplish. The exaltation and the proclamation of the name are the rewards for His meritorious deeds.

Scholars argue over what “the name” is. Some point to Revelation 19:13 which says, “ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.” Some point back to the Old Testament, saying that He has been granted the name of the Lord, meaning “Jehovah” or “I AM” of the Old Testament. But both of these overlook the obvious. The name “Jesus” is stated directly after the word “name” in verse 10, and then it is repeated in verse 11. It is this name, Jesus, which is above every name.

Though it was given to Mary to name Him this before His birth, it was given in the sense of a prophecy –

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21

Upon completion of His work, validated by the resurrection and bestowal of all authority and power, the name took on its full significance. He had saved His people from their sins. This is the name which is being referred to here. Other names and titles have their own significance, but it is by the name of JESUS that we see the full honor and glory of the Person who came to save humanity. It is this recognizable name that we honor Him for His work.

Life application: The name which is cherished and loved around the world, regardless of how it is pronounced in individual cultures, is the name which is above every name. In the English speaking world, we call Him JESUS. Let us carry that name with us with every step we take, and let us meditate on the Man who bears that name, contemplating the marvelous deeds which He has done for us.

...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, Philippians 2:10

This verse needs to be taken in context with the previous verse –

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth...”

Because Christ Jesus has been so exalted to have “the name which is above every name,” the honor is His to receive all praise and worship from His creation. The words “at the name of Jesus” are not rightly rendered from the Greek. Instead it says, “...in the name of Jesus.” Paul follows the theme from Hebrew worship where blessing and honor are said to be “in” the name of the Lord. This is to be found, for example, in the 63rd Psalm –

“Thus I will bless You while I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.” Psalm 63:4

The psalmist lifted his hands in the name of the Lord, meaning “to the Lord.” By saying “at the name of Jesus,” it gives the impression that each time the name Jesus is spoken, the knee is to be bowed. This is incorrect, but it has led to this type of custom in some circles. As Jesus is simply a name, it would be inappropriate to bow to the name if it was not indicating the name of the Lord. But “in the name of Jesus,” meaning the Lord, “every knee should bow.” This thought is taken directly from Isaiah 43, and it is an implicit reference to the deity of Jesus –

“I have sworn by Myself;
The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness,
And shall not return,
That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath.” Isaiah 45:23

The Lord of the Old Testament, meaning “Jehovah,” swore by Himself that every knee would bow to Him. It would be the highest of blasphemy for Paul to use this concept, applying it to Christ Jesus, unless he understood that “Jehovah” of the Old Testament is “Jesus” of the New. But this is exactly the connection he is making. To solidify this, he makes an all-encompassing statement, “...of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth.”

All beings will bow in the name of Jesus. Paul’s words lead us to the understanding that Jesus is God. Only a perverse and twisted reading of Scripture could lead us to any other interpretation. Understanding this, the coming verse will then reveal a further truth concerning the nature of the Trinity.

Life application: Words in the Bible are selected with precision and intent. We are asked to study to show ourselves approved, and one way to do that is to understand what the original language is saying and then to compare it to the translation we use. If there are discrepancies, we should note them and assimilate only the original intent of what is being conveyed to us.