

Does Peter call Jesus "God" in 2 PETER 1:1?

By David Maas

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218 Main Street, Unit 133

Kirkland, Washington, 98033, USA

david.maas@gospeltoallnations.org

eleutheria@prodigy.net

www.gospeltoallnations.org

~ **The Issue** ~

2 PETER 1:1 is often cited as a passage in which Jesus is explicitly identified as "God" or *theos* (the Greek noun). The basis for this claim rests on the validity of the so-called *Granville Sharp Rule* (see definition below). The passage reads as follows, first from the *New International Version* (NIV) and then from the *New American Standard* (NAS):

(NIV) "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of **our God and Saviour Jesus Christ** have received a faith as precious as ours."

(NAS) "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of **our God and Savior, Jesus Christ**."

The relevant issue is whether "the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (NIV) refers to two individuals, God and Jesus, or to just one. The NIV assumes only one being is intended, Jesus Christ, who is called both "God" and "savior." The NAS rendering is more explicit inserting a comma after "savior" and setting "Jesus Christ" in apposition to both "God" and "savior" (there were no such marks of punctuation in the original Greek).

The justification for taking this clause to refer to Jesus as both "God" and "savior" is a supposed rule of Greek grammar, the *Granville Sharp Rule*.^[1] The definition of this Rule is that in Greek when two nouns of the same case are joined by the conjunction *kai* ("and") and only the first noun of the pair has the definite article (*i.e.*, "the"), then both nouns refer to the same subject or person. In the Greek sentence of 2 PETER 1:1 only one definite article is used before "God" (*i.e.*, "the God"). Both "God" and "Jesus Christ" are in the genitive noun case, masculine gender and singular number. Hence it is concluded that Peter is referring to one and the same person, indicating that Jesus is identified as both "God" and "savior."

~ **The Validity of the Granville Sharp Rule** ~

Granville Sharp was a Nineteenth Century student of scripture and English philanthropist who studied a narrowly defined aspect of New Testament Greek with the express purpose of proving the deity of Christ. It was in this endeavor that he "discovered" a previously unknown rule of Greek syntax. It has since been named the *Granville Sharp Rule*.^[2] Mr. Sharp specifically applied this rule to eight verses purported to prove the deity of Christ including 2 PETER 1:1 and cited them to demonstrate his Rule's validity.

Since Mr. Sharp had the specific intent to find characteristics of Greek that prove the deity of Jesus, his Rule must be viewed with some skepticism. His "discovered" Rule is self-validating. Further, the reasoning on which it is based is circular since his goal was to find grammatical rules that prove what he already assumed to be true.

A basic problem is that prior to Mr. Sharp's "discovery" such a rule was unknown in Greek literature. He

found a new “rule” of which no earlier Greek scholar or writer was aware going back several thousand years. Furthermore Greek usage of the definite article as described by Mr. Sharp is inconsistent. Sometimes one article is used with two nouns connected by the conjunction where two separate persons or things are in view, while in other places two definite articles (or more) are used.^[3]

Numerous New Testament examples can be cited where two nouns with the same case, number and gender share a single definite article and are joined by the conjunction *kai* (“and”), yet where two distinct entities, persons or things are clearly in view. In each of the following examples a single definite article precedes two nouns of the same case (and gender and number) that are joined by *kai*. In the first example (MATTHEW 5:20) a single article is used with both “scribes” and “Pharisees,” both of which are in the genitive case, plural number and masculine gender. In the gospel accounts “scribes” and “Pharisees” are two distinct groups and are not identical. Note the following:

MATTHEW 5:20, “The scribes and Pharisees” (*tôn grammateôn kai pharisaiôn*). Compare same usage in MATTHEW 12:28, 16:6, 16:12, ACTS 23:7.

MATTHEW 3:7, Refers to the “Pharisees and Sadducees” (*tôn Pharisaiôn kai Saddoukaiôn*).

MATTHEW 2:4, “The chief priests and scribes” (*tous archiereis kai grammateis*).

EPHESIANS 2:20, Paul refers to “the apostles and prophets” (*tôn apostolôn kai prophétôn*).

REVELATION 20:11, “The heaven and earth” (*ho ouranos kai topos*).

MATTHEW 20:18, The Son of Man will be betrayed to “the chief priests and scribes” (*archiereusin kai grammateusin*).

LUKE 22:4, “The chief priests and officers” (*tois archiereusin kai stratégois*).

ACTS 15:22, “The Paul and Barnabas” (*tô paulô kai barnaba*) cp. ACTS 13:2, 12:50.

LUKE 21:12, “The synagogues and prisons” (*ta sunagôgas kai phulakas*).

JOHN 7:45, “The chief priests and the Pharisees” (*tous archiereis kai pharisaious*).

JOHN 11:19, Many Jews came to “the Martha and Mary” (*tén marthan kai Mariam*).

