

## Ephesians 5:5

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (NIV)

1. Using this verse, some Trinitarians try to make Christ into God by what is known as the “Granville Sharp Rule.” The following explanation is lengthy, but it is necessary to show that this “rule” has been properly analyzed and shown to be invalid for proving the Trinity. Granville Sharp was an English philanthropist, who began to study the grammar of the New Testament in order to demonstrate that his Trinitarian beliefs were correct and that Christ was God. From his study of the New Testament, he declared that when the Greek word *kai* (usually translated “and”) joins two nouns of the same case, and the first noun has the definite article and the second does not, the two nouns refer to the same subject. This is the principle behind the “rule,” but there are a large number of exceptions to it that must be noted.

There are problems with the Granville Sharp “Rule.” First, it is impossible to prove that it was a rule of grammar at the time of the apostle Paul. Nigel Turner, a Trinitarian, writes:

Unfortunately, at this period of Greek we cannot be sure that such a rule is really decisive. **Sometimes the definite article is not repeated even when there is a clear separation in idea.**<sup>1</sup>

Buzzard writes about Titus 2:13, also supposedly an example of the Granville Sharp rule:

A wide range of grammarians and Biblical scholars have recognized that the absence of the definite article before “our Savior Jesus Christ” is quite inadequate to establish the Trinitarian claim that Jesus is here called ‘the great God’ “ (p. 130).

The point is, that when Scripture refers to “our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,” it can refer to two separate beings—1) the Great God and 2) the Savior, Jesus Christ. Andrews Norton wrote a clear evaluation of the Granville Sharp Rule as it applies to the Trinity in *Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*. [For the ease of the reader, we have taken the liberty to translate into English some of the Greek words he uses.] Norton writes:

The argument for the deity of Christ founded upon the omission of the Greek article was received and brought into notice in the last century by Granville Sharp, Esq. He applied it to eight texts, which will be hereafter mentioned. The last words of Ephesians 5:5 may afford an example of the construction on which the argument is founded: “in the Kingdom of Christ and God.” From the article being inserted before “Christ” and omitted before “God,” Mr. Sharp infers that both names relate to the same person, and renders, “in the kingdom of Christ our God.” The proper translation I suppose to be that of the Common Version [the *King*

*James*], “in the kingdom of Christ and of God,” or, “in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.”

The argument of Sharp is defended by Bishop Middleton in his *Doctrine of the Greek Article*. By attending to the rule laid down by him, with its limitations and exceptions, we shall be able to judge of its applicability to the passages in question. His rule is this:

When two or more attributives, joined by a copulative or copulatives, are assumed of [relate to] the same person or thing, before the first attributive the article is inserted, before the remaining ones it is omitted” (pp. 79 and 80).

By attributives, he understands adjectives, participles and nouns, which are significant of character, relation, and dignity.

The limitations and exceptions to the rule stated by him are as follows:

I. There is no similar rule respecting “names of substances *considered as substances*.” Thus, we may say “the stone and gold,” without repeating the article before “gold,” though we speak of two different substances. The reason of this limitation of the rule is stated to be that “distinct real essences cannot be conceived to belong to the same thing;” or, in other words, that the same thing cannot be supposed to be two different substances.

In this case, then, it appears that the article is not repeated, *because its repetition is not necessary to prevent ambiguity*. This is the true principle which accounts for all the limitations and exceptions to the rule that are stated by Bishop Middleton and others. It is mentioned thus early, that the principle may be kept in mind; and its truth may be remarked in the other cases of limitation or of exception to be quoted.

II. No similar rule applies to proper names. “The reason,” says Middleton, “is evident at once; for it is impossible that *John* and *Thomas*, the names of two distinct persons, should be predicated of an individual” (p. 68).

This remark is not to the purpose [*i.e.*, “is not correct”], for the same individual may have two names. The true reason for this limitation is, that proper names, when those of the same individual, are not connected by a copulative or copulatives, and therefore that, when they are thus connected, no ambiguity arises from the omission of the article.

III. “Nouns,” says Middleton, “which are the names of abstract ideas, are also excluded; for, as Locke has well observed, ‘Every distinct

abstract idea is a distinct essence, and the names which stand for such distinct ideas are the names of things essentially different” (*ibid.*).

It would therefore, he reasons, be contradictory to suppose that any quality were at once *apeira* [without experience] and *apaideusia* [without instruction, stupid, rude]. But the names of abstract ideas are used to denote personal qualities, and the same personal qualities, as they are viewed under different aspects, may be denoted by different names. The reason assigned by Middleton is therefore without force. The true reason for the limitation is that *usually* no ambiguity arises from the omission of the article before words of the class mentioned.

