

**Sharp's Rule and  
Antitrinitarian Theologies:**  
*A Bicentennial Defense of Granville  
Sharp's Argument for the Deity of Christ*

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## **Summary**

In 1798 Granville Sharp published a book setting forth six rules governing the use of the definite article (“the”) in the Greek New Testament. The first of these, known popularly as “Sharp’s rule,” has rightly been cited in support of understanding Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 to be calling Jesus “God.” The validity of Sharp’s rule, however, has often been disputed.

In the first part of this paper, I argue for the validity of Sharp’s rule, responding to all of the known objections and supposed counterexamples to the rule. Along the way he also critiques certain abuses of the rule. The second part of the paper discusses the claim that Sharp’s rule is inapplicable to Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 because of the use of proper names in those texts. The third and fourth parts examine Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 in their respective contexts. I explain why the contexts, as well as the grammatical structure, of these two texts support the conclusion that they do call Jesus “God.” The fifth and final part of the paper looks at each text in its context again and shows that Jesus is not being called “God” in the sense of an inferior deity, but is actually being identified as Yahweh or Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament.

Along the way, this paper not only defends the deity of Christ, but also specifically provides a refutation of key aspects of the biblical arguments used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and Oneness Pentecostals to defend their view of the person of Christ.

This paper, though written with the layperson in mind, is a somewhat technical treatment of the interpretation of these two verses of the Bible. A briefer and far less technical discussion can be found in Robert Bowman’s book *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 104-5.

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## Introduction

The second major tenet of the doctrine of the Trinity, after the belief in one God, is that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. But does the New Testament call Jesus “God”? And if it does call Jesus “God,” what does that mean? Whenever this question is discussed, priority is usually given to John 1:1. However, because this text has proved to be a center of considerable controversy and confusion even among biblical scholars,<sup>1</sup> we do well to examine other texts which call Jesus “God.”

Two other texts that often come up together in discussions of the deity of Christ are Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. When these texts are used to demonstrate that the New Testament calls Jesus “God,” appeal is usually made to a grammatical principle known as Sharp's rule. Those who appeal to this rule, however, sometimes do not define or qualify it properly, while those who deny that Christ is called God in these texts usually dismiss Sharp's rule without a fair hearing.

In this study it will be argued that Sharp's rule, properly defined, is relevant to the exegesis of these two texts. It will also be argued, however, that Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 must be regarded as calling Jesus “God” regardless of the validity of Sharp's rule.

## I. Sharp's Rule Reconsidered

In 1798, an English Christian and abolitionist named Granville Sharp published a work on the use of the definite article in the Greek New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In this work he set forth what has commonly been called Sharp's rule. Practically from the day the book was first published, even to this day, the rule has been criticized, and many scholars have concluded that the rule, while a useful generalization, does not hold in all cases. To what extent this is true must be carefully considered.

Furthermore, in recent years advocates of the antitrinitarian theologies taught by certain heretical sects have written about Sharp's rule. These authors have argued either that the rule *is* valid and actually supports their antitrinitarian interpretation of various texts, or that the rule is *not* valid and therefore cannot be used in support of the trinitarian understanding of such texts as Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. In this, the two-hundred-year anniversary of the first edition of Sharp's book setting forth his famous rule, we do well to reconsider the matter afresh.

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<sup>1</sup>The most recent scholarly study of John 1:1 is found in Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), especially 21-71, 310-13. See also Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 17-84. My own study, which appeared earlier and reaches the same conclusions about John 1:1, is somewhat less technical than Harris's.

<sup>2</sup>The full title of Sharp's work was *Remarks on the Use of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament, Containing Many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, from Passages Which Are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version*. It was first published in England in 1798; the first United States edition was in 1807 (Philadelphia: B. B. Hopkins).

## A. Defining Sharp's Rule

It should be noted that Sharp set forth not merely one rule but *six* governing the use of the definite article. Almost all of these rules have been accepted as valid except the first, which is the one that applies to Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. In this study, therefore, we shall be concerned only with the first rule, which shall be called simply "Sharp's rule."

Sharp's rule has been variously stated by different grammarians and theologians, and this may help to explain the confusion which has surrounded this issue. The definition of Sharp's rule that shall be defended here is as follows:

*In Greek, when two nouns of the same case are connected by kai ("and"), and the definite article appears before the first noun but not before the second, both nouns refer to the same person if the nouns are (1) personal, (2) singular, and (3) non-proper nouns, and if the nouns are (d) not normally paired semantically as denoting two persons.*

This definition is in most respects similar to the one given by Sharp himself, and even closer in wording to the definition offered recently the Lutheran scholar C. Kuehne.<sup>3</sup> Neither Sharp nor Kuehne, however, included the final qualification (d) regarding semantically "paired" nouns. More recently still, the Greek grammarian Daniel B. Wallace, whose doctoral dissertation was devoted to Sharp's rule, has defended a definition of the rule essentially identical to that of Kuehne.<sup>4</sup> In his recent textbook Wallace argues that the rule covers all article-noun-kai-noun (TSKS) expressions with three qualifications: "(1) neither is *impersonal*; (2) neither is *plural*; (3) neither is a *proper* name." In other words, "according to Sharp, the rule applied absolutely only with personal, singular, and non-proper nouns."<sup>5</sup> The definition I defend here includes these three qualifications and adds a fourth: if the nouns are normally semantically paired as denoting two persons, Sharp's rule normally does not apply.

One other possible qualification I would add – though it does not materially affect the argument of this paper – is that it is possible that Sharp's rule might not always apply to a series of three or more nouns in this construction. At least one textbook does state that "the rule could also be applied to a series of three or more,"<sup>6</sup> but even the way this statement is worded suggests that it would not necessarily apply to all such series. Still, with the other qualifications observed, there are no exceptions in the New Testament to the rule involving series of three or more nouns,

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<sup>3</sup>C. Kuehne, "The Greek Article and the Doctrine of Christ's Deity," *Journal of Theology*, Church of the Lutheran Confession, 13, 3 (Sept. 1973) 19-20, 26. Kuehne discussed the application of Sharp's rule to the deity of Christ in six issues of this journal, in Vol. 13, Nos. 3 and 4, and Vol. 14, Nos. 1-4 (Sept. 1973 - Dec. 1974).

<sup>4</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, "The Article with Multiple Substantives Connected by *Kai* in the New Testament: Semantics and Significance," Ph.D. diss. (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 272.

<sup>6</sup>James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winberg, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978), 70.

and there are examples of such series where it *does* apply. The qualification is mentioned here simply because there does not appear to be sufficient information to be dogmatic on the matter.

The four qualifications presented in the rule are neither arbitrary nor *ad hoc*. They are, rather, qualifications that flow naturally from an understanding of what Sharp's rule is about and the nature of the relationship between semantics and grammar. Let us consider the rationale for each of these four qualifications.

(1) Sharp's rule applies to *personal* nouns, not to abstract nouns. The point here is simply that Sharp's rule is concerned with constructions in which a single person is the referent. Abstract or impersonal nouns by definition are therefore not covered by Sharp's rule. In cases where abstract or impersonal nouns are used to refer to persons, it is probably reasonable to be cautious about assuming that Sharp's rule applies, although in many cases it may.

(2) Sharp's rule does not, strictly speaking, apply to plural nouns, but only to *singular* nouns. By their very nature plural nouns do not refer to a single person, whereas Sharp's rule refers specifically to constructions describing a single person using two different nouns.

(3) Sharp's rule applies to common personal nouns, and does *not* govern *proper names*. This distinction is critical, and often not understood. By "personal nouns" is meant nouns which are normally used to refer to persons, but which are not proper names. Personal nouns are words such as "king," "savior," "prophet," "teacher," and "brother." Proper names are words such as "Jesus," "Peter," "Paul," and "John."

The reason why the rule does not apply to proper names is that *proper names express a person's identity, not his function or relationship to other persons*. The distinction here can easily be misunderstood. A noun that expresses a person's function or relationship to other persons might in some cases refer unambiguously to one person. For example, the title "the President" can, in some cases, refer unambiguously to one particular man occupying the position of President of the United States. Even in such cases, though, the word "President" does not express the man's identity, but his position or function. Such nouns can be linked with other nouns descriptive of the same person's function, relationship, or status, whereas this cannot be done with proper names. For example, we could refer to Bill Clinton as "the President and Commander-in-Chief," but we could never refer to him as "the President and Bill Clinton." Thus, when either or both nouns is a proper name, the referents of the nouns will be unambiguously distinct and the Greek text may use or omit the definite article with no change in referents.

While this qualification is usually simple enough to apply, in some cases there may be uncertainty as to whether a noun is being used as a proper name. A few nouns, such as "God" and "Christ," arguably can sometimes function semantically as proper names, while at other times they can function as non-proper personal nouns. This turns out to be a crucial and much-debated question in the debate over the interpretation of both Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, and more will be said on this matter later in this study.

(4) Sharp himself was careful to exclude both plural nouns and proper names from his rule.<sup>7</sup> However, another qualification not noted by Sharp or his contemporary defenders needs to be added. Sharp's rule does not normally apply to texts in which the two nouns are semantically "paired" nouns that normally bear a reciprocal relationship denoting two distinct persons.

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<sup>7</sup>Kuehne, "Greek Article," 13, 3 (Sept. 1973) 21-22.

Suppose, for example, we were to find references in Greek to “the man and his wife” or “the mother and child” or “his brother and sister” or “our king and queen,” where in each case the phrase followed the construction article-noun-*kai*-noun. In each case two persons would be unambiguously meant because of the semantically “paired” nature of the nouns. This is not to impose a restriction on authors barring them from applying both nouns in such a pair to a single person. For example, a widow might speak of herself as forced by circumstances to be “both the father and mother” to her children. The grammar of the sentence in such cases would make this equation of the two descriptions with one person unambiguous. The point, then, is that Sharp's rule does not *normally* apply to texts linking two such nouns.

A couple of confusions about Sharp's rule ought to be addressed here. The reverse of Sharp's rule does not necessarily always follow. That is, if two personal, singular, non-proper nouns connected by *kai* refer to a single referent, it is not always necessary for the first noun to have the article and the second to lack it. For example, the two nouns may both have the article, particularly when the nouns are related explicitly by the grammar of the sentence to a single referent. “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:8) is an example of this construction. Somewhat more controversial, but still a useful example, is Thomas's statement to Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28), where both “Lord” and “God” have the definite article. That both nouns refer to Jesus is evident from the fact that John tells us that Thomas's entire statement was directed to Jesus (“Thomas answered and said *to him*,” v. 28a). In any case, John 20:28 as traditionally interpreted can hardly be cited as counterevidence to Sharp's rule – and neither can Sharp's rule be used to call the traditional interpretation into question.

A related point is that Sharp's rule does not imply that inserting the definite article in front of the second noun would necessarily always make the text refer unambiguously to two persons. For example, Luke 20:37 has one article governing the three occurrences of *theos* referring to the one Lord (“the God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob”). (This is one of those texts using a series of three nouns that clearly fits Sharp's rule.) Yet the parallel text in Matthew 22:32 has the definite article three times (“the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob”).<sup>8</sup> Obviously, as Greg Stafford (a Jehovah's Witness) points out, this change does not result in Matthew referring to three Gods while Luke refers to one.<sup>9</sup> But such an implication is not required by Sharp's rule, and to my knowledge biblical scholars defending Sharp's rule have not suggested that it was required. In some cases the text might refer unambiguously to one person, while in other cases it might refer unambiguously to two persons. Perhaps in some cases we may rightly decide that the text is ambiguous. What Sharp's rule as I have defined it here claims is that when the article-noun-*kai*-noun construction is used with two personal, singular, non-proper nouns, unless the grammar of the sentence or the semantic relationship of the two nouns explicitly rules it out, the two nouns have the same referent.

Finally, Sharp's rule is a “rule” in the descriptive sense, not in a prescriptive sense. It describes how the NT and other Greek writers of the period wrote, and appears to do so with high consistency, but it does not prohibit Greek writers from having used the article-noun-*kai*-

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<sup>8</sup>The parallel text in Mark 12:26 is textually uncertain, with some manuscripts inserting a second and third article (like Matthew) and other manuscripts having only the initial article (like Luke).

<sup>9</sup>Greg Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* (Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1998), 246-47.

noun construction with the specified kind of nouns to refer to two referents, if they wished. What Sharp's rule shows is that Greek *readers* would be expected to understand two nouns in such a construction to refer to the same person unless the author clearly indicated the contrary. For example, a writer could relate the two nouns in a grammatically unambiguous fashion to a plural pronoun or other plural antecedent (e.g., "We are . . ."). Thus, Sharp's rule puts the *burden of proof* on the exegete who maintains that a text fitting the parameters of the rule is nevertheless an exception to that rule. Moreover, that burden of proof must be discharged by appeal to grammatical or semantic factors, not a priori theological or philosophical presuppositions.