ACTS 19:21, Paul passed through “the Macedonia and Achaia” (*tén Makedonian kai Achaian*).

REVELATION 17:13, They gave their “power and authority” to the beast (*tén dunamin kai exousian*).

In the following examples *three or more* nouns in the same case, gender and number are joined by *kai* and share a single definite article. This is not to belabor the point but to emphasize that there is no grammatical rule consistently followed in the New Testament that conforms to or validates the so-called *Granville Sharp Rule*:

MATTHEW 17:1, “The Peter and James and John” (*ton Petron kai Iakôbon kai Iôannén*). cp. MARK 5:37, LUKE 5:17.

LUKE 2:52, Jesus increased in “the wisdom and stature and grace” (*té sophia kai hélikia kai chariti*).

ACTS 9:31, Throughout all “the Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (*tés Ioudaias kai Galilaias kai Samareias*).

ACTS 15:23, To those in “the Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (*tén Antiocheian kai Surian kai Kilikian*).

2 CORINTHIANS 12:21, “The uncleanness and fornication and debauchery” (*té akatharsia kai porneia kai aselgeia*).

EPHESIANS 3:18, What is “the breadth and length and height and depth” (*to platos kai mékos kai hupsos kai bathos*).

REVELATION 1:9, In “the tribulation and kingdom and endurance” of Jesus (*té thlipsei kai Basileia kai hupomoné*).

In summary, if the *Granville Sharp Rule* was valid at the time the New Testament was written its application by the authors of the New Testament (including Peter) is too inconsistent to conclude 2 PETER 1:1 labels Jesus “God” with any certainty. Furthermore, since Granville Sharp discovered his rule as part of a concerted effort to find grammatical features that prove the deity of Christ, his conclusions must be viewed as self serving and suspect.

~ Peter’s Usage in His Epistle ~

Elsewhere in 2 Peter the author maintains a distinction between God and Jesus (in each of the following scriptures the NAS is used). In 2 PETER 1:21 Peter expresses his wish that “grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge *of God and of Jesus* our Lord.” In 1:17 he describes the Transfiguration of the earthly Jesus when “when he received honor and glory *from God the Father*, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is *My beloved Son* with whom I am well-pleased’.” In this second verse a very clear distinction is made between God and Jesus Christ, the “beloved Son.” Since Peter elsewhere consistently maintains a distinction between God and Jesus it would be inconsistent if not strange for him to treat them as a single entity in 2 PETER 1:1. It makes no sense to portray God and Jesus as two distinct entities or beings and then to describe them as one and the same person in the very next verse.

Also relevant is Peter’s use of the noun “savior.” In 2 PETER 1:1 he refers to Jesus Christ as “savior.” Elsewhere in his letter he only applies this term to Jesus Christ, never to God or the Father. Note the following:

2 PETER 1:11, “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and *Savior* Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

2 PETER 1:21, “For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and *Savior* Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”

2 PETER 3:2, “That you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and *Savior* spoken by your apostles.”

2 PETER 3:18, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and *Savior* Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

~ Peter’s Usage Elsewhere ~

In his earlier epistle Peter also maintains a clear distinction between God and Jesus Christ. Note the following verses from 1 Peter (NAS):

(1:2-3) “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

(1:17-21) “And if you address as *Father the One* who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *upon earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ*. For *He was foreknown* before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you, “Who *through Him* are believers in *God, who raised Him from the dead* and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

(2:4-5) “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable *to God through Jesus Christ*.”

(3:18) “For *Christ* also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, in order that *He might bring us to God*, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

(3:21-22), “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of *Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God*, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

(4:11) “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things *God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

(5:10) “And after you have suffered for a little while, the *God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ*, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.”

Luke records several of Peter’s sermons in the Book of Acts where he also consistently maintains a distinction between God and Jesus. Note the following examples (NAS):

(2:22) “Men of Israel, listen to these words: *Jesus the Nazarene*, a man attested to you *by God* with miracles and wonders and signs which *God performed through Him* in your midst, just as you yourselves know.”

(2:32) “This *Jesus God raised up* again, to which we are all witnesses.”

(2:36) “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that *God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus* whom you crucified.”

(3:13) “*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one* whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.”

(3:20) “And that *He may send Jesus*, the Christ appointed for you.”

(4:10) “Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of *Jesus Christ* the Nazarene, whom you crucified, *whom God raised from the dead--* by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.”

(10:38) “You know of *Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him* with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.”

(11:17) “If *God* therefore gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the *Lord Jesus Christ*, who was I that I could stand in *God's* way?”