IV. The rule, it is further conceded, is not of universal application as it respects *plurals*; for, says Middleton, “Though *one* individual may act, and frequently does act, in several capacities, it is not likely that a *multitude* of individuals should all of them act in the *same* several capacities: and, by the *extreme improbability* that they should be represented as so acting, we may be forbidden to understand that second plural attributive of the persons designed in the article prefixed to the first, however the usage in the singular might seem to countenance the construction” (p. 90).

V. Lastly, “we find,” he says, “in very many instances, not only in the plural, but even in the singular number, that where attributives are in their nature *absolutely incompatible*, *i.e.*, where the application of the rule would involve a contradiction in terms, there the first attributive only has the article, *the perspicuity of the passage not requiring the rule to be accurately observed*” (p. 92).

It appears by comparing the rule with its exceptions and limitations that it in fact amounts to nothing more than this: that when substantives, adjectives, or particles are connected together by a copulative or copulative, if the first have the article, it is to be *omitted* before those which follow, when they relate to the same person or thing; and it is to be *inserted*, when they relate to different persons or things, EXCEPT when this fact is sufficiently determined by some other circumstance. The same rule exists respecting the use of the definite article in English.

The principle of exception just stated is evidently that which runs through all the limitations and exceptions that Middleton has laid down and exemplified, and is in itself perfectly reasonable. When, from any other circumstance, it may be clearly understood that different persons or things are spoken of, then the insertion of omissions of the article is a matter of indifference.

But if this be true, no argument for the deity of Christ can be drawn from the texts adduced. With regard to this doctrine, the main question is whether it were taught by Christ and his Apostles, and received by their immediate disciples. Antitrinitarians maintain that it was not; and consequently maintain that no thought

of it was ever entertained by the Apostles and first believers. But if this supposition be correct, the insertion of the article in these texts was wholly unnecessary. No ambiguity could result from its omission. The imagination had not entered the minds of men that God and Christ were the same person. The Apostles in writing, and their converts in reading, the passages in question could have no more conception of one person only being understood, in consequence of the omission of the article, than of supposing but one substance to be meant by the terms “the stone and gold,” on account of the omission of the article before “gold.” These texts, therefore, cannot be brought to disprove the Antitrinitarian supposition, because this supposition must be proved false before these texts can be taken from the exception and brought under the operation of the rule. The truth of the supposition accounts for the omission of the article.<sup>2</sup>

Norton makes some great points and shows the irrelevance of the Granville Sharp Rule in “proving” the Trinity. Because no ambiguity between Christ and God would arise in the minds of the readers due to the omission of the article, it can be omitted without a problem. Likewise, there was no need for a second article in Matthew 21:12 in the phrase, “all the [ones] selling and buying,” or in Ephesians 2:20 in the phrase, “the apostles and prophets,” because no one would ever think that “sold” and “bought” meant the same thing, or that “apostles” and “prophets” were somehow the same office. This same is true all over the Bible. There is no need for a second article if no confusion would arise without it. The “rule” therefore begs the question. It can be made to apply only if it can be shown that an ambiguity would have arisen in the minds of the first century readers between Christ and God. Because the whole of Scripture clearly shows the difference between Christ and God, and that difference would have been in the minds of the believers, the Granville Sharp “Rule” is not a valid reason to make Christ God.

2. Ephesians 5:5 mentions the kingdom of Christ and of God. There is a time coming in the future when the earth as we know it now, with all its wickedness, disease and death, will be destroyed and it will be made into a place of justice, peace and happiness. Christ taught about this future earth when he said, “The meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The future Kingdom that will be set up on earth has many names in Scripture. It is called the “Kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 4:17, *etc.*) and the “Kingdom of God” (Mark. 1:15, *etc.*). In what is known as “the Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus called it “your [*i.e.*, the Father’s] kingdom” (Matt. 6:10). Jesus again called it the Father’s kingdom in Matthew 13:43. As well as calling it his Father’s kingdom, Jesus called it his own kingdom in Luke 22:30, and it is called “the kingdom of His dear Son” in Col. 1:13 (*KJV*). The reason both God and Christ are named as having the kingdom is apparent. In the Millennial Kingdom, Christ will rule with God’s authority, and in the final kingdom there will be two rulers (Rev. 21:22—22:1). From the above evidence, it is quite fitting and proper to call the future kingdom “the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Since it is so well attested that the kingdom will be the kingdom of God, a phrase well known in Scripture, there is no reason to remove “God” from Eph. 5:5 by grammatical juggling (the Granville Sharp Rule would make the word “God” a double reference to Christ and remove the Father from the verse), and every reason to see that He should be in the verse along with Jesus Christ.

Buzzard, pp. 130 and 131  
Norton, pp. 199-203

**Endnotes:**

1. Moulton-Howard-Turner, *Grammar*, Vol. 3, p. 181. Emphasis ours.
2. Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians* (American Unitarian Association, Boston, 10th ed., 1877), pp. 199-202.

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