## B. Evidence for the Rule

That there are numerous texts in the New Testament where this rule applies is fairly easy to demonstrate. There are, first of all, over a dozen instances of the expression "the God and Father," where the terms "God" and "Father" clearly refer to one person, not two (Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 1:3; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:3; 5:20; Phil. 4:20; 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:11, 13; James 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 1:6). Because the translators of the King James Version rendered *tô theô kai patri autou* (word for word, "the God and Father of-him") in Revelation 1:6 too literally as "God and his Father," Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, came to the erroneous conclusion that God is not eternal, but has himself a Father that lived before him.<sup>10</sup> Nearly all modern translations correctly translate this phrase "his God and Father," in keeping both with Sharp's rule and the context. Note that the King James Version also uses the expression "God and our Father" (*tou theou kai patros hêmôn*, Gal. 1:4; *tô theô kai patri hemôn*, Phil. 4:20; 1 Thess. 1:3; *ho theos kai pater hemôn*, 1 Thess. 3:11) where modern translations uniformly have "our God and Father."<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in one place the KJV rendering makes the identity of the Father as God in this expression explicit: "God, even our Father" (*tou theou kai patros hêmôn*, 1 Thess. 3:13). Thus, Smith's interpretation is certainly in error.

An interesting text where Sharp's rule applies twice with reference to the same person is 2 Corinthians 1:3. Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father [*ho theos kai patêr*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father [*ho patêr*] of mercies and God [*kai theos*] of all comfort." Here Paul reverses his usual order "God and Father" to "Father and God," adding a descriptive expression to each noun ("of mercies," "of all comfort").

There are four texts in 2 Peter containing the phrase "the Lord and Savior" or some variation, each of which refers indisputably to one person, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). These texts will be important when we consider the interpretation of 2 Peter 1:1. Another text of significance for the doctrine of Christ is Jude 4, which speaks of those who deny "our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ" (*ton monon despotên kai kurion hêmôn Iesoun Christon*). Word for word this reads, "the only Master and Lord of us Jesus Christ."

James 3:9 says of the tongue that "with it we bless the Lord and Father." Although the title "Lord" is more commonly applied to the Son than it is to the Father in the New Testament,

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 473.

<sup>11</sup>The Greek in these expressions differ only in case (genitive, dative, or nominative).



translators and commentators are agreed that both titles refer to the same person as “the God and Father” (James 1:27).

Other examples include the following:

Mark 6:3	“the carpenter, the <i>son</i> of Mary and <i>brother</i> of James”
Luke 20:37	“the Lord the <i>God</i> of Abraham and <i>God</i> of Isaac and <i>God</i> of Jacob”
John 20:17	“my <i>Father</i> and your <i>Father</i> and my <i>God</i> and your <i>God</i> ”
Eph. 6:21	“Tychicus, the beloved <i>brother</i> and faithful <i>minister</i> in the Lord”
Col. 4:7	“Tychicus, the beloved <i>brother</i> and faithful <i>servant</i> and <i>fellow-slave</i> in the Lord”
1 Thess. 3:2	“Timothy, our <i>brother</i> and God's <i>servant</i> ”
1 Tim. 6:15	“the <i>King</i> of kings and <i>Lord</i> of lords”
Heb. 3:1	“the <i>apostle</i> and <i>high priest</i> of our confession, Jesus”
Heb. 12:2	“the <i>author</i> and <i>finisher</i> of faith”
1 Pet. 2:25	“the <i>Shepherd</i> and <i>Overseer</i> of your souls”
1 Pet. 5:1	“as the <i>fellow-elder</i> and <i>witness</i> of Christ's sufferings”
Rev. 1:9	“John, your <i>brother</i> and <i>fellow-partaker</i> ”

These, at least, ought to be noncontroversial examples of Sharp's rule. In addition, there are numerous texts using participles, adjectives as substantives, or a mix of different kinds of substantives, in which the rule also applies, and apparently none in the NT where it does not. In all, some 80 NT texts may be cited as fitting the rule, and none that do not, unless we count the debated texts in which Jesus may be called “God.”<sup>12</sup>

### C. Alleged Counterexamples

Given the qualifications to the rule specified by Sharp himself, all of which make perfectly good sense, Sharp's rule would appear to be inviolate, in the New Testament at least. Detailed studies have been done which also included passages from extracanonical literature; even these have failed to turn up exceptions to Sharp's rule when properly defined.<sup>13</sup> For the sake of illustration, a few examples ought to be given from among the many supposed counterexamples to Sharp's rule.

**Proverbs 24:21.** Notable is Proverbs 24:21 in the Septuagint, “Fear God, [my] son, and the king,” where “God” has the article and “king” does not. That is, word for word it reads, “Fear the God, [my] son, and king” (*phobou ton theon huie kai basileia*). (Complicating the sentence somewhat is the word *huie*, which literally means “son” but is used in the vocative, the case used in direct address, so that we would translate “O son” or “[my] son.”) There are at least three good explanations why this text is not a counterexample to Sharp's rule.

First, it may be that “God” is here treated as a proper name. This is the most probable explanation, as I shall shortly explain, even if there is some question about the word “God”

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<sup>12</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 274-76.

<sup>13</sup>Kuehne, “Greek Article,” 14, 2 (June 1974).

normally functioning as a proper name. Strangely, in his recent detailed study of Sharp's rule, Greg Stafford considers some four or five explanations for this text but does not discuss this simplest explanation.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the Greek translation here may reflect an overly literal rendering of the Hebrew text (Sharp's rule does not apply to Hebrew).<sup>15</sup> To this explanation Stafford has objected that the Septuagint, in Proverbs as well as elsewhere, frequently departed from the Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> Although Stafford is right about this general observation, it does not militate against the explanation. While the Septuagint frequently departs from the Hebrew, it does not do so always. In Proverbs 24:21 there is no denying that the Greek represents a literal, word-for-word rendering from the Hebrew, with the one interesting variation that it substitutes "God" for "Yahweh." The Hebrew reads, "Fear Yahweh, my son, and [the] king" (*y'ra' 'et yhv h b' nî va-melekh*). The name "Yahweh" is preceded by *'et*, which in Hebrew functions to indicate the direct object of the verb. Its nearest equivalent in Greek (as in English) is the definite article, which may explain its presence in the Septuagint translation. Except for the substitution of *theos* for *Yahweh*, the Greek text renders each word literally and in the same order (even keeping the direct address "[my] son" in the same awkward place). Moreover, the fact that in the Septuagint "God" is used as a substitute for "Yahweh" adds further confirmation that "God" is here used as a proper name. Even if "God" is normally not used as a proper name, when it is used as a substitute for the name "Yahweh" it very likely does function as a proper name.

Third, the text makes it grammatically unambiguous that two persons is meant in the second half of the verse: "Fear God, [my] son, and [the] king, and disobey *neither of them* [Greek, *meth' heterô autôn*]." Since the plural pronoun "them" (*autôn*) here must have as its antecedent two or more persons, the sentence as a whole makes it grammatically unambiguous that "God" and "king" refer to two distinct persons. It would be artificial in the extreme to define Sharp's rule in such a way that it would override an explicit grammatical indicator of two referents.

This text, then, cannot stand as a counterexample to Sharp's rule, despite claims to the contrary.<sup>17</sup> On the assumption that "God" is being treated as a proper name, the omission of the article before "king" has the effect of closely linking God and the king without identifying them. In context they are evidently united in a collective unity because the faithful Israelite cannot truly fear God without also fearing the king of Israel. Thus, the text does not equate or identify the king as God, but it does imply that the fear of God is for the faithful Israelite indistinguishable from the fear of the king.

**Matthew 17:1.** In Matthew 17:1, "Peter and James and John his brother" are obviously three separate individuals, even though only "Peter" has the article preceding. In this case two qualifications to Sharp's rule are relevant. First, it is certain that these are proper names, a

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<sup>14</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 224-26.

<sup>15</sup>This explanation is suggested but not developed in Kuehne, "Greek Article," 19.

<sup>16</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 225.

<sup>17</sup>*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures: With References* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1984), 833, 1581-1582, hereafter cited as *NWT* (1984).

consideration that is enough to render Sharp's rule inapplicable. Second, it is unknown whether Sharp's rule applies uniformly to cases of three nouns in sequence. Thus Robert Countess (who does argue for the general validity of the rule, and for its application to Titus 2:13) is certainly mistaken in thinking this text to be an exception to Sharp's rule.<sup>18</sup> The single article before "Peter" evidently serves to link the three men closely together as a collective unity, because they were the leading trio of the apostolic band.

**Acts 13:2, 50; 15:22.** Even where only two proper names joined with *kai* are governed by one definite article, Sharp's rule does not apply. For example, in Acts 13:50 and 15:22 the phrase "Paul and Barnabas" uses this construction, and likewise Acts 13:2 uses the construction in the phrase "Barnabas and Saul." These texts are not valid exceptions to the rule (contrary to the assertion of some) because the nouns are proper names.<sup>19</sup> The omission is evidently a stylistic variation, since in the same context Luke also refers to "Paul and Barnabas" or "Barnabas and Paul" using two definite articles (13:42, 43, 46; 15:2a) or no definite article at all (15:2b, 12, 29, 35). These texts illustrate the common observation that there are few or no hard and fast rules governing the definite article in Greek with proper nouns.

**Matthew 21:12.** In one of the most extensive studies of Titus 2:13 taking the view that it does not call Jesus God, Ezra Abbot gives Matthew 21:12 as a counterexample to Sharp's rule.<sup>20</sup> This text, however, uses two plural forms (participles functioning as substantives), "buyers and sellers"; and since plural forms do not come under Sharp's rule, this text also is no exception to Sharp's rule.

**Martyrdom of Polycarp 22:1.** Greg Stafford cites Polycarp speaking of "glory to the God and Father and [the] Holy Spirit" (*doxa tô theô kai patri kai hagiô pneumati*) as an exception to Sharp's rule. The best explanation is that "Holy Spirit" functioned as a proper name in Christian usage, making Sharp's rule inapplicable to this text. (It is possible, though debatable, that this was also the case for the expression "the God and Father.") For Sharp's rule to be inapplicable it is necessary only that one of the two nouns joined by *kai* be a proper name. (Recall our example of "the President and Bill Clinton," a phrase that refers to two persons even though only one of the nouns is a proper name.) Thus, even if "the God and Father" was not being used in *Polycarp* as a proper name, Sharp's rule would not apply because of the use of "Holy Spirit" as such.

One other thing about this passage in *Polycarp* should be observed. In context Polycarp is being quoted as speaking of giving glory "to Jesus Christ," along with the Father and Holy Spirit. Given that this is the context, there really can be no doubt but that Polycarp is referring to the Holy Spirit as customarily distinguished from the Father (as well as from the Son, Jesus Christ).

**Clement of Alexandria, Paedagogus 3:12.** Another alleged counterexample is that found in Clement of Alexandria where he speaks of giving praise "to the only Father and Son" (*tô*

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<sup>18</sup>Robert H. Countess, *The Jehovah's Witnesses' New Testament: A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1982), 69.

<sup>19</sup>Note the citation of these verses as exceptions to Sharp's rule in *NWT* (1984), 1581.

<sup>20</sup>Ezra Abbot, *The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel and Other Critical Essays* (Boston, 1888), 452, cited in *NWT* (1984), 1582.

*monô patri kai huiô*). As with the previous text, Wallace considers and rejects the explanation that the nouns are used as proper names. Here Wallace is on firmer ground, since “Father” and “Son” would normally be common, personal nouns (like “brother” or “mother”). The adjective “only” would also appear to give the nouns the connotation of personal titles rather than proper names. While it is just barely possible that, despite these considerations, Clement used the nouns as proper names, a better explanation should be sought.

Here is a case where it is important to recognize the fourth qualification we made to Sharp's rule. Where the two nouns are semantically related as normally descriptive of two persons in a reciprocal or otherwise immediately recognizable relationship (such as “the husband and wife” or “the winner and runner-up”), Sharp's rule does not apply unless the grammar of the sentence requires that one person is meant. This explanation naturally applies to Clement's reference to “the Father and Son.” (It does not apply, though, to Polycarp's reference to “the Father and Holy Spirit,” because the two terms are not semantically paired.)

If the explanations given here for the texts from Polycarp and Clement are correct, there is no need to resort to Wallace's theory that the texts are examples of lapses into modalistic or monarchian language on the part of the authors.<sup>21</sup> Stafford rightly objects to this theory, since there is no other evidence of monarchian language in either writing.<sup>22</sup> The point here is not that Clement could not have used the titles “Father” and “Son” in a monarchian fashion. He certainly could have, if he wished. However, if he wanted to be clearly understood to teach monarchianism he would have had to make the identity of the Father and the Son explicit, something he did not do in this or any other text. For example, had Clement written, “Jesus is the Father and Son,” or quoted Jesus as saying, “I am the Father and Son,” or even, “Let us give praise to Jesus, the Father and Son,” we would have no trouble noting the monarchian identification of the Father with the Son. But Clement does not use such language, and in context the two-person interpretation is semantically unambiguous.

Finally, something should be said about the explanation favored by Stafford for all of the exceptions considered here (other than Matthew 21:12, which involves plural nouns). Stafford seizes on Kuehne's explanation of the apparent exception in Proverbs 24:21 LXX that “the two nouns, ‘God’ and ‘king,’ are so distinct that no confusion could possibly have arisen through the omission of the second article.”<sup>23</sup> Oddly, at first Stafford says that this explanation “is not entirely convincing” because in Psalms (though not in Proverbs) God is called “king” some twenty times. But then he decides that this explanation is really best after all. Stafford regards Kuehne's explanation as providing a basis to deny that the rule applies in the debated christological texts. He generalizes Kuehne's explanation into a principle that Sharp's rule does not apply in any text where the persons to whom two nouns refer are understood to be two different persons. In

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<sup>21</sup>Wallace, “Article with Multiple Substantives,” 268-70. *Monarchianism* refers to theories popular in the late second and well into the third century that regarded God as a single ruler (hence “monarch”) and as one person. *Modalism* is a particular form of monarchianism that viewed the three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as three modes of God's being (often, but not necessarily, three *successive* modes).