~ The Syntax of 2 PETER 1:1 ~

In 2 PETER 1:1 Simon Peter writes (literal rendering), “to those having obtained faith equally precious to us, by [a] righteousness of the God of us and of [a] savior, Jesus Christ.” In this clause the plural first person pronoun “our” or “us” modifies the two words in the genitive case, “the God.” This is a common construction in Greek using the genitive case to show possession where the definite article is used along with an accompanying pronoun (“the God of us”). Since this makes for a rough rendering in English modern translations typically omit the definite article in 2 PETER 1:1 (*i.e.*, “our God” rather than “the God of us”).

The noun “savior” follows the conjunction “and” without a definite article and also in the genitive case. In Greek proper names and key nouns like “savior” are inherently definite and can be used with or without the definite article (“the”) as an author wishes. Peter uses “savior” a total of five times in this epistle, *always without the definite article* in the Greek and always in reference to Jesus, including verses where Jesus is clearly distinguished from God (note 1:1, 1:11, 2:20, 3:2, 3:18).

In the final clause of 2 PETER 1:1 “savior” is in ‘apposition’ to “Jesus Christ.” ‘Apposition’ is a grammatical construction in which two adjacent nouns with the same referent stand in the same syntactical relation to the rest of a sentence. The word or phrase in ‘apposition’ further defines the word or name with which it is used. In English this structure is often indicated by the use of a comma as in “Bob, the plumber” or “Sally Smith, attorney at law.” In the preceding translation a comma is used to indicate this relationship. In this verse Jesus Christ is the one named “savior,” not God (though elsewhere in scripture God is referred to as “savior”).

~ A Larger Problem ~

A basic problem with the idea of the deity of Christ is the lack of many direct references to Jesus as “God” or *theos* in the New Testament. 2 PETER 1:1 is only one of eight scriptures in the entire New Testament that at first glance appear to explicitly call Jesus “God” (JOHN 1:1, 1:18, 20:28, ROMANS 9:5, TITUS 2:13, HEBREWS 1:8, 2 PETER 1:1, 1 JOHN 5:20). This small number of passages where Jesus is at first glance called “God” is problematic.

The New Testament provides clear evidence of various controversies in the early church. The books of the New Testament demonstrate the early church’s leadership did not hesitate to confront controversies and other problems (*e.g.*, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Jude, 1 John). Because Christianity was an outgrowth of the faith of Israel and initially a strictly Jewish movement, it is not surprising that some of the conflicts found in

the New Testament reflect the kinds of disputes one would expect to erupt when the Gospel was opened up to non-Jews. This included debates over circumcision, Sabbath keeping and Jewish dietary rules.

One of the key objections raised by Jews to the claim of Jesus' Messiahship was the fact that he had been crucified. The notion of God's messiah being executed on a cross by Israel's greatest enemy, Rome, would have been viewed by many Jews as a contradiction in terms. After all, did not Israel's own scriptures teach that anyone hung on tree was under God's curse (DEUTERONOMY 21:23, see GALATIANS 3:13)? This objection is reflected in several passages in the New Testament (*e.g.*, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:23, GALATIANS 5:11).

Missing from the New Testament is any indication of conflict over or objection to the claim that Jesus is God or that God became a man. While this is an *argument from silence*, this silence speaks volumes. Fundamental to the faith of Israel was its *strict monotheism*. Yahweh alone was God and He alone merited worship. He was most definitely *other than human* and could not die. Any claim to deity on the part of Jesus or his followers would have been highly problematic. Any claim that in Jesus "God became a man," let alone died, would have been viewed as blasphemous. If the early church had been actively proclaiming Jesus to be God devout Jews would have fought this message tooth and nail. Conflicts caused by a claim that Jesus is God would have necessitated constant and clear teaching in this regard yet we find no evidence of this in the New Testament.

~Summary ~

In summary, the *Granville Sharp Rule* used to argue 2 PETER 1:1 is a statement of the deity of Jesus is invalid. This grammatical rule was "discovered" rather late by a well-intentioned Christian who was specifically looking for grammatical patterns that would "prove" the deity of Christ. His "discovery" was self-serving and self-validating.

Instead 2 PETER 1:1 has two persons in view, "our God" and the "savior, Jesus Christ." Peter consistently distinguishes between God and Jesus in both of his letters as well as in his sermons as recorded in the Book of Acts. In 2 Peter he applies the label "savior" to Jesus five times, in each case without the definite article. In each such passage he also maintains a distinction between God and Jesus, the latter consistently identified as "savior."

Since this verse is not a clear statement about the deity of Christ, and since Peter elsewhere distinguishes between God and Jesus, the burden of proof for the deity of Jesus lies with those who make such claims.

ENDNOTES:

[1] James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis: Bethany Press Int'l., 1998), pp. 76-77; Robert Morey, *The Trinity, Evidence and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: World Publishing, 1996), p. 345.

[2] Graeser-Lynn-Schoenheit, *One God One Lord* (Indianapolis: Christian Education Services, 2000), p. 500.

[3] Moulton-Howard-Turner, *Grammar* Vol. III, p. 181; *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1965), p. 16.