



"Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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THE GREEK ARTICLE
AND THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S DEITY

(Part III)

This third installment in a series of articles on the Greek definite article and the deity of Christ carries forward the discussion of the rule of Granville Sharp. This rule was introduced in the September, 1973, issue of the *Journal of Theology*, and its validity with respect to the usage of the New Testament was explored in the December, 1973, issue.¹

A brief summary of what has been covered so far might be helpful. Granville Sharp (1735-1813), an English philanthropist, abolitionist, and philologist, published in 1798 a monograph with the title: *Remarks on the Uses 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*. In this treatise, which was sufficiently popular and controversial to make necessary the early printing of a second and a third edition, he presented that statement of Greek syntax which today is generally referred to as "Sharp's Rule." In its simplified wording, the rule states:

When two personal nouns of the same case are connected by the copulative *καί*, if the former has the definite article, and the latter has not, they both relate to the same person.

Sharp excluded both proper names and plural nouns from the application of his rule.

In the latter part of his monograph, Sharp attempted to show that, in view of his rule of syntax, several passages in the Greek text of the New Testament clearly ascribe the name "God" (θεός) to Jesus Christ -- passages which are at best rendered ambiguously in the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Following an evaluation of Sharp's Rule and his applications of it, this evaluation being carried on in the light of the usage of the New Testament, I offered the following tentative conclusions: the rule appears to be a well-founded and accurate description of the usage of the article which it covers; and, the following passages may, it seems, be accepted as proof passages for

Christ's deity: Ephesians 5:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:12, Titus 2:13, and 2 Peter 1:1. These passages, to which reference shall repeatedly be made on the pages which follow, read thus in the Greek:

Ephesians 5:5... οὐκ ἔχει κληρονομίαν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ (does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and God).

2 Thessalonians 1:12...κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (according to the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ).

Titus 2:13. προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (waiting for the blessed hope and appearance of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus).

2 Peter 1:1... ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ).

It is recognized, however, that a number of modern-day grammarians of the Greek New Testament fail to cite the rule of Granville Sharp as a valid principle, and that many commentators refuse to accept the above passages as proof texts for the deity of Christ. This contradictory situation makes necessary a further discussion of the rule and of the exegetical history of these passages.

The Findings of Christopher Wordsworth

One of the earliest and most interested readers of Sharp's treatise was the youngest brother of the poet William Wordsworth -- the English divine and scholar, Christopher Wordsworth (1774-1846). He received his education at Trinity College, Cambridge, becoming a fellow of that college in the year that Sharp published his monograph. Wordsworth's rather erudite response to Sharp's work came in 1802, in a volume entitled *Six Letters to Granville Sharp, Esq., Respecting His Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article, in the Greek Text of the New Testament*.² Wordsworth states that his first reaction to Sharp's conclusions was one of incredulity -- a reaction, I think, that may be quite typical among Greek scholars who come upon Sharp's Rule for the first time. Wordsworth explains himself as follows (p. 1f.): "You will not, I think Sir, be surprized to learn, that one of the first feelings which I experienced upon the

reading of your Remarks, was a feeling of uncertainty and scepticism. I soon perceived, however, that my doubts originated in the very weight and clearness of the evidence on which your theory was founded. I felt as if it were incredible, but that evidence so remarkable must have occurred, in all its strength, to learned men of former days. How then is it, that this rule should have remained so long unknown, or unacknowledged; and the important texts of the New Testament depending upon it, how is it that the vulgar translation of them [the *KJV*] is so far from being allowed universally to be erroneous, that public opinion has hardly yet learned of the matter being ever doubted of; that the generality of commentators should uphold the established interpretation; and that no notice should be taken of any thing wrong in it, in works written professedly to point out the errors of our English version; and yet we are told, that the rule, and the interpretation of those dependent examples, were expressly asserted by a writer so long ago as Beza? Surely, said I, Mr. Sharp has only not gone so far in the investigation as earlier critics. There must be some secret fallacy: and he is producing to us as a valuable discovery, that which his predecessors, after having for a time followed it, must have found out to be an empty phantom, and so they returned from their pursuit, and sat down again, not venturing to tell the world how idly they had been occupied."³