<sup>22</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 232-33.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 225, 226, citing Kuehne, “Greek Article,” 19.

Stafford's own words, "the *prima facie* meaning of the text in its context" may override Sharp's rule.<sup>24</sup>

Although Stafford is correct in observing that Kuehne and others have used this principle to explain (away) apparent exceptions to Sharp's rule, the evidence we have provided undermines the legitimacy of Stafford's principle. In no text considered here is it necessary to appeal to theological preunderstandings in order to know what is meant. In Proverbs 24:21 LXX, for example, we saw that the text is grammatically unambiguous that two persons are meant because the two nouns "God" and "king" are antecedents for the plural pronoun "them." We also saw that the LXX substituted "God" for "Yahweh," making it likely that "God" was being treated as a proper name.

In cases in which proper names (such as "Barnabas" or "Holy Spirit") or "paired" nouns (such as "Father and Son") are used in the construction, these noun pairs clearly are to be taken as referring to two persons unless the grammar of the sentence requires otherwise. But that is not on the basis of a general principle that readers may be trusted to recognize when two persons are meant, but on the basis of objective semantic factors. It is, in fact, arguing in a circle to conclude that Paul or Peter was referring to two persons rather than one because their readers would already know that Christ was a separate being from God.

It is also begging the question to reason that because elsewhere in Titus or 2 Peter the author distinguishes Jesus Christ from "God," his readers will understand that he is not then identifying Jesus Christ as "God" in texts exhibiting Sharp's construction. The cornerstone of orthodox, trinitarian theology is precisely this phenomenon of Scripture in which the Son Jesus Christ is both distinguished from God and identified as God (as in John 1:1b-c; Heb. 1:8-9).

## D. Abuses of Sharp's Rule

Numerous grammarians and biblical scholars have stated that Sharp's rule is not hard and fast, and that exceptions to it must be admitted to exist. The fact is that no exceptions to it *as correctly defined* have yet been produced. Of course, exceptions probably do exist in the form of grammatical errors; but it would be arguing in a vicious circle to explain away New Testament texts that appear to call Jesus "God" by attributing grammatical mistakes to those texts!

Biblical scholars are absolutely right to object to the excessively broad and simplistic definition of Sharp's rule that has often been the basis for faulty interpretations. In popular works (and even in some scholarly ones) it is commonly supposed that any two Greek nouns connected by *kai* and governed by a single article refer to a single object or idea. We will consider a couple of examples of interpretive abuses arising from this popular misunderstanding.

**The "Pastor-Teacher."** Perhaps the best-known example of this abuse of the rule is the interpretation of Ephesians 4:11 which construes "pastors and teachers" to refer to a single office of "pastor-teacher." As has already been noted, Sharp's rule does not strictly apply to plural nouns. In context here the two nouns for "pastors" and "teachers" are governed by one definite article probably because these two ministries are tied to the local church (unlike apostles, prophets, and evangelists). This means that Paul most likely envisioned pastors and teachers as

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<sup>24</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 225, 226.

two distinct ministries in the church, not one. These two ministries may be held by overlapping groups of people, but the ministries are distinct. Thus, while some pastors may also be gifted teachers, not all will be, and not all teachers are pastors. The practical implication of this conclusion is that Christians often expect too much of their pastors when they expect them to be gifted leaders of the flock *and* gifted teachers of the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

***Jesus as God the Father.*** Another, more serious abuse of Sharp's rule occurs in certain publications of the United Pentecostal Church, the largest Oneness denomination in the world. Oneness is an antitrinitarian doctrine similar to monarchianism, and teaches that the Father and the Son are simply the divine and human natures of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> While most antitrinitarians try to deny the validity of Sharp's rule to escape the deity of Christ in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, some Oneness writers have tried to use Sharp's rule to buttress their claim that Jesus is not only God, but is in fact *God the Father*.

Among the many passages of Scripture which distinguish between the Father and the Son as two persons and so contradict Oneness doctrine are the salutations in the New Testament epistles, the most common form of which runs as follows: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; Philemon 3; see also Eph. 6:23; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 John 3). To circumvent the conclusion that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are two persons, at least two Oneness writers appeal to the absence of the definite article before the expression "Lord Jesus Christ," and cite the passages which speak of "the God and Father" as parallel examples.<sup>27</sup>

This argument overlooks the fact that in all but one of these texts the definite article is omitted before the *first* noun also. In other words, in all but one of these texts there is no definite article at all and Sharp's rule has no possible application. The lone exception is 2 Peter 1:2, "of God and of Jesus our Lord" (*tou theou kai Iêsou tou kuriou hêmôn*). Since "God" may be used as a proper name (see further below) and in any case "Jesus" is certainly a proper name, this text does not fit the requirements of Sharp's rule, either. Indeed, Sharp's *fifth* rule states that when two nouns are connected by *kai* and neither of them are preceded by the definite article, they generally refer to two distinct persons or things. Here again, exceptions may occasionally occur in texts where two singular nouns are explicitly and unambiguously applied to one person (e.g., "God has made *him* both Lord and Christ," Acts 2:36).<sup>28</sup> Since no such reason exists for

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<sup>25</sup>My conclusion here differs somewhat from Wallace, who sees Ephesians 4:11 as referring to pastors as a subset of teachers, i.e., "pastors and [other] teachers," so that "all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors" (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 284).

<sup>26</sup>For an analysis and refutation of the Oneness doctrine, see Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); for a brief treatment, see Robert M. Bowman, Jr., "Oneness Pentecostalism and the Trinity: A Biblical Critique," *Forward*, 8, 3 (Fall 1985) 22-27.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Brent Graves, *The God of Two Testaments* (n.p., 1984), 50-54; David K. Bernard, *The Oneness of God*, Series in Pentecostal Theology 1 (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983), 207-211. Bernard appears to be dependent on Graves for this argument.

<sup>28</sup>Kuehne, "Greek Article," 13, 3 (Sept. 1973) 24-25.

identifying the salutations as exceptions, it may be concluded that they are intended to distinguish between the Father and Christ as two different persons.

Particularly devastating to the Oneness understanding of the salutations is 2 John 3, which speaks of blessings “from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father” (*para theou patros kai para Iêsou christou tou huiou tou patros*). The unusual feature of this salutation is that the word “from” (*para*) is repeated before “Jesus Christ.” One Oneness writer claimed that *none* of the salutations did this, recognizing that if they did it would imply two persons; but he makes no mention of this text.<sup>29</sup> Also striking is that the first person, “God,” is described as “the Father,” while the second person, “Jesus Christ,” is called “the Son of the Father”; the language of Father and Son here as elsewhere clearly denotes two persons.

## E. “Hard” and “Soft” Senses of Sharp’s Rule

Returning to Sharp’s (first) rule, it may be helpful to distinguish a “hard” sense to Sharp’s rule in contrast to a “soft” sense. In the hard sense, two singular personal nouns linked by *kai* and governed by a single article refer to one person. In the soft sense, two nouns in the same construction that do not fit the qualifications of the “hard” rule may in some cases describe one and the same thing, but more typically name two things linked together as a single unit for the purposes of the immediate context. Thus, the expression “those who hunger and thirst” (*hoi peinôntes kai dipsôntes*, Matt. 5:6) refers to one group, since those who hunger are also those who thirst. On the other hand, the expression “the chief priests and scribes” (*tous archiereis kai grammateis*, Matt. 2:4) refers to two classes of men considered as a single group in that context.

In the first edition of his book *Exegetical Fallacies*, D. A. Carson correctly argued for such a “soft” sense in which “the two substantives are grouped together to function in some respect as a single unity.” In support, Carson gave as examples 1 Thessalonians 2:12 (“into his kingdom and glory”), Philippians 1:7 (“the defense and confirmation of the gospel”), Acts 17:18 (“the Epicureans and Stoics”), and the various occurrences of the phrase “the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:1, 6, 11, 12; Acts 23:7).<sup>30</sup> Where Carson’s analysis was incomplete was in his assertion that “only this ‘softer’ form of the Sharp rule really holds up,”<sup>31</sup> as the foregoing discussion has given evidence that a “harder” form of Sharp’s rule also holds up when properly qualified.<sup>32</sup> In the recent second edition of the book, Carson has rewritten his discussion of Sharp’s rule in recognition of this fact. He notes that fallacies occur by “formulating the Granville

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<sup>29</sup>Graves, *God of Two Testaments*, 51.

<sup>30</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 84-86.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>32</sup>Carson himself seemed to have recognized this earlier when he wrote, “Sharp himself, it must be remembered, did not claim that his rule applied to proper names or to the plural number.” D. A. Carson, “The Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982) 167 n. 24.

Sharp rule with less care than Granville Sharp did,” specifically pointing out that Sharp had “excluded plural nouns from his rule (not to mention other restrictions).”<sup>33</sup>

Murray Harris also argues for only the soft form of the rule, which he defines as follows: “With two (or more) coordinated nouns, the repetition of the article distinguishes, while a single article associates the notions in a conceptual unity (or sometimes an identity).”<sup>34</sup> This is a wonderfully complete summary of the softer version of Sharp’s “rule” that actually integrates as many as four of Sharp’s rules. However, Harris does not consider whether the “hard” version of Sharp’s first rule might be defensible if properly and narrowly enough defined.<sup>35</sup>

In the first edition of his *Exegetical Fallacies*, Carson also argued that two substantives joined by *kai* which both have a definite article do not necessarily refer to two distinct entities.<sup>36</sup> Here Carson was actually challenging the uniform validity of Sharp’s *sixth* rule, according to which two or more substantives connected by *kai* refer to distinct persons if they each have the definite article preceding, *unless* the text explicitly applies them to a single person.<sup>37</sup> In Carson’s example text, Revelation 2:26, the two substantives are explicitly applied to one person: “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds, I shall give to him (*autô*) authority over the nations.” In texts where such application is not made, the substantives refer to distinct persons, as in Matthew 28:19 (“the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”).

## F. Reasons for Scholarly Doubts about Sharp’s Rule

Perhaps a major reason for the poor reception of Sharp’s work, particularly in the century following its publication, is that it specifically faulted the King James Version in several places, even referring in the title to “Passages Which Are Wrongly Translated in the Common English Version.”<sup>38</sup> The complete dominance of the KJV for three centuries in English-speaking countries made any work that was at all critical of the KJV instantly suspect. If this is part of the reason for the reluctance of scholars to endorse Sharp’s rule, it is indeed ironic, since it is sometimes claimed that the belief that the Bible teaches the deity of Christ is based on an uncritical acceptance of the KJV. As a matter of fact, as Carson has noted,<sup>39</sup> many modern translations support the deity of Christ as much as or even more than the KJV, particularly in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1.

Another reason for the reluctance of scholars to endorse Sharp’s rule fully is the influence of the nineteenth-century Greek grammarian G. B. Winer. Over sixty years ago A. T. Robertson lamented Winer’s influence in this matter. After noting Winer’s “anti-Trinitarian prejudice” and

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<sup>33</sup>D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 81.

<sup>34</sup>Harris, *Jesus as God*, 307-8.

<sup>35</sup>Harris does acknowledge in a footnote Sharp’s narrow version of the first rule; *ibid.*, 308 n. 42.

<sup>36</sup>Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 1984 ed., 86.

<sup>37</sup>See Kuehne, “Greek Article,” 25.

<sup>38</sup>See n. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 62-64.



carefully examining Winer's arguments concerning Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, Robertson concluded:

It is plain, therefore, that Winer has exerted a pernicious influence, from the grammatical standpoint, on the interpretation of 2 Pet. 1:1 and Tit. 2:13. Scholars who believed in the Deity of Christ have not wished to claim too much and to fly in the face of Winer, the great grammarian, for three generations. But Winer did not make out a sound case against Sharp's principle as applied to 2 Pet. 1:1 and Tit. 2:13. Sharp stands vindicated after all the dust has settled. We must let these passages mean what they want to mean regardless of our theories about the theology of the writers.<sup>40</sup>

## II. Sharp's Rule and Proper Names

One of the qualifying statements that was made regarding Sharp's rule is that it does not apply to proper names. It was also pointed out that it is at least arguable that certain biblical titles, notably "God" and "Christ," may have been used as proper names. If, then, it could be demonstrated that in the texts in question "God" was being used as a proper name, it would then be possible to argue that Sharp's rule does not apply in those texts, and that they do not call Jesus God. Furthermore, it has recently been argued that "(our) Savior Jesus Christ" in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 functions as the equivalent of a proper name, thus rendering Sharp's rule inapplicable. If, on the other hand, neither "God" nor "Savior" is being used as part of a proper name in those texts, then we should interpret them as indeed calling Jesus "God."

