

Does Paul call Jesus "God" in Titus 2:13?

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TITUS 2:13, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (*New American Standard*).

~ The Issue ~

TITUS 2:13 is often cited as a passage in which Jesus is explicitly identified as "God" or the Greek, *theos*. The basis of this claim rests on the validity of the so-called *Granville Sharp Rule* (see definition below).

The Argument for the Deity of Christ:

TITUS 2:11-14 reads as follows:

"For the grace of God appeared to all men, salvation,^[1] instructing us in order that, having denied the ungodliness and the worldly lusts,

We may live soberly and justly and godly in the present age,

Awaiting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory *of the great God and of our Savior, Christ Jesus*;

Who gave himself on our behalf, that he might ransom us from all lawlessness and cleanse for himself a people, especial, zealous of noble works."

The relevant question is, in the relevant clause *is Paul referring to two individuals, God and Jesus, or to one* (*i.e.*, "the great God and savior, Jesus Christ")? The argument for the latter option is based on the *Granville Sharp Rule*.^[2] The definition of this Rule is that in Greek when two nouns of the same case are joined by the conjunction *kai* or "and," and only the first noun of the pair has the definite article (*i.e.*, "the"), then both nouns refer to the same subject. In the Greek sentence in TITUS 2:13 there is only one definite article present before "God" (*i.e.*, "the God"), and both "God" and "Jesus are in the genitive noun case, masculine gender and singular number. Hence, it is concluded that Paul is referring to one and the same individual, Jesus, who is here called both "great God" and "our savior."

The Validity of the Granville Sharp Rule:

Granville Sharp was a Nineteenth Century student of scripture and English philanthropist who studied an aspect of Greek *with the express purpose of proving the deity of Christ*. It was in this endeavor that he "discovered" this previously unknown rule of Greek syntax. It has since been named the *Granville Sharp Rule*.^[3] Mr. Sharp specifically applied this rule to eight verses purported to prove the deity of Christ including TITUS 2:13 and he cited them to demonstrate his Rule's validity.

Since Mr. Sharp undertook his venture with the specific intent to find characteristics of Greek that prove the deity of Jesus, his Rule must be evaluated with some degree of skepticism. His "discovery" is self-validating. Further, it is based to some extent on circular reasoning since he started with the goal of finding grammatical rules to 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. He found a new "rule" of which no earlier Greek scholar or speaker was previously 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.^[4]

New Testament examples can be found where two nouns have the same case, number and gender, share a single definite article and are joined by the conjunction *kai* ("and"), yet where clearly two distinct entities, persons or things are 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 not identical but two distinct groups. 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 consistent grammatical rule followed by the authors of 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 Paul) is too inconsistent to conclude TITUS 2:13 labels Jesus the "great God" with certainty. Furthermore, since Granville Sharp discovered his rule as part of a conscious effort to find grammatical features to prove the deity of Christ, his conclusions must be viewed as self-serving and suspect.

The Literary Context:

Elsewhere in the epistle to Titus Paul maintains a distinction between God and Jesus Christ (in each

example a more literal translation is used). Thus, for example, in TITUS 1:1 Paul describes himself as a “slave of God” and an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (“Paul, slave of God, apostle moreover of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of the chosen ones of God and the knowledge of the truth that is according to godliness”).

In TITUS 1:4 Paul writes, “to Titus, true child according to a common faith, grace and peace from **God-Father and Christ Jesus the savior of us.**” In this verse there is no definite article used with “God” or “Father,” the Greek reads simply “from God Father.” A definite article is used in “the savior of us” (or “our savior”) after “Christ Jesus.” Paul clearly has two entities or persons in view, one he calls “God” and “father,” the other “Christ Jesus our savior.”

In TITUS 3:4-6 Paul writes, “now when the kindness and affection for man of our Savior God appeared, not from works which we did in righteousness, but according to his mercy he saved us, through means of the bathing of regeneration and the renewal of holy spirit, which **he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.**” Again Paul distinguishes between God and Jesus. In the last clause “he” refers to “God” and is the subject, “us” is the direct object of the verb “poured out” and “Jesus Christ our Savior” is its indirect object. The syntax of the clause treats God and Jesus Christ as two distinct entities.

Since Paul elsewhere treats God and Jesus as two distinct persons, does it make sense that he would now identify them as one and the same person in TITUS 2:13?

Examination of the Syntax TITUS 2:13:

TITUS 2:11-14, “For the grace of God appeared to all men, salvation, instructing us in order that, having denied the ungodliness and the worldly lusts, we may live soberly and justly and godly in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope and appearance of the glory **of the great God and of our Savior, Christ Jesus;** who gave himself on our behalf, that he might ransom us from all lawlessness and cleanse for himself a people, especial, zealous of noble works.”

In the Greek sentence the final clause of TITUS 2:13 reads, “the glory of the great God and of our savior, Jesus Christ.” “God” is in the genitive case and has the definite article. The adjective “great” is used with “God” in the **attributive position**, that is, “great” modifies “God.” The definite article (“the”) before “great God” is not used to identify the “great God” as Jesus Christ but functions rather to mark the adjective “great” as **attributive** (“the great God”) rather than **predicate** (“God is great”).^[5] “Great” modifies “God,” not “our Savior” or “Christ Jesus.”