But Wordsworth did not give in to these initial feelings of doubt. He resolved, first, to make an actual comparison of Sharp's theory with the books of the New Testament. As a second step, he determined to search the writings of the Greek church fathers, to see if their exegesis of the passages in question would conform to that of Sharp. "If Mr. Sharp's rule be true, then will their interpretations of those texts be invariably in the same sense in which he understands them; unless indeed it should appear, that some change in later times took place in the use of the article." (p. 3) Wordsworth went at his researches with eagerness, and what he was able in a short time to gather considerably exceeded his expectations. This prompted him to an even greater endeavor, and relevant materials continued to accumulate to such a degree that he ventured upon the publication of his findings. He felt justified in thus pursuing the matter, for a two-fold reason. He recognized "the importance of

the subject as a general philological question, and the infinitely greater importance of those particular texts in the sacred writings thus involved with it." (p. 4) But he also found it "painful in the highest degree" to note how various commentators during the preceding three centuries so disagreed in their interpretations of these passages. The orthodox had occasionally employed them in the defense of Christ's deity, but often for no better reason than that others had done so before them, while those of opposite sentiments either pointed to the alleged ambiguity of expression or else passed by the texts "in mysterious and utter silence." With the hope of putting a stop to "circumstances so unfortunate as these," Wordsworth was emboldened to lay the fruits of his labors before the public. (p. 4)

In his second letter (pp. 12-38), Wordsworth discusses the passage at Ephesians 5:5: ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ (in the kingdom of the Christ and God). He cites twenty-one Greek writers in which this passage is quoted. In twelve of them, because of a lack of commentary, nothing can be determined concerning the meaning of the words. But in the remaining nine, including writings by Chrysostom (347?-407), Cyril of Alexandria (376?-444), and Theodoret (390?-457?), it is clear that both words, "Christ" and "God," are understood of the second person of the Trinity. Wordsworth says to Sharp concerning the evidence from the Greek fathers: "No other interpretation than your's was ever heard in all the Greek churches.... ALL the Greek authorities that do speak at all are on your side." (p. 26,36)

The situation is quite different, however, among the Latin writers who cite this passage. In sixteen of the citations brought by Wordsworth it is possible to determine the meaning of the writer, and all but three of these are plainly against Sharp. Wordsworth suggests several reasons for this contrary situation. To begin with, the Latin language contains no definite article, and it therefore cannot convey the Greek idiom without ambiguity. The Latin translation, *in regno Christi et Dei*, is capable of either meaning: "in the kingdom of the Christ and God" (one person), or "in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (two persons). But why did so many of the Latin fathers choose the second of these meanings? For the most part, they were not capable of referring to

the Greek for the correct understanding, and the meaning "of Christ and of God" (two persons) would in fact be more readily suggested by the Latin translation. Furthermore, this latter meaning generally suited their doctrinal arguments better than the former. For their theological debate was particularly with the Arians, who were not reluctant to call Christ "God" -- although in a lesser sense than when the term was used of the Father. The Arian heresy could, in fact, be better combated by citing verses that showed Christ and the Father to be coequal in their eternity, their works, and their glory. The orthodox teachers could, therefore, use Ephesians 5:5 more effectively against the Arians by taking it in the sense "the kingdom of Christ and of God" (two persons), thus showing that Christ and the Father are coequal in their royal authority. The fact that Christ is here named *first*, would make this passage an especially effective weapon against the heretics -- if it be taken as a reference to both Christ and the Father!

Thus the contrary testimony of most of the Latin fathers, according to Wordsworth, bears little weight against the unanimous testimony of the Greek fathers in support of Sharp's exegesis. Moreover, the testimony of the three Latins who do agree with Sharp, namely Jerome (340?-420), Faustinus (a contemporary of Jerome), and Alcuin (735-804), bears fully as much weight as that of all the rest of the Latin interpreters. For the first two were well acquainted with the Greek language, and the third was accurately translating a section from the Greek father, Cyril of Alexandria.

Wordsworth, near the end of the second letter, asks why none of those Greek fathers whose writings he explored ever took Ephesians 5:5 as a reference to both the Son and the Father, particularly since they too were involved in the Arian controversy and could have profited from such an interpretation. The answer, which he expects the reader of his letter to deduce, is that the Greek was not capable of such an understanding, for in the Greek the words τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ could be taken as a reference to only *one* person, namely the Son. Thus Sharp's Rule is vindicated with respect to this passage, and the *KJV* translation, "of Christ and of God" (two persons), is found to be an inheritance solely from the Latin text and from the Latin interpreters.