### A. What Is a Proper Name?

Usually we have no difficulty in recognizing whether a noun is a proper name or not. Examples of non-proper nouns include king, mother, brother, president, teacher, friend, captain, and apostle. (Even where these are capitalized, as is often the case with King, President, or Captain, they still are not proper names.) Examples of proper names include David, Margaret, John, Bill, Helen, Craig, Jim, and Paul. "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" is clearly a proper name, as is Jesus. In addition to these one-word names, there are compound proper names using more than one noun. In modern languages these typically involve a first and last name (and even a middle name), such as George Washington, Granville Sharp, or Helen Keller. However, compound proper names may include titles or descriptions that have become part of the person's "name," such as Catherine the Great, Ivan the Terrible, President Bill Clinton, or General Douglas MacArthur. It should be noted, though, that the titles or descriptions themselves are *not* proper names. That is, expressions such as "the Great," "the Terrible," "President," or "General" are not proper names, although they may function as parts of compound proper names.

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<sup>40</sup>A. T. Robertson, "The Greek Article and the Deity of Christ," *Expositor* (London), Series VIII, 21 (1921) 187; reprinted in Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [reprint of 1923 ed.]), 66. This is not an *ad hominem* argument; Robertson gives reasons for setting aside Winer's position. See further Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 272-73.

So far we have been doing little more than giving examples of proper names and of personal nouns that are not proper names. What is needed, though, is a definition of “proper name” and a method of determining in all cases what is or is not a proper name. As stated earlier, I would define a proper name as a noun (or compound noun expression) that expresses a person's *identity*, as distinguished from a noun that expresses that person's function, relationship, or other characteristics *about* that person. A proper name, particularly a compound name, might *include* information about the person, such as a title, but the expression itself functions to identify, not to describe, the person.

Now, if this definition is correct, why would proper names be excluded from Sharp's rule? The answer is that proper names function, *regardless of context*, as *self-contained designations* for the persons to whom they refer. For example, the noun “Paul” in any context – a sentence, a list, or a name badge – has as its semantic function to identify a person. Non-proper personal nouns, on the other hand, do not have this distinct semantic function. For example, the noun “brother” is descriptive of a kind of relationship and can be used to refer to a specific person only by placing that word in a linguistic context where that is made explicit (as in the sentence, “My brother is coming over for dinner”). Because a proper name functions as a self-contained designation, when it is linked with another personal noun by “and” the two expressions will always be construed as referring to two persons unless the sentence is constructed to make one referent explicit.

Thus, a text referring to “John and Paul” is immediately understood to be referring to two persons, not one, even though a person might have both names (e.g., John Paul II). The same is true whether two proper names are used, or one proper name, and regardless of which comes first. For example, “the President and Bill Clinton” and “Bill Clinton and the President” both refer clearly to two persons, and *must* do so unless the sentence is structured grammatically to make a reference to one person explicit.

By “self-contained,” it should be noted, I do not mean that a proper name cannot be *expanded*. For example, the proper name “Paul” can be expanded to “Paul Revere” or to “the Apostle Paul”; the proper name “Bill” can be expanded to “Bill Clinton” or “President Bill Clinton,” or to “Bill Bennett” or “Bill Bailey.” What I mean by “self-contained” is that a proper name by itself *designates* a person (even though it does so with greater or lesser specificity depending on how common it is and the context in which it appears). A non-proper personal noun, on the other hand, *describes* a person but does not designate a person except in specific linguistic contexts.

One test, then, of whether a noun or compound noun expression is a proper name can be developed precisely from the *general* kind of construction we are considering – that is, two personal nouns connected by “and.” (The definition of a proper name is a semantic question that cuts across different languages. For this reason, at this point we are not concerned specifically with Greek nouns. Nor for the point at hand does it matter whether the noun is preceded by a definite article. All we are seeking here is to establish what constitutes a proper name and how we would go about recognizing one reliably.) According to this test, a noun is not a proper name if it can be linked with the word “and” to another noun expression and both refer to the same person. For example, we can refer to Bill Clinton as “the President and Commander-in-Chief” because neither of these designations is a proper name expressing his identity, but is rather a

personal noun that describes Bill Clinton. On the other hand, we could not refer to “Bill Clinton and the President” (where “President” designates the office held by Bill Clinton) because “Bill Clinton” is a proper name.

A couple of other approaches to determining whether a noun or noun phrase is a proper name, or functions as a proper name equivalent, should be considered. Daniel Wallace states that a proper name differs from a non-proper personal noun in that a proper name cannot be pluralized, whereas other personal nouns can be pluralized.<sup>41</sup> For example, one can pluralize “king” to “kings,” or “President” to “Presidents,” but one cannot pluralize “Alexander” or “Bill Clinton.” This test would not appear to be entirely reliable. For example, last names in modern languages obviously serve as proper names, yet they can and regularly are pluralized. For example, “Clinton” is a proper name referring to Bill, and “the Clintons” is a plural designation for Bill and Hillary Clinton (or for the two of them and their daughter Chelsea). So while this test may help in some cases to identify certain nouns as proper names, it cannot be used to prove that a noun is *not* a proper name.

The other approach to this question to which we must give some attention is that taken by the Jehovah's Witness writer Greg Stafford. In a post to an Internet discussion board responding to an earlier version of this paper, Stafford argued that a noun or noun phrase can function as a proper name equivalent if the author and readers would understand it as clearly referring to a single individual. That is, according to Stafford, a noun or noun phrase functions as a proper name equivalent if it has the “restrictive force” of a proper name. Stafford points out that some descriptive expressions can actually refer more definitely and restrictively to a single individual than a proper name. Stafford illustrates the point with an example borrowed from linguist John Lyons: while there may be several women in history who have borne the name “Margaret Thatcher,” there is and can be only one woman designated by the description “the first woman prime minister of England.”<sup>42</sup>

Stafford is right in saying that a descriptive expression can refer more definitively to an individual than a proper name. However, that very fact shows that definitiveness or singularity of reference is not the criterion of what constitutes a proper name. There probably have been throughout history millions of men by now named “John” (perhaps millions of men living right now!), but only one man who can be described as “the author of the Book of Revelation.” Yet the noun “John” is a proper name and the description “the author of the Book of Revelation” is neither a proper name nor the semantic or grammatical equivalent of one. Only one man in history has or can bear the name “Pope John Paul II,” but this restrictive referential significance is not what makes the designation a proper name. What makes it a proper name is that it is a *designation of identity*, not a description of function or characteristics. A designation of identity, or proper name, may be more or less restrictive in delimiting the precise individual being identified, but that has no bearing on the *semantic function* of the expression in a sentence (which is what Sharp's rule is all about). It is just as meaningless to refer to one individual as “Bill and

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<sup>41</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 272 n. 42.

<sup>42</sup>Greg Stafford, “Trinitarian Apologetics,” posted to The Watchtower Review discussion board. The illustration is taken from John Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), page 301.

the President” as it is to refer to him as “William Jefferson Clinton and the President,” even though “Bill” is an extremely common name that can *refer* to thousands of different persons. Thus, having only one possible referent does not make an expression a proper name and an exception to Sharp's rule. Nor need an expression have more than one possible referent to fit the parameters of Sharp's rule. In a sentence referring to the apostle Paul as “the *apostle* to the Gentiles and *author* of thirteen New Testament epistles,” the second expression can refer to one person alone, yet it would easily fit in a sentence using the construction governed by Sharp's rule.

## B. Is “God” a Proper Name?

In light of the foregoing discussion of the meaning and identification of proper names, what shall we say about the noun “God”? Were we to apply Wallace's rule, we would, as Wallace himself does, have to conclude that “God” cannot be regarded as a proper name because it can be pluralized as “Gods” or “gods” (that is, the Greek *theos* can be pluralized as *theoi*).<sup>43</sup> While this fact about *theos* can be cited to show that it *can* be used as a non-proper personal noun, I do not think it proves that *theos* is *always* so used.

According to Greg Stafford, “there are problems with seeing *theos*, *by itself*, as the equivalent of a proper name,” but when it is used with “accompanying terms” that make it refer unambiguously to a specific person that full expression then has the force of a proper name. Stafford's main example is “God the Father” (*theos ho patêr*), in which the qualifying expression “the Father” restricts the term “God” to a specific person.<sup>44</sup> As explained above, the problem here is that the semantic significance of a proper name is not that it is restricted in its referent to a single specific person, but that it functions as a self-contained designation rather than a description. I agree that “God the Father” is a proper name, but not for the reason Stafford gives. The expression “God the Father” appears to function in the New Testament as a self-contained designation for the person. Thus, one never finds this designation coupled with another expression referring to the Father, and it is hard to see how it could be. For example, to speak of “worshipping the Creator and God the Father” would imply that God the Father was not the Creator; the language virtually demands two referents be inferred. Compare this example with such language as “worshipping the Creator and Sustainer” or “worshipping the Creator and Father of us all,” where one referent is easily and clearly understood.

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<sup>43</sup>Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 272 n. 42.

<sup>44</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 235 n. 52. As evidence that *theos* alone does not function as a proper name, Stafford refers in this footnote to the textually uncertain 2 Thessalonians 2:16, which speaks of “our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father” (*ho kurios hêmôn Iêsous Christos kai [ho] theos ho patêr hêmôn*). I do not see how a text that does not have *theos* standing alone can be cited as evidence about its usage when standing alone! As indicated, some manuscripts have the definite article before *theos* and others do not. Stafford reasons, “If *ho theos* is the true reading, it is difficult to understand its articularity, being in the second position, if indeed *theos* is here the equivalent of a proper name.” Here Stafford betrays a misunderstanding of Sharp's rule. The reverse of the qualification regarding proper names and Sharp's (first) rule is not itself a rule: that is, if two nouns are joined by *kai* and either or both of them is a proper name, they might still both have the definite article. Thus, there would be nothing grammatically odd about the text if *ho theos* were the true reading and at the same time was using *theos* as a proper name.

I would suggest that the unqualified *theos* can sometimes be used as a proper name, but it is not always so used. The unqualified noun *theos*, sometimes with the definite article, sometimes without, is often used in the New Testament in a wide variety of grammatical constructs as a simple designation. By that I mean that *theos* or *ho theos* is used to refer to God with no emphasis or focus on the descriptive or functional meaning of the word *theos*. When we encounter the word *theos* or “God” in such contexts as the following, the word appears to function solely to identify the person to whom the author is referring, not to describe him:

“God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones” (Matt. 3:9)

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8)

“So what God has joined together, let no one divide” (Matt. 19:6)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven” (Rom. 1:18)

“Paul, a servant of God” (Titus 1:1)

These are just a few examples chosen at random; very many of the numerous occurrences of *theos* in the New Testament fit this usage.

On the other hand, it is really indisputable that *theos* is often used as a term descriptive of God's relationship or status or position in relation to us, his creatures, and functions semantically as a non-proper personal noun. The proof of this is that *theos* can be coupled with other nouns (using *kai*) and the two nouns function descriptively. Note especially the following examples:

“the God of Abraham and [the] God of Isaac and [the] God of Jacob” (Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37)

“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; etc.)

“the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3b)

“one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:6)

“You are worthy, our Lord and God” (Rev. 4:11)<sup>45</sup>

Some of these texts happen to follow the Sharp's rule construction (Luke 20:37; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3ab; Eph. 4:6), but others do not (Matt. 22:32; Rev. 4:11). The point being made here is not that these verses are grammatically parallel to Titus 2:13 or 2 Peter 1:1 (some are as far as Sharp's rule is concerned, but others are not). Rather, the point is that in all of these verses *theos* clearly is not being used as a proper name.

To my knowledge there are no inflexible rules for determining when “God” is being used as a proper name rather than as a non-proper personal noun. However, there is a rule of thumb that frequently can be used to determine that it is *not* being used as a proper name. Whenever “God” is qualified by some adjectival word or phrase, it is being used as a personal noun, not as a proper name. For example, we do not normally use adjectives with proper names in English. When we do — for instance, “Ivan the Terrible” or “my Bill” — it is generally to distinguish the

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<sup>45</sup>Lit., “the Lord and the God of us” (*ho kurios kai ho theos hêmôn*). This example may seem problematic for Jehovah's Witnesses, whose NWT renders the phrase “Jehovah, even our God.” Even in the NWT, though, “God” in this verse clearly functions as a non-proper noun that is *descriptive* of Jehovah.

persons named from other persons bearing the same name. In these cases, though, the noun in question is one that is *never* used as a common personal noun. That is, the nouns “Ivan” and “Bill” are unambiguously proper names whenever they are used of persons, regardless of the context, whereas “God” can be used as a proper name or a personal noun depending on context. Thus, such expressions as “my God,” “our God,” “the true God,” “the living God,” “the Almighty God,” “the God of Abraham,” and so forth, without a doubt are using “God” as a personal noun. This is so, because with such adjectival modifiers the noun “God” takes on the semantic character of a relational or functional description rather than a simple designation of identity.

The accuracy of this rule of thumb is confirmed when we consider that such expressions can always be combined with additional descriptions and the two linked with “and” to refer to a single referent. We have already given some examples, such as “the God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob,” or “our God and Father,” or “my Lord and my God.” We could easily find or construct examples for other such expressions, such as “the Almighty God and Everlasting Creator,” or “the true God and Giver of life.”

Of course, the question that interests us is whether any of the biblical texts that appear to call Jesus “God” on the basis of Sharp’s rule actually use one or more nouns as proper names. We turn to this question next.