“Jesus Christ” is also in the genitive case but does not have the definite article. The noun “savior” and the pronoun “our” both modify “Jesus Christ”. Both are also in the genitive case. In the verse’s final phrase “our savior” stands in **apposition**^[6] to “Christ Jesus.” In other words, “our savior” modifies “Christ Jesus,” not “the great God.”

Granville Sharp’s interpretation poses theological problems in verse 14 (“who gave himself on our behalf, that he might ransom us” - the pronoun “who” refers to “Jesus Christ” in verse 13). Elsewhere in the New Testament it is always Jesus Christ, the Son of God, not God who “gives himself” as a ransom in behalf of believers. This was accomplished in his death on the cross (e.g., MATTHEW 20:28, GALATIANS 1:4, 2:20, 3:13, EPHESIANS 5:2, 5:25-26, 1 TIMOTHY 2:6, HEBREWS 9:14, 1 PETER 3:18, REVELATION 1:5). Stating that God gave himself in death on a cross as a ransom raises insurmountable theological problems.

Paul’s Usage Elsewhere:

A fundamental obstacle to the argument for the deity of Christ in Titus 2:13 is Paul’s usage elsewhere. In his several letters Paul routinely maintains a distinction between God and Jesus as in ROMANS 1:7, 1:8-9,

2:16, 3:24-45, 5:1, 5:8, 5:10-11, 5:15, 6:11, 6:23, 7:25, 8:3, 8:17, 8:34, 8:39, 10:9, 15:5-6, 16:27, 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3, 1:9, 1:30, 3:23, 4:1, 6:14, 11:3, 15:15, 15:24-28, 57, 2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3, 1:19-20, 2:14-15, 4:4-6, 5:17-20, 10:5, 11:31, 12:19, 13:14, GALATIANS 1:1-3, 3:17, 3:26, 4:4-7, 4:14, EPHESIANS 1:1-3, 1:17, 2:10, 4:32, 5:1-2, 5:5, 5:20, 6:11, 6:23, PHILIPPIANS 1:2, 1:11, 2:6-11, 4:7, 4:19, COLOSSIANS 1:1-3, 1:15, 2:2, 3:1-3, 3:17, 1 THESSALONIANS 1:9, 2:15, 3:11, 3:13, 4:14, 5:9, 2 THESSALONIANS 1:1-2, 1:12, 2:16, 1 TIMOTHY 1:1-2, 2:5, 5:21, 6:13, 2 TIMOTHY 1:2, 4:1, PHILEMON 3. The weight of this evidence must be balanced against an argument from TITUS 2:13 based on a questionable grammatical rule.

~ A More Fundamental Problem ~

A basic problem with the idea of the deity of Christ is the lack of direct references to Jesus as "God" in Paul's writings. TITUS 2:13 is only one of two or three other passages that appear to refer to Jesus as "God" or *theos* in Paul's writings (also ROMANS 9:5) and this lack is problematic.

The New Testament provides us with clear evidence of various controversies in the early church and Paul's letters demonstrate he did not hesitate to confront opponents, controversies, and problems (*e.g.*, the epistle to the Galatians). Because Christianity was an outgrowth of the faith of Israel and was initially a strictly Jewish movement, it is not surprising that some of the conflicts found in the New Testament reflect the kinds of controversies one would expect to erupt when the Gospel was opened up to non-Jews. This includes 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 and scandalous. Did not Israel's own scriptures teach that anyone hung on tree was under God's curse (DEUTERONOMY 21:23, GAL. 3:13)? This very objection by Jews to the idea of a crucified Messiah 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 man* and could not die. Any claim to deity on the part of Jesus or by 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 Apostle Paul had been actively proclaiming Jesus to be God Jews would have fought this tooth and nail every step of the way. Was it not Paul's practice after arriving at a city to preach in the local synagogue? Conflicts caused by a claim that Jesus is God would have necessitated Paul to teach the deity of Christ clearly and constantly, yet we do not find this to be the case in any of his letters.

~ Summary ~

In summary, the *Granville Sharp Rule* used to argue for TITUS 2:13 as a statement of Jesus' deity is invalid. The passage instead has two persons in view, "the great God" and "Christ Jesus, our savior." This is in keeping with Paul's usage elsewhere in Titus and his other letters, as well as in the rest of the New Testament. The fact that the one called "Jesus Christ" is further described as the same one "who gave himself for us" in order to ransom us, provides further evidence that Paul is referring to Jesus in the final phrase of the verse, the son of God, and not to God. Since this verse is not a clear statement about the deity of Christ, and since Paul elsewhere does not explicitly state that Jesus is God (with the possible exception of ROMANS 9:5), the burden of proof for the deity of Jesus remains on those making such claims.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Note: In the Greek sentence “salvation” is in apposition to “the grace of God.” “To all men” is the indirect object of the verb, “appeared.”

[2] 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.

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

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

[5] Smyth, p. 293, sec. 1154; A.T. Robertson, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 277.

[6] Apposition is a grammatical construction in which two adjacent nouns have the same referent and are in the same syntactical relation to the rest of a sentence.