In his third letter (pp. 39-47), Wordsworth discusses 2 Thessalonians 1:12: *κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (according to the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ). He states that he was unable to produce any clear evidence from the writings of the fathers, on either side of the question, respecting the interpretation of this text. The verse was, in fact, seldom cited by the fathers. Is this lack of evidence, now, to be regarded as a strong presumption that this passage cannot be a testimony to the deity of Christ, for otherwise it would certainly have been used frequently against the Arians? Not so, according to Wordsworth. "The nature of those heresies which produced almost all the polemical writings of the ancient Church which are now extant, is sufficient to teach us not to look there particularly [namely in a passage like 2 Thessalonians 1:12], for arguments in behalf of Christ's mere Divinity. In the controversies of those days it would have been of little use to produce passages of Scripture which spake of Christ as God, and did not withal convey something respecting the proper nature and dignity of his person. It is those places where it is written 'In the *beginning* was the Word'; where he is called the 'God over all, blessed for ever,' (Rom. ix. 5.) 'the great God and our Saviour,' (Tit. ii.13.) 'the true God, and eternal life,' (1 John v.20.) which were then of especial importance, and are accordingly perpetually insisted upon." (p. 39f.)

Additional information, applicable to this passage, is found in the fourth letter (pp. 48-64). Wordsworth states concerning the general phrase *ὁ θεὸς καὶ κύριος* (the God and Lord) that he "had indeed once thought, that the appellation *κύριος* might, perhaps, have become so appropriated to our Saviour, as to be considered as a proper name." (p. 63) In such a case, the phrase *τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου* in 2 Thessalonians 1:12 would be excluded from the application of Sharp's Rule, and the terms "God" and "Lord" would not then necessarily apply to only one person, namely Jesus Christ. But in his researches Wordsworth found many passages in a variety of Greek fathers in which, when the general phrase *ὁ θεὸς καὶ κύριος* occurs, it is always used of one person -- in some contexts of the Father, in others of the Son. He discovered, moreover, that "when the writer had to designate the two persons, he invariably *quitted* the

ὁ θεὸς καὶ κύριος, to adopt (among others) the form ὁ θεὸς, καὶ ὁ κύριος," with the article repeated before κύριος! (p. 62) In view of Wordsworth's finding, one might indeed well question the translation of the KJV: "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (two persons).

Wordsworth devotes the lengthy fifth letter (pp. 65-104) to a discussion of Titus 2:13, and to the exegetical history of this passage. It reads: τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus). Wordsworth cites a very large number of passages from the Greek and Latin fathers in which this verse occurs,⁴ and reaches the following conclusions: 1) the Greek interpreters uniformly ascribe both titles, "the great God" and "Savior" to Jesus Christ; 2) all of the Latin writers, as many as convey their sense of the meaning of Paul's words, agree with the Greek authorities, except perhaps for two poor exceptions. Wordsworth therefore laments: "It is the more to be regretted, and wondered at, that our English translators should have deprived us of that interpretation, which was the only one ever preached in all the ancient Churches." (p. 90). (Once again the KJV indicates two persons in its translation: "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.")

Significantly, even such heretics as the Arians acknowledged as correct that interpretation of the passage which Sharp defended. According to Wordsworth, "The interpretation of our version [the KJV] was never once thought of in any part of the Christian world, even when Arianism was triumphant over the Catholic faith. Surely, this fact, might of itself suffice to overturn every notion of an ambiguity in the form of expression. It was probably, in allusion to this verse, that we find the Arians, in their Discourse, a short tract answered by St. Augustine, speaking thus of the Father: '*et magno major, et bono melior est manifestatus* (He is manifested both *Greater than the Great, and Better than the Good*).'" (p. 95) By this specious argument the Arians apparently sought to evade the clear force of our passage -- that Jesus Christ is Himself "the great God"!

In commenting on the exegetical history of Titus 2:13, Wordsworth states that by the time of Alcuin (ca. 800) some persons in the western church had begun to ask

whether *magni Dei* might not mean rather the Father. In a sense, the question was not out of place, for so far as their Latin text went, lacking as it did the services of a definite article, the phrase might be explained as readily of the Father as of the Son. As time went on, these Latin notions began gradually to prevail still more, and therefore some writers, to secure the old interpretation, left out the *et* (and) after "*magni Dei* (of the great God)" and wrote the passage thus: "*magni Dei, Salvatoris nostri* (of the great God, our Savior)." Wordsworth suggests that it was probably Erasmus (1466?-1536) and Grotius (1583-1645), particularly the former, who were chiefly instrumental in propagating the interpretation that the words "the great God" refer to the Father rather than to Christ. "Succeeding commentators," he continues, "have faithfully trodden in the steps of those writers." (p. 103)