## **B. Dubious Applications of Sharp’s Rule to Christological Texts**

In any complete discussion of Sharp’s rule, there are five other Pauline texts besides Titus 2:13 that must be considered. These texts contain the following expressions:

“of the Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5)  
*toú Christou kai theou*

“of our God and Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:12)  
*toú theou hēmôn kai kuriou Iêsou Christou*

“of the God and Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:1)  
*toú theou kai Christou Iêsou*

“of the God who makes all things alive and Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 6:13).  
*toú theou tou zôogonountos ta panta kai Christou Iêsou*

Scholars rarely agree that the passages in 1 and 2 Timothy actually call Jesus “God,” whereas some evangelical scholars have maintained that Jesus is called “God” in Ephesians 5:5 and 2 Thessalonians 1:12.

It is at this point that realizing that “God” might be used as a proper name is relevant. Four of these five texts have “God” standing without any adjectival modifiers at all; thus, it is possible that in these four cases “God” is used as a proper name. The exception is 2 Thessalonians 1:12, where the text has “our God.” And it is just barely possible that “Lord” is to be taken with “our God” as a second personal noun, so that the text is understood, “of our-God-and-Lord, Jesus Christ.” However, the noun phrase “Lord Jesus Christ” was a standard

compound proper name for Jesus, and it is quite possible to construe it as such here as well. In Paul's writings alone the compound name "Lord Jesus Christ" appears some 18 times.<sup>46</sup> Closely related to this compound name is the formulation "our Lord Jesus Christ," which appears in Paul some 25 times.<sup>47</sup> To these we should probably also add the equivalent expressions "Jesus Christ our Lord" and "Christ Jesus our Lord," which appear in Paul's writings some 11 times.<sup>48</sup> However, in these three forms "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus" is the actual compound name, and "our Lord" is a descriptive expression in close apposition to the compound name (since the adjectival pronoun "our" gives the noun "Lord" the character of a description).<sup>49</sup> But these related formulations do show that the compound name "Lord Jesus Christ" would be easily recognized as such. Most likely, then, the expression in 2 Thessalonians 1:12 should be read, "of our God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

None of these five texts, then, can be definitely said to call Jesus "God," and probably none of them should be taken that way.

## C. Proper Names in Titus 2:13 or 2 Peter 1:1?

The situation is rather different, however, with Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1. Titus 2:13 speaks literally of "the great God and Savior of-us Jesus Christ" and 2 Peter 1:1 of "our God and Savior Jesus Christ." Stafford argues that "the great God" was recognizable as a proper name for the Father, while "our Savior Jesus Christ" functioned as a compound name for the Son (on the analogy of "our Lord Jesus Christ"). He thus seeks to demonstrate that neither text is actually covered by Sharp's rule. We shall consider both of these supposed proper names in turn.

### 1. Is "the Great God" a Proper Name?

To show that "the great God" functioned as a proper name for the Father, Stafford cites expressions from the following Old Testament references as they appear in the Septuagint.<sup>50</sup> Since in some cases Stafford does not give enough of the text to show the significance of the words he quoted, we present the texts here:

"the Lord your God among you [is] a great and awesome God" (Deut. 7:21)  
*kurios ho theos sou en soi theos megas kai krataios*

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<sup>46</sup>Rom. 1:7; 13:14; 1 Cor. 1:3; 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:14; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 3:20; 4:23; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1, 2, 12; 3:6, 12; Philem. 3, 25.

<sup>47</sup>Rom. 5:1, 11; 15:6, 30; 1 Cor. 1:8, 10; 2 Cor. 1:3; 8:9; Gal. 6:14, 18; Eph. 1:3, 17; 5:20; 6:24; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:9, 23, 28; 2 Thess. 2:1, 14, 16; 3:18; 1 Tim. 6:3, 14. Additional uses for both this and the previous form will be found in the majority of Greek NT manuscripts, but they are of disputed originality.

<sup>48</sup>"Jesus Christ our Lord": Rom. 1:4; 5:21; 7:25; 1 Cor. 1:9; "Christ Jesus our Lord": Rom. 6:23; 8:39; 1 Cor. 15:31; Eph. 3:11; 1 Tim. 1:2, 12; 2 Tim. 1:2; compare "Christ Jesus my Lord," Phil. 3:8.

<sup>49</sup>The point may be illustrated by noting the semantic change in the word *President* in the following expressions: "President Bill Clinton"; "our President Bill Clinton"; "Bill Clinton our President."

<sup>50</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 239 n. 70.

“the Lord . . . the great and strong and fearsome God” (Deut. 10:17)  
*ho kurios . . . ho theos ho megas kai ischuros kai ho phoberos*

“our God is greater than all the gods” (2 Chron. 2:4)  
*megas ho theos hêmôn para pantas tous theous*

“the Lord, the God of heaven, the strong, great, and fearsome” (Neh. 1:5)  
*ho theos tou ouranou ho ischuros ho megas kai ho phoberos*

“the Lord, the great God” (Neh. 8:6)  
*kurion ton theon ton megan*

“our God, the strong, great, awesome, and fearsome” (Neh. 9:32)  
*ho theos hêmôn ho ischuros ho megas ho krataios kai ho phoberos*

“What god is as great as our God” (Ps. 76:14b LXX; cf. 77:13 Heb.)  
*tis theos megas hôs ho theos hêmôn*

“For you are great . . . you alone are the great God” (Ps.85:10)  
*hoti megas ei su . . . su ei ho theos monos ho megas*

“the great God” (Dan. 2:45)  
*ho theos ho megas*

“the Lord, the great God” (Dan. 9:4)  
*kurios ho theos ho megas*

There are severe deficiencies in Stafford's argument for the expression “the great God” in Titus as a proper name for the Father (or for Yahweh).

1. This expression is actually rare even in the texts Stafford cites; we should properly include only four texts (Neh. 8:6; Ps. 85:10; Dan. 2:45; 9:4). In other texts the word “great” is attached to “God” but as part of a more elaborate description. Psalm 76:14 LXX should not be included at all, since *theos megas* does not mean “great God” but is rather asking rhetorically what “god” is great like our God! The rarity of the expression “the great God” confirms that it is a description, not a self-contained designation.

2. In all of the texts cited by Stafford here, not one uses the expression “the great God” as a proper name. That is, in each case we are dealing with a description praising God in worship or commending God's greatness to others, not a designation serving as a proper name. In many of these texts there is a noun functioning as a proper name, but it is “Lord” (*kurios*), substituting for



the Hebrew divine name Yahweh.<sup>51</sup> Even where the name “Lord” is not in the immediate context, not once does “the great God” function as a proper name. The only text where such a usage is even debatable is Daniel 2:45. Here again the expression is used as a description commending God’s greatness to another. Specifically, Daniel is commending his God’s greatness to Nebuchadnezzar on the basis of his having enabled Daniel to interpret the king’s dream. Thus, the expression “the great God” is not a designation used to identify the one who revealed the meaning of the dream.

3. Examples of this “proper name” appearing in Paul’s writings, or even the New Testament, are conspicuously absent from Stafford’s discussion. There is a simple reason for this: Titus 2:13 is the *only* New Testament text using the expression “great God.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, except for Titus 2:13 God is never called “great” (*megas*) in the New Testament, even though the word appears in the New Testament nearly 200 times. There is, then, no evidence at all in the Old or New Testament that the expression “the great God” functioned as a proper name.

When these considerations are taken together with the presumption that the noun “God” modified by an adjective such as “great” is being used as a personal noun, the only reasonable conclusion is that “the great God” in Titus 2:13 is not functioning as a proper name.

## 2. Is “Our Savior Jesus Christ” a Proper Name?

To show that Sharp’s rule does not apply to Titus 2:13 or 2 Peter 1:1, Stafford argues that “(our) Savior Jesus Christ” could function as a proper name on the analogy of “(our) Lord Jesus Christ.” There are some serious difficulties for this view.

First, in order for this view to work the words “Savior Jesus Christ” in 2 Peter 1:1 must be treated as a self-contained expression without the adjectival pronoun “our” (since grammatically “our” must go with “God” alone if two persons are meant). However, that expression is unprecedented in the New Testament. Never once is the title “Savior” used in a self-contained compound proper name without an adjectival pronoun. Note the following:

“our Savior Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 1:10)  
*toû sôtêros hêmôn Christou Iêsou*

“Christ Jesus our Savior” (Titus 1:4)  
*Christou Iêsou toû sôtêros hêmôn*

“ . . . our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13)  
*. . . sôtêros hêmôn Christou Iêsou*

“Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:6)

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<sup>51</sup>According to Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Septuagint originally contained the name *YHWH* where extant copies now have *kurios*. I reject this claim, but it would only strengthen my point here, which is that “great God” in these texts is a description of someone who has already been identified with a proper name.

<sup>52</sup>The expression does appear in Rev. 19:17 in the KJV, “the supper of the great God.” However, the phrase is *to deipnon to mega tou theou*, correctly translated “the great supper of God.”

*Iêsou Christou tou sôtêros hêmôn*

“our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11; 3:18)  
*tou kuriou hêmôn kai sôtêros Iêsou Christou*

In all of these texts the title “Savior” is qualified by the adjectival pronoun “our” (indirectly even in 2 Peter 1:11 and 3:18). The one passage where “Savior” is linked to the name “Jesus Christ” without an adjectival pronoun is 2 Peter 2:20. Here, though, “Savior Jesus Christ” does not stand alone as a self-contained expression, but rather “the Lord and Savior” is set in close apposition to “Jesus Christ”:

“the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 2:20)  
*tou kuriou kai sôtêros Iêsou Christou*

That “the Lord and Savior” is used by Peter as a semantic unit is confirmed a few sentences later when Peter uses it again, this time without bothering to add the compound name “Jesus Christ” in apposition: “the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2).

In addition to the texts cited above, there are seven texts in which the title “Savior” is joined to the noun “God,” and in all seven cases an adjectival pronoun (“my” or “our”) is used to qualify Savior. Thus we find “God my Savior” (*tô theô tô sôtêri mou*, Luke 1:47), “God our Savior” (*theou sôtêros hêmôn*, 1 Tim. 1:1), “our Savior God” (*tou sôtêros hêmôn theou*, 1 Tim. 2:3; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4), and “the only God our Savior” (*monô theô sôtêri hêmôn*, Jude 25). These texts add further confirmation that in New Testament usage “Savior” is never used as part of a compound proper name.

Second, there is a significant disanalogy between the compound proper name “Lord Jesus Christ” and the supposed compound proper name “Savior Jesus Christ.” The title “Lord” itself (*kuriôs*) was often used in the New Testament as a proper name or as part of compound names taking various other forms. Thus, the New Testament writers often refer to Jesus simply as “Lord” (e.g., John 4:1), but also as “Lord Jesus” (e.g., Acts 1:21) and even “Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24), as well as the full form “Lord Jesus Christ.” By contrast, we never find the New Testament writers referring to Jesus (or to God) as simply “Savior,” nor do we find references to “Savior Jesus” or “Savior Christ.” In short, there is no evidence that the New Testament ever treats “Savior,” as it treats “Lord,” as a proper name or as part of a proper name.

Third, the three references in 2 Peter to “(our) Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (*tou kuriou [hêmôn] kai sôtêros Iêsou Christou*, 2 Pet. 1:11; 2:20; 3:18) clearly disprove that “Savior Jesus Christ” was recognizable for Peter or his readers as a proper name. Again, we have shown that a proper name is to be defined as a noun or noun phrase that functions as a self-contained designation of identity. This means that a proper name cannot be joined by “and” to another description of that same person without incoherence unless the sentence makes clear that it is using two designations for one person. To illustrate again, one could not refer to the Father as “Jehovah and Creator” because “Jehovah” is a proper name that semantically distinguishes itself here from “Creator” as having a separate referent. Nor, to use an illustration closer to the case in

point, could one refer coherently to Jesus as “the Lord and Jesus Christ.” But in these 2 Peter texts, then, if “Savior Jesus Christ” were a compound proper name, then it would be distinguished as having a different referent from the one called “(our) Lord.” Since that is clearly not the case (as all of the antitrinitarian theologies we are considering here agree), these texts show that “Savior Jesus Christ” is not a compound proper name. Rather, “Savior” is being used (with other qualifying and accompanying words) in apposition to the compound proper name “Jesus Christ.”

In Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1, then, we have two singular personal nouns of the same case, “God” and “Savior” (*theos* and *sôtêr*), linked by *kai*, with the definite article appearing before the first noun but not before the second. Neither of these two nouns can be construed in either text as a proper name or as part of a compound proper name. Both of these texts, then, are evidently perfect examples of the construction governed by Sharp's rule.

The case for interpreting these two texts — Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 — as calling Jesus “God” does not rest merely on the grammatical principle of Sharp's rule. There is much contextual evidence for this conclusion as well, particularly in Titus 2:13.

### III. Jesus as “God” in Titus 2:13

In Titus 2:13 Paul speaks of “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Some translations, however, render the last part of this sentence “of the great God and of our Savior Jesus Christ,” thus eliminating from this text the idea that Jesus Christ is God. We have already examined the grammatical reason for thinking that Titus 2:13 does call Jesus God. We must now consider theological and exegetical factors relating to this question.

#### A. Theological Question-Begging

The usual reason for rejecting the view that in Titus 2:13 Jesus is called God has nothing to do with grammar or context. Rather, the interpreter presupposes that Paul<sup>53</sup> could not have called Jesus “God.” Thus G. B. Winer denied that Titus 2:13 calls Jesus *theos* “for reasons which lie in the doctrinal system of Paul.”<sup>54</sup> Such an approach, however, is subjective and circular. The proper method is to interpret the text as it is, and then determine from this text along with other texts what Paul's “doctrinal system” really was. Besides, the claim that Paul does not call Jesus *theos* in any other passage is refuted if Romans 9:5 be taken in its most natural sense.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Most liberal scholars deny the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles; these scholars sometimes argue not only that could Paul not have called Jesus “God,” but also that neither could any of his disciples. That this assertion amounts to nothing more than circular reasoning should be obvious. In any case, the question of the authorship of Titus need not detain us. For a thorough defense of Paul's authorship, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

<sup>54</sup>G. B. Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, trans. J. Henry Thayer (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1897), 130, cited in Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 244.

<sup>55</sup>See especially Bruce M. Metzger, “The Punctuation of Rom. 9:5,” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley, in honor of C. F. D. Moule (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 95-112.

Admittedly, Paul rarely calls Jesus *theos*. However, his “doctrinal system” exalts Jesus as God in a variety of other ways, perhaps most notably equating Jesus as “Lord” (*kurios*) with the “Lord” (*Yahweh*) of the Old Testament (e.g., Rom. 10:9-13; Phil. 2:9-11).<sup>56</sup> It is a mistake to think that the case for interpreting Paul as teaching the full deity of Christ rests solely on one or two verses that happen to call Jesus “God.”

Another form of this argument is Ezra Abbot's. He insists that the interpretation that makes “the great God” the Father rather than Jesus Christ “is imperatively demanded by a regard to Paul's use of language, unless we arbitrarily assume here a single exception to a usage of which we have more than 500 examples.”<sup>57</sup> What this means is nothing more than that, because Paul uses “God” over 500 times to refer to God the Father,<sup>58</sup> it is arbitrary to assume a single exception in Titus 2:13. Again, this argument ignores the evidence of Romans 9:5. It also errs logically, in assuming (arbitrarily!) that Paul could not have made an exceptional use of the word *theos*. It is the grammatical construction and the context, not some arbitrary whim, that is the basis for understanding Titus 2:13 to be calling Jesus “God.”

Yet another, more sophisticated form of the argument comes from Joachim Jeremias, who contends that the title “the great God” was too “firmly rooted in late Judaism” as a designation of God to have been given to Jesus.<sup>59</sup> Again, this assumes that the New Testament writers did not believe that Jesus *was* God.

I grant that if Titus 2:13 calls Jesus “God,” this is unusual in Pauline language. However, it is not unprecedented (Rom. 9:5), and most of the antitrinitarians who deny that Jesus is here called “God” are quick to allow that in some sense Jesus might be properly called “God.” The rarity of this title being applied by Paul to Jesus might be urged as placing some burden of proof on the exegete to show that it is so used here. But it is illegitimate to make the burden inordinate or to negate grammatical and contextual arguments in support of that interpretation.

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<sup>56</sup>Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 103, 108-9; *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Why They Read the Bible the Way They Do* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 120-21.

<sup>57</sup>Ezra Abbot, “On the Construction of Titus ii.13,” *Journal of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* (1882), 11-12, cited in Nelson A. Herle, Jr., *The Trinity Doctrine Examined in the Light of History and the Bible* (unpublished manuscript), 66. Herle is a Jehovah's Witness who has written and debated extensively against the doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>58</sup>The number 500 is actually inflated, since in most cases Paul neither specifies that “God” refers to the Father nor distinguishes Jesus Christ from the one he calls “God.” That Paul often does use the word “God” for the Father specifically is not here denied, but the number 500 really begs the question of whether Paul always means to refer to the Father alone when he uses the word “God.”

<sup>59</sup>Joachim Jeremias, cited in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 82.

## B. The Options

The last half of Titus 2:13 has been exegeted in various ways, including the following:<sup>60</sup>

- A. “the appearing of the glory of the great God [=the Father] and (the appearing) of our Savior, Jesus Christ”
- B. “the appearing of the glory of the great God and [the glory of] our Savior, Jesus Christ”
- C. “the glorious appearing of the great God and [of] our Savior, Jesus Christ”
- D. “the appearing of [him who is] the Glory of the great God, namely [which Glory is] our Savior, Jesus Christ”
- E. “the appearing of [him who is] the Glory of our great God and Savior [=the Father], [which Glory is] Jesus Christ”
- F. “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”
- G. “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”

From these various interpretations of Titus 2:13, several exegetical questions can be derived, the most important of which are the following.

- (1) Do “God” and “Savior” refer to two persons (A, B, C, D) or one (E, F, G)?
- (2) Is “Jesus Christ” in apposition to (that is, does it correspond grammatically with) “our Savior” (A, B, C, D), “glory” (E), or “our great God and Savior” (F, G)?
- (3) Is “the appearing” an appearing of (the glory of) God and Jesus (A, B, C), Jesus as “the Glory” of God (D, E), or of Jesus as God (F, G)?

Although the choices may appear bewildering, there are several clues in the context which will narrow the choices quickly.

## C. The Exegetical Evidence

The first and most important contextual clue is to be found in the expression “our Savior” (*sôtêros hêmôn*). This expression occurs six times in Titus, three times with reference to God (1:3; 2:10; 3:4), and evidently three times with reference to Christ (1:4; 2:13; 3:6). Three times in Titus, then, Christ is called “our Savior” immediately following a reference to God as “our Savior.” To argue that in 2:13 “our Savior” is not “Jesus Christ” (as does view “E”) violates the evident pattern that can be seen in 1:3-4 and 3:4-6, where “our Savior, Jesus Christ” clearly makes Jesus Christ the Savior. View “E,” then, may be eliminated as highly unlikely.

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<sup>60</sup>Each of these interpretations is discussed in detail in Harris, *Jesus as God*, 174-85, to which the reader is referred for further details.

**Table 1. Interpretations of Titus 2:13**

Proposed Interpretation	“God” and “Savior”: One Person or Two?	“Jesus Christ”: How Identified?	Who or What Appears?	Evidence Against
A. “the appearing of the glory of the great God [=the Father] and (the appearing) of our Savior, Jesus Christ”	Two	“our Savior”	(a) God’s glory; (b) Jesus	(1) Sharp’s rule (2) 2:13 the only one of six texts in Titus where “our Savior” lacks the article (1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6), confirming that “our Savior” is identical to “the great God” (3) Paul always uses “appearing” of Jesus alone (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8)
B. “the appearing of the glory of the great God and [the glory of] our Savior, Jesus Christ” (ASV, NAB)	Two	“our Savior”	(a) God’s glory; (b) Jesus’ glory	
C. “the glorious appearing of the great God and [of] our Savior, Jesus Christ” (KJV)	Two	“our Savior”	(a) God; (b) Jesus	
D. “the appearing of [him who is] the Glory of the great God, namely [which Glory is] our Savior, Jesus Christ”	Two	“our Savior”	Jesus (“the Glory”)	(1) Sharp’s rule (2) 2:13 the only one of six texts in Titus where “our Savior” lacks the article (1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6) (3) “The appearing of the glory” may be a Hebraism for “the glorious appearing”
E. “the appearing of [him who is] the Glory of our great God and Savior [=the Father], [which Glory is] Jesus Christ”	One	“the glory” (of our great God and Savior, i.e., of the Father)	Jesus (“the Glory”)	The expression “our Savior” in Titus 1:4 and 3:6 refers to Jesus
F. “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (NIV)	One	“our great God and Savior”	Jesus (God, Savior)	
G. “the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (RSV, NEB, NASB, etc.)	One	“our great God and Savior”	Jesus’ glory (God, Savior)	“The appearing of the glory” may be a Hebraism for “the glorious appearing” (as in F)

Another important clue is that the definite article *tou* is used with *sôtêros hêmôn* five of the six times that the expression occurs in Titus, the only exception being Titus 2:13. The simplest explanation for this exception is that the article before *theou* (“of God”) governs *sôtêros hêmôn* as well, which is what we should expect based on Sharp’s rule. It would appear, then, that those interpreters are mistaken who have argued that the omission of the article before *sôtêros* may be explained by the “general neglect of the article” in the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>61</sup> This piece of

<sup>61</sup>*Expositor’s Greek Testament*, IV:195, cited in Nelson A. Herle, Jr., *The Trinity Doctrine Examined*, 65.

evidence weighs heavily against views A, B, C, and D. The only way around this bit of evidence is to argue that “our Savior Jesus Christ” lacks the definite article because it is functioning as a compound proper name.<sup>62</sup> As we have seen, this claim cannot be substantiated from the New Testament usage.

The use of the word *epiphaneia* (“appearing,” “manifestation”) constitutes another piece of evidence that must be considered. This word is used by Paul six times (five times in the Pastorals), always with reference to Christ (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13), unless one counts Titus 2:13 as the lone exception. Of course, such an exception might be possible, but there is additional evidence that this text is no exception. 2 Timothy 1:9-10 makes reference to the “grace” (*charin*) that appeared “through the appearing [*epiphaneias*] of our Savior, Christ Jesus [*tou sôtêros hêmôn christou Iêsou*].” This statement closely parallels Paul’s words in Titus 2:11-13, where after speaking of the appearance of grace, he tells us that Christians await the “appearing of . . . our Savior, Jesus Christ,” using the same words as found in 2 Timothy 1:9-10.

It is therefore practically certain that Paul uses the term *epiphaneia* in Titus 2:13 with the same meaning as he gives it in his five other uses of the term. This means that it is beside the point to argue, as some have, that it is not impossible for Titus 2:13 to be speaking of a “double epiphany” of the glory of the Father and the Son, based on such texts as Luke 9:26.<sup>63</sup> This argument is problematic for at least two reasons.

First, assuming the premise is true that the New Testament elsewhere speaks of a double epiphany, the most that this argument could prove would be that if Titus 2:13 refers to a double appearance it would not be an isolated instance in the Bible. The fact is, however, that Paul always used the specific word *epiphaneia* of Christ alone, and there is no reason to make Titus 2:13 an exception. The question is not, what Paul could have said, or how Paul could have used the word *epiphaneia*. Of course, Paul *could* have spoken of the appearing of the Father’s glory. But the question is what Paul *did* say and what he did mean. In the light of Paul’s actual usage, especially in the parallel passage in 2 Timothy 1:9-10, we conclude that Paul used the word *epiphaneia* always with reference to the appearing of Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup>

Second, the argument from Luke 9:26 and parallel passages in the Gospels is itself flawed. These passages do not speak of the appearing, manifestation, coming, or revelation of the Father or of the glory of the Father. For example, what Luke 9:26 speaks of is the coming of Jesus Christ *in* his glory and in the glory of the Father and the angels. (Is this a multiple epiphany, since it speaks not only of Christ and the Father but also of the angels?) Neither this nor any other New Testament passage can be used to establish a precedent for the idea of a double epiphany.

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<sup>62</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 240-42.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 242-43.

<sup>64</sup>We are speaking here only of the noun *epiphaneia*. Paul uses the verb *epiphainô* twice to speak of God’s saving grace or love as having “appeared” (Tit. 2:11; 3:4). Elsewhere the verb is used in the New Testament only twice, neither text of particular relevance here (Luke 1:79; Acts 27:20). In short, no New Testament writer ever applies the noun or verb form to an appearing of God the Father, and none applies the noun to anything other than the concrete appearing of the person of Jesus Christ, unless Titus 2:13 is the lone exception.

Yet another bit of evidence that the two nouns *theos* and *sôtêr* are intended to be taken as referring to a single subject is the fact that a parallel construction is used earlier in the same verse,<sup>65</sup> and there the two nouns refer to a single subject. Paul writes that we are awaiting “the blessed hope and appearing of the glory” (*tên makarian elpida kai epiphaneian tês doxês*, Tit. 2:13a). Here the “hope” is precisely the future “appearing” for which Christians eagerly wait. Now, of course this is not strictly speaking an exemplar of Sharp’s first rule, since the two nouns are abstract nouns, not personal nouns. For abstract nouns the “softer” rule applies: the two nouns may refer to a single subject, or they may refer to two subjects that are treated together for some reason. Here, the two nouns refer to a single subject. Given that Paul has just used this article-adjective-noun-*kai*-noun-genitive construction in this way in the first half of verse 13, it would be most peculiar if the same construction were employed using personal nouns and yet the nouns referred to distinct subjects. Below we set out the two halves of verse 13 out in parallel form to make this point clearer.<sup>66</sup>

<i>prosdechomenoi</i>	<i>tên</i>	<i>makarian elpida</i>	<i>kai</i>	<i>epiphaneian tês doxês</i>			
awaiting	the	blessed hope	and	appearing	of the	glory	
	<i>tou megalou theou</i>	<i>kai sôtêros</i>	<i>hêmôn</i>	<i>Iêsou Christou</i>			
	of the great God	and Savior	our	Jesus Christ			

Next, the natural connection and identity that would be made by Paul’s readers between the two nouns *theos* and *sôtêr* further strengthens the case for the identity of their referent. In 18 out of the 22 times<sup>67</sup> that *sôtêr* is used in the Old Testament Septuagint, it refers to the Lord God (i.e., Yahweh), and in all but one of these texts the noun *sôtêr* is directly linked with the noun *theos*.<sup>68</sup> Even more telling are the contexts in which the two nouns are linked. 14 out of the 18 texts referring to God as Savior are in Psalms and Isaiah, the two books that are most heavily cited in the New Testament as prophetic of the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ. If, as has

<sup>65</sup>Pointed out, e.g., by Harris, *Jesus as God*, 183; Andrew Y. Lau, *Manifest in Flesh: The Epiphany Christology of the Pastoral Epistles*, WUNT 2/86 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 244.

<sup>66</sup>While the question is not essential to our purposes here, I would suggest that the parallel between the two halves of the verse provides some evidence for the view that *tês doxês* is used as an adjectival expression modifying *epiphaneian* (just as *hêmôn* modifies *sôtêros*). Thus, the view that we should construe Paul to be speaking of “the glorious appearing,” rather than “the appearing of the glory,” looks a little more likely in view of this bit of evidence.

<sup>67</sup>The few exceptions refer to the Israelite judges prior to the monarchy (Judg. 3:9, 15; cf. 12:3; also Neh. 9:27). It is illegitimate to compare the use of *sôtêr* for Jesus to its use in reference to the judges in order to avoid it having connotations of deity. The judges were merely human, military deliverers; Jesus is a person of heavenly origin and unique relationship to God, and who came to bring eternal, spiritual salvation.

<sup>68</sup>Deut. 32:15; 1 Sam. 10:19; Ps. 23:5 [Heb., 24:5]; 24:5 [25:5]; 26:1, 9 [27:1, 9]; 61:3, 7 [62:2, 6]; 64:6 [65:5]; 78:9 [79:9]; 94:1 [95:1]; Isa. 12:2; 17:10; 45:15, 21; 62:11; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 3:18. See further below for more on these passages.



been argued, the expression *theos kai sôtêr* or variations of that expression were commonly used by both Jews and pagans in the first century, that would only underscore the point.<sup>69</sup> Because the two terms *theos* and *sôtêr* were so commonly linked in biblical usage, as well as in the general culture, readers encountering the terms linked grammatically in a way easily taken as referring to a single subject would naturally be expected to construe the terms in that way. A modern-day illustration may help. Because the titles “President” and “Commander-in-Chief” are so regularly used in American discourse as titles for the same individual, anyone encountering a reference to “the President and Commander-in-Chief” would construe them as having the same referent unless the grammar of the sentence in some way ruled that out. Stafford misses the point, then, when he complains that “we must not arbitrarily assume that just because the two titles ‘God’ and ‘Savior’ are used together in such close proximity that they *ipso facto* apply to one person.”<sup>70</sup> It is not their mere “close proximity,” but their linkage in a construction that, at the very least, was easily construed as applying the two titles to one person, that leads us to that conclusion. There is nothing arbitrary about the argument: Sharp’s rule, combined with the natural linkage of the two titles, establishes a strong presumption in favor of the two titles applying to the same person. If anything, it is arbitrary to assume otherwise.

Grammatically and contextually, then, there is incontrovertible evidence against the interpretations labeled A through E above, and in support of the interpretation (either F or G above) that in Titus 2:13 Jesus is called “our great God and Savior.” Even if Sharp’s rule were completely unknown, a careful examination of the language used in its context would leave no other exegetically defensible interpretation.

#### IV. Jesus as “God” in 2 Peter 1:1

The claim is often made that in the case of 2 Peter 1:1 there is one very important contextual clue indicating that Jesus Christ is not being called “God.” That clue is found in the very next verse, which speaks of the “knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet. 1:2). It is undeniable that in 1:2 “God” and “Jesus our Lord” are two different persons, for the reasons given earlier in answer to the Oneness misuse of Sharp’s rule. The fact that “God” has the definite article while “Jesus” does not is to be explained by recognizing that Sharp’s rule does not apply to texts using proper names. (“Jesus” is indisputably a proper name, and “God” may be as well.) Therefore, the fact that 1:2 speaks of two persons cannot be counted against Sharp’s rule. But does not this distinction between God and Jesus in verse 2 prove that they must also be distinguished in verse one? Can it not be maintained that 1:2 somehow serves to clarify 1:1 by showing that the two are distinct?

The answer to this question is decidedly “no.” If Sharp’s rule is valid — and the evidence clearly supports it — then 1:1 does say that Jesus is God; and if 1:2 is meant to say that Jesus is *not* God, then 1:2 does not “clarify” 1:1, it *contradicts* it. Since it would be highly arbitrary to assume that Peter would contradict himself in the space of a single sentence (not to mention the

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<sup>69</sup>Harris, *Jesus as God*, 178-79. Unlike Harris, though, I would prefer to focus on the Old Testament background as primary in illuminating Paul’s use of language, not first-century pagan terminology.

<sup>70</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 242.

fact that positing contradiction in Scripture is unthinkable for a biblical Christian), some other understanding of 1:1-2 must be sought.

It would be better, therefore, to view 1:2 as adding the additional information that not only is Jesus Christ our God and Savior, but he is a second person distinct from the One commonly spoken of as “God,” namely, God the Father. Thus, in 2 Peter 1:2 “God” would mean specifically the person of God the Father, while in 1:1 “our God and Savior” would mean the person of “God the Son,” as he is called in trinitarian language. Thus, 2 Peter 1:1 rules out any “Arian” doctrine of Christ (e.g., the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ view), while 1:2 rules out any “modalist” doctrine of Christ (e.g., the Oneness view).

As a further insight, it has been pointed out that in 1:2 Peter gives his salutation, which uses the same stylized formula found in Paul’s letters. In each case, the writer wishes “grace and peace” to his readers, from the two persons of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (see Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; etc.). This fact suggests that in 1:2 Peter simply follows the usual formula with its reference to the two persons of the Father and the Son, whereas in 1:1 he writes more freely and takes the opportunity to refer to Christ with the more exalted title *theos*.<sup>71</sup>

That Jesus is being called “God” in 2 Peter 1:1 is confirmed by four parallel expressions applied to Jesus in 2 Peter: “our Lord and Savior” in three texts (1:11; 2:20; 3:18), and “the Lord and Savior” once (3:2).<sup>72</sup> There can be no question but that these texts follow Sharp’s rule perfectly, and that the expression “Lord and Savior” is to be applied to one person, Jesus Christ. When, then, we find that Peter uses precisely the same construction in 1:1, with the simple substitution of “God” for “Lord,” it becomes obvious that he wishes “our God and Savior” to be applied to Christ, just as “our Lord and Savior” applies to him later in the epistle.

Ernst Käsemann attempted to turn this evidence on its head by arguing that the use of *theos* in 1:1, rather than *kurios* (“Lord”), is meant to distinguish this text from the others as speaking of two persons rather than one.<sup>73</sup> Stafford makes the same argument, asking why Peter would call Jesus “God” in 1:1 but “Lord” in the other verses.<sup>74</sup> But this argument ignores the fact that “God” and “Lord” were both divine titles in Greek (and indeed in Hebrew and Aramaic as well), so that their use in the expression “our Lord/God and Savior” is precisely parallel. As Bauckham points out, “there is no reason why variations on the stereotyped formula should not be used.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 168. Stafford tries to argue that the usual dual reference to the Father and the Son in the New Testament epistolary salutations confirms the interpretation of 1:1 as referring to two persons, “our God” and “Savior Jesus Christ”; Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 246. But this argument misses the fact that such a dual reference comes in 1:2, in the salutation proper.

<sup>72</sup>There is significant textual evidence for “Lord and Savior” instead of “our Lord and Savior” in 2:20; the variation does not affect the argument presented here.

<sup>73</sup>E. Käsemann, cited in *ibid*.

<sup>74</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 245.

<sup>75</sup>Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 168.

In a variation on the preceding argument, Stafford argues that since Peter never calls Jesus “God” unless we count 2 Peter 1:1, while he calls the Father “God” 45 times (excluding 2 Peter 1:1), it is most likely that his readers would understand that “God” referred to the Father. This is really the same type of argument we encountered concerning Paul’s usage: since he uses the word “God” some 500 times where it does not refer to Jesus, it is ruled *a priori* unlikely that it refers to Jesus in Titus 2:13. The argument really begs the question. Moreover, most of these 45 occurrences in Peter’s epistles do not unambiguously refer to the Father in distinction from the Son. Only about 14 of the 46 occurrences of *theos* in Peter refer unambiguously to the Father (1 Pet. 1:2, 3, 21 [twice]; 2:4, 5; 3:18, 21, 22; 4:11 [twice]; 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:2, 17).

Still, it must be admitted that Peter’s use of *theos* explicitly as a title for Jesus is comparatively rare. But again, as in Titus 2:13, that does not make it impossible. If there is strong grammatical and syntactical reason to believe that 2 Peter 1:1 is an exception, then it should be accepted as such.

## V. What “God” is Jesus?

Faced with the evidence that in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 Jesus Christ is called God, some antitrinitarians, while denying that such is the case, argue that it doesn’t matter even if it is true. Even if Jesus is called God in these verses, they say, it doesn’t mean he is the one Almighty God, but only a great god. Greg Stafford, for example, writes, “It would be another qualified reference to Jesus as *theos*, with the understanding that Jesus has one who is God to him.”<sup>76</sup> Stafford, like all Jehovah’s Witnesses, assumes that because Paul and Peter elsewhere speak of the Father as Jesus’ God (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3), in Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 they *cannot* mean that Jesus is himself the one true God, Jehovah.

### A. The Antitrinitarian Alternatives

In reply to this claim we must first point out that the argument based on references to the Father as the God of Jesus really begs the question. That is, antitrinitarians assume that if the Father is Jesus’ God and yet Jesus is also called God, one of two conclusions *must* be drawn. (1) Jesus is a different God from the Father, i.e., they comprise two separate and different Gods. This is the explanation given by Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. (2) Jesus is the same God as the Father because somehow Jesus *is* the Father. This is the explanation given by Oneness Pentecostals. None of these antitrinitarians even considers the possibility of a third explanation: (3) Jesus is the same God as the Father, and yet somehow Jesus is not himself the Father. This explanation is assumed to be impossible, generally without even mentioning it, nearly always without any consideration or debate.

The second point to be made is that both of the antitrinitarian solutions to the problem mentioned above have insuperable biblical difficulties.

(1) The plurality of Gods explanation founders on the simple fact that the Bible repeatedly asserts that there is only one God (Deut. 4:35, 39; 32:39; 2 Sam. 22:32; Isa. 37:20; 43:10; 44:6-8;

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<sup>76</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 247.

45:5, 14, 21-22; 46:9; Jer. 10:10; John 17:3; Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2:5; James 2:19; 1 John 5:20; Jude 25). It says this in just about every way that the Hebrew and Greek languages permit. The biblical passages cited here use three different Hebrew words for God (the singular *el* and *eloah* as well as the intensive plural form *elohim*) as well as the singular Greek *theos*. They not only contain the simple expressions “one God” or “only God” but also make such assertions as “there is no other God.” Attempts to circumvent this plain, explicit, and repeated teaching of Scripture are unsound, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>77</sup>

(2) The Oneness explanation that Jesus is the Father likewise encounters insurmountable problems, which we may only summarize here. We have already mentioned the salutations, where the Father and Jesus are routinely distinguished (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; etc.; especially 2 John 3). The Gospel of John contains abundant evidence that the Father and Son are distinct persons. The testimony of Jesus and the Father satisfies the Law's requirement of two witnesses (John 5:31-32; 8:16-18). The Father sent the Son (John 3:16-17; 1 John 4:10); the Father and the Son love each other (John 3:35; 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:23-26); the Father and the Son speak to each other (John 11:41-42; 12:28; 17:1-26); and the Father and the Son know each other (John 7:29; 8:55; 10:15). The Son was with the Father before creation (John 17:5) and then came out of heaven from the Father to become a man; after rising from the dead, the Son returned to heaven to be with the Father (John 3:13, 31; 6:33, 38, 41, 46, 51, 56-58, 62; 8:23, 42; 13:3; 16:27-28). Again, Oneness theologians have made an effort to explain away much of this evidence, but the explanations are not sound.<sup>78</sup>

## B. Jesus as Yahweh in Titus 2:13-14

In addition to the evidence presented so far that Jesus is not only called *theos* in Titus 2:13 but is identified as Yahweh or Jehovah, the only true God, there is abundant evidence in the immediate context that this was Paul's meaning. I will here bring all of the evidence together by proceeding almost word for word through Titus 2:13-14.

### 1. “Appearing” (*Epiphaneia*)

The use of *epiphaneia* itself, in light of the OT background, must be referring to the appearing or manifestation of Yahweh himself. The noun is used only twice in the Septuagint. Its use in Amos 5:22 in reference to the Israelites' outwardly showy sacrifices rejected by God does not seem particularly relevant. Its other occurrence, however, is most notable. In 2 Samuel 7:18-29 David offers a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord God for his promise of an everlasting kingdom from his seed (vv. 12-16). This promise, of course, ultimately has its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (e.g., Luke 1:32-33). In his prayer David praises the Lord for his *greatness* as exhibited in his *manifesting* himself in the Exodus to *redeem for himself a people*, Israel (2 Sam. 7:21-24), and on that basis expresses confidence in God's promise to him (vv. 25-29).

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<sup>77</sup>Bowman, *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, 50-58; *Jehovah's Witnesses*, 23-24.

<sup>78</sup>See n. 22.

2 Sam. 7:21-24	Titus 2:13-14
God has done “great things” ( <i>megalôsuneîn</i> , vv. 21, 23) and is “great” ( <i>megalunai</i> , v. 21).	“the great God [ <i>tou megalou theou</i> ] . . . Jesus Christ”
God went to “redeem to himself a people” ( <i>tou lutrôsasthai autô laon</i> , v. 23); “you redeemed for yourself your people” ( <i>tou laou sou elutrôsô seautô</i> , v. 24).	Jesus Christ gave himself to “redeem us [ <i>lutrôsêtai hêmas</i> ] . . . and purify for himself a people [ <i>heautô laon</i> ].”
In the Exodus God made a “manifestation” of himself ( <i>epiphaneian</i> , v. 23).	Christians await the “manifestation” or “appearing” ( <i>epiphaneian</i> ) of Christ.

Now what is striking is that in Titus 2:13-14 this language is applied to Jesus Christ. *He* is the *great* God who *redeemed for himself a people* (namely, the church) and who will *manifest* himself to complete their redemption. That it is Jesus who is said to have done this is explicit and clear: “. . . Jesus Christ, *who gave himself for us* in order to *redeem for himself a people*” (Titus 2:13b-14a). Since it is indisputably Jesus Christ who gave himself for us in death as a sacrifice for our redemption, everything that is said in verse 14 refers to Jesus Christ.

Elsewhere in the Septuagint the corresponding verb for *epiphaneia*, *epiphainô*, is used 13 times. Of these, 12 refer to a manifestation of Yahweh. The one exception speaks of the appearing of branches on a tree (Ezek. 17:6) and is irrelevant to Titus 2:13. Of the 12 references to the manifestation or appearing of Yahweh, all but one (Zeph. 2:11) do so in the context of God’s saving or showing mercy to his people Israel (in the LXX, Num. 6:25; Deut. 33:2; Ps. 30:17 [Heb., 31:16]; 66:2 [67:1]; 79:3, 7, 19 [80:3, 7, 19]; 117:27 [118:27]; 118:135 [119:135]; Jer. 36:14 [29:14]; Ezek. 39:28; Dan. 9:17). In fact, all of the passages in the Psalms that speak of God’s “appearing” also speak explicitly of him “saving” or providing “salvation” to Israel or to the Psalmist personally, using the verb *sôzô* (“save”) or noun *sôtêria* (“salvation”), both of course related to the noun *sôtêr* in Titus 2:13.

Psalm 118 (Ps. 117 in the LXX) is especially interesting and relevant. Verse 22 refers to the stone rejected by the builders but made the chief cornerstone. This verse is quoted five times in the NT, where it is consistently applied to Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7). In verse 25 the Psalmist prays, “O Lord, save [*sôson*] now”; this cry is quoted by the Jews when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when they cry, “Hosanna” (a transliteration of the Hebrew “save”; see Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; John 12:13). Thus, Psalm 118 is clearly treated in the NT as a Messianic text. But Psalm 118 also says, “God is the Lord, and he has shined [*epephanen*] on us . . . and you have become my salvation [*sôtêrian*]” (Ps. 117:27, 28 LXX). This is exactly what Paul is saying in Titus 2:13 – that God has become our salvation in Jesus Christ, who was God manifested among us and who will come again to manifest his divine glory for the consummation of our redemption.

## 2. “The Great God” (*Tou Megalou Sôtêr*)

Earlier we discussed Greg Stafford’s claim that Titus 2:13 might be calling Jesus “God” without meaning that he was Jehovah. This claim, however, is contradictory to his own exegesis of Titus 2:13. As we saw earlier, Stafford argued that the expression “the great God” was “such a fixed title of the Father” that Paul’s readers would have recognized it as referring to no one

other than Jehovah. “In light of the OT description of Jehovah as ‘the great God’ it is equally possible, if not more likely, that ‘the great God’ was understood as the equivalent of a proper name, and a clear reference to the Father.”<sup>79</sup> Now, we argued that the specific expression “the great God” does not have the semantical qualities of a proper name. However, if Stafford were right about the expression “the great God” functioning as a proper name for Jehovah, that would rule out the possibility that the noun “God” in Titus 2:13 could be used for anyone other than Jehovah. But then it would make no sense to say that Titus 2:13 could be calling Jesus “God” in the qualified, secondary sense of a deity subordinate to Jehovah. Stafford is clearly hedging here.

Actually, Stafford is on to something about the expression “the great God.” It is undeniably true that the Old Testament knows no other “great God” than Jehovah. We may go further and agree that an informed reader encountering the reference to “the great God” in Titus 2:13 would surely understand this as a reference to Jehovah. Again, this understanding of the reference of “the great God” does not turn the expression into a proper name. It does, though, mean that whoever is being called “the great God” in Titus 2:13 is surely being described in terms that imply that he is in fact Jehovah. Given the grammatical and contextual evidence presented so far showing that it is Jesus Christ who is called “the great God,” the conclusion that Jesus is being referred to as Jehovah seems unavoidable.

### 3. “God and Savior” (*Theou kai Sôtêros*)

Earlier we argued that the two nouns “God” and “Savior” were so closely and regularly linked in the OT (specifically the Septuagint) that Jewish readers or Gentile Christians familiar with the OT would easily and naturally link the two in Titus 2:13 and apply them to one person. In the OT, of course, these two nouns when used together in the OT *always* refer to Yahweh (Deut. 32:15; 1 Sam. 10:19; Ps. 23:5 [Heb., 24:5]; 24:5 [25:5]; 26:1, 9 [27:1, 9]; 61:3, 7 [62:2, 6]; 64:6 [65:5]; 78:9 [79:9]; 94:1 [95:1]; Isa. 12:2; 17:10; 45:15, 21; 62:11; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 3:18).

A couple of these passages merit closer attention. Consider Psalm 94:1-3 LXX (95:1-3):

“Come, let us exult in the Lord;  
Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior [*tô theô tô sôtêri hêmôn*].  
Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving,  
And make a joyful noise to him with psalms.  
For the Lord is a great God [*theos megas*],  
And a great king over all gods;  
For the Lord will not cast off his people [*ton laon autou*].”

In this passage (which Stafford did not mention in his discussion of the expression “great God”), the “great God” is, of course, the Lord, Yahweh; and he is clearly equated with the God who is also “our Savior.” This passage illustrates well the fact that when anyone steeped in the Old Testament wrote or spoke about “our great God and Savior,” they could only mean Yahweh.

Another text deserving special attention is Isaiah 45:21-22. After chastising the heathen for praying to “gods that do not save” (*theous hoi ou sôzousin*), the Lord says through Isaiah, “I

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<sup>79</sup>Stafford, *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*, 239.

am God [*ho theos*], and there is no other besides me, a righteous [God] and Savior [*dikaios kai sôtêr*]; there is none except me. Turn to me, and be saved [*sôthêsesthe*], those from the end of the earth; I am God [*ho theos*], and there is no other.” If Jesus Christ is at all a God who can save, then he must be Yahweh, because Yahweh himself says there is no other such God.

#### **4. “Redeem Us from Every Lawless Deed” (*Lutrôsêtai Hêmas apo Pasês Anomias*)**

So far the exposition has depended somewhat on our previously drawn conclusion that Titus 2:13 calls Jesus Christ “our great God and Savior” (although some aspects of the exposition have provided further support for that conclusion). We have been arguing that *if* Jesus is here called God, it must mean that he is Yahweh, not some inferior deity.

When we come to verse 14, though, even this assumption is not necessary. In fact, it would not be too strong to say that even if we did not have verse 13, verse 14 alone as applied explicitly to Jesus Christ would be sufficient proof that Paul thought of Jesus as Yahweh.

The line to be considered here, “that he might redeem us from every lawless deed,” is essentially a quotation from Psalm 129:8 LXX (130:8 Heb.). The Psalmist expresses the hope that the Lord “will redeem Israel from all his lawless deeds” (*kai autos lutrôsetai ton Israêl ek pasôn tôn anomion autou*). Paul applies this in the first-person plural to we who believe in Jesus Christ, i.e., the church. Once again, what the OT said Yahweh would do, the NT says Jesus Christ has done.

#### **5. “Purify for Himself a People” (*Katharisê Heautô Laon*)**

Woven together with the quoted words of Psalm 129:8 LXX are words taken from Ezekiel 37:23. There Yahweh says, “I will deliver them from all their lawless deeds [*apo pasôn tôn anomion autôn*], in which they sinned, and I will purify them [*kathariô autous*], and they will be my people [*laon*], and I the Lord will be their God [*theon*].” Notice that both OT verses speak of the lawless deeds; the Psalm speaks specifically of being “redeemed” from them, a term picked up in Titus 2:14. But the primary text on which Titus 2:14 appears to be based is Ezekiel 37:23. Yahweh speaks of delivering Israel “from all their lawless deeds,” of “purifying” them, and says that the result is that they will be his “people.” What is startling here is that whereas in Ezekiel, Yahweh is the one who will cleanse them to be his people, in Titus it is *Jesus Christ* who cleanses us to be *his* people. Now we have Jesus not only doing what the OT said Yahweh would do – save and redeem and purify us – but doing it to make a people *for himself*, whereas the OT said that Yahweh would do these things to make a people for himself, i.e., for Yahweh. In short, what the OT said would be done *by and for* Yahweh, Paul says was done *by and for Jesus Christ*.

#### **6. “A People for His Own Possession” (*Laon Periousion*)**

The Greek word *periousios* (“own possession”), used in the NT only in Titus 2:14, appears only five times in the OT, always as a modifier of *laos* (“people”), and always with reference to Israel as a people for Yahweh’s own possession (Ex. 19:5; 23:22; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18). Its first occurrence, in Exodus 19:5, is as part of the foundational description of God’s intention for Israel (presented after they have escaped into the wilderness and just prior to the giving of the Law). Thus, the expression *laos periousios* would be immediately recognized as a

description of Israel that has now been applied to the church. Exodus 19:5 is also applied to the church in 1 Peter 2:9, where *peripoiêsin* is used instead of *periousios*.

In Titus 2:13-14, then, Paul applies the title “God” to Jesus Christ. Paul characterizes the nature of Christ in the way the OT characterizes the nature of Yahweh (as the “great” God). He speaks of Christ doing what the OT said Yahweh would do (save, redeem, and purify his people) and of doing it to create a people for himself, just as the OT said Yahweh would do for himself. In this one sentence, then, Paul attributes to Jesus Christ titles, characteristics, works, and honors reserved in the OT for Yahweh. The evidence is overwhelming that Paul was intentionally speaking of Jesus Christ as Yahweh, the great God and Savior.

### C. Jesus as Yahweh in 2 Peter 1:1

There is not nearly as much exegetical evidence in the context of 2 Peter 1:1 to consider in seeking to understand what Peter meant by calling Jesus Christ “God.” However, what evidence there is once again supports the conclusion that Peter meant this in the highest possible sense – that is, identifying Jesus Christ as Yahweh.

First of all, everything that was said with reference to Titus 2:13 about the significance of the expression “our God and Savior” also applies here. As in Titus 2:13, the expression identifies Jesus as Yahweh because of the frequent association of the two titles for Yahweh in the LXX. Again it must be emphasized that the OT uses these two titles together for no one other than Yahweh.

In discussing Titus 2:13 we mentioned Isaiah 45:21, where the Lord says through Isaiah, “I am God [*ho theos*], and there is no other besides me, a righteous [God] and Savior [*dikaios kai sôtêr*].” This verse provides the closest OT background to Peter’s phrase, “the righteousness of our God and Savior” (*dikaiousunê tou theou hêmôn kai sôtêros*). In the immediate context of Isaiah, Yahweh goes on to say that “righteousness” (*dikaiousunê*) will come from him (v. 23). This OT background further confirms that when Peter calls Jesus God, he means that he is Yahweh, the only God and Savior of the OT.

There is at least one other reason from the context in support of understanding Peter to be identifying Jesus as Yahweh. In the very last verse of 2 Peter, after urging his readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” (3:18a), Peter adds immediately, “To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (3:18b). As Harris notes, there is absolutely no ambiguity about the fact that the closing line is a doxology to Jesus Christ.<sup>80</sup> To this observation we would add one additional point. This doxology, coming at the very end of the epistle, completes what is known as an *inclusio* with the reference to Jesus as God at the very beginning of the epistle. In an *inclusio* the opening and closing of a text are closely related or parallel, resulting in the text coming “full circle” back to where it began. This *inclusio* strengthens the argument for applying the noun *theos* to Jesus. The epistle would then open with Peter referring to “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” and close with him referring to “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” What is already grammatically clear enough, that in both texts one person is meant, is confirmed by the relationship between the two verses in the *inclusio*.

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<sup>80</sup>Harris, *Jesus as God*, 235.



Moreover, the doxology shows that we are to honor Jesus as the Lord God. It is fitting that an epistle that ends with a doxology to Jesus Christ opens with an affirmation of the divine dignity that justifies such a doxology.

The contextual evidence, then, shows that in 2 Peter 1:1, as in Titus 2:13, Jesus Christ is given the title “God” in a way that clearly identifies Jesus as the God of the OT – Yahweh.

## **Conclusion**

The doctrine that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh does not rest on merely one proof text, but on a large number of them; we have in this paper examined only two. This doctrine does not mean that Jesus is God the Father, but that he is fully God while somehow personally distinguished from God the Father. Moreover, the importance of knowing Jesus Christ as “God” goes beyond the mere acknowledgment that he has a right to that title. Rather, as God, he is our Savior, the source of eternal life. Those who would be saved by him and receive eternal life must not shrink from worshipping him as truly God. To him be the glory forever!