Wordsworth completes the discussion of Titus 2:13 with a general observation concerning the validity of Sharp's Rule. For the sake of argument he temporarily excludes those passages which bear upon the deity of Christ, and then states: "I fully believe, that there is no one exception to your first rule in the whole New Testament: and the assertion might be extended infinitely further.... I am persuaded that the idiom is not 'anceps' [double, doubtful], not 'ambiguum' [ambiguous]. Nay, may I not venture to add, that the Greek must be a strange language, if such a thing were possible?" (p. 103)

The sixth letter (pp. 105-134) includes Wordsworth's comments on 2 Peter 1:1: τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ). He notes that quotations from the catholic epistles are relatively rare in the writings of the church fathers. Thus the materials on this verse are very scanty, and such as exist give no explanation of the words in question.

Before closing his sixth letter, Wordsworth presents an imposing list of quotations from twenty Greek writers extending from Clement of Rome (30?-100?) into the 13th century, all the quotations serving to illustrate and substantiate Sharp's Rule and its application to the above passages. He concludes with the statement: "We might continue our progress still further, but even

this brings us into the middle of the 13th century; so that we shall easily be excused for descending no lower. And it may be fairly estimated, what stress is to be laid on this part of the argument, when it shall have been told, that I have observed more (I am persuaded) than a thousand instances of the form ὁ Χριστός καὶ θεός (Ephes. v.5); some hundreds of instances of the ὁ μέγας θεός καὶ ἁγίος (Tit. ii.13); and not fewer than several thousands of the form ὁ θεός καὶ ἁγίος (2 Pet. i.1.) while in no single case, have I seen (where the sense could be determined) any one of them used, but only of one person." (p. 132)

It is impossible not to be impressed with the apparent intellectual honesty and the evident broad learning which Christopher Wordsworth displays throughout his *Six Letters to Granville Sharp*. By means of a vast number of quotations from the church fathers and from later Greek and Latin writers, he vindicates Sharp's Rule and supports his exegesis of the aforementioned passages. He traces the alleged ambiguity of these passages to the influence of the Latin language, which because of its absence of an article is incapable of reproducing the Greek idiom. The Greek text, he insists, is in no way ambiguous, and he regrets deeply that so many modern commentators have wrongfully charged these passages with such unclarity.

(To be continued)

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FOOTNOTES

1. This would seem to be an opportune place to indicate several minor corrections which should be made in the article which appeared in the December, 1973, issue. 1) On p. 25, line 29, change Gal. 1:5 to Gal. 1:4. 2) On page 27, omit from the first full paragraph the following examples: Gal. 1:1, 1 Tim. 1:1, and James 1:1. The first two passages are inappropriate to the discussion at that point, inasmuch as they contain phrases which were subsequently labeled as compound proper names, "Jesus Christ" and "Christ Jesus," respectively. James 1:1 should be omitted because it

is not certain that the words "God" and "Lord" denote different persons of the Trinity. Christopher Wordsworth, in his *Six Letters to Granville Sharp, Esq.* (cf. footnote 2), finds several items of evidence in the writings of the Greek fathers to indicate that both of these anarthrous nouns are to be referred to the person of Christ. (See pages 114ff. and 133f. of Wordsworth's book.) It would be tempting to pursue this matter further at this time, but I shall refrain from doing so, since the question cannot be resolved decisively on the basis of Greek grammar and syntax. Let it suffice to state that the common exegesis in the early church suggests that we regard also James 1:1 as a proof text for Christ's deity, taking both words, "God" and "Lord," as titles of the one person, Jesus Christ. 3) The following note should be added by way of clarification. The discussion in the December issue cited all passages in the New Testament which are in any way illustrative of Sharp's Rule. Some of the citations (pp. 23-25) involve participles and adjectives which are used attributively rather than substantively. While such passages, strictly speaking, do not fit under the rule, which confines itself specifically to "nouns," yet they do serve to illustrate further that rule of syntax which is described by the rule.

2. Christopher Wordsworth, *Six Letters to Granville Sharp ...* (London: F. and C. Rivington, 1802).

3. The principle of syntax contained in Sharp's Rule had indeed been recognized and acknowledged by Beza (1519-1605) and several other earlier commentators. But it remained for Sharp to research the principle and give adequate expression to it. Cf. the reviews of Sharp's treatise, contained in appendices to Sharp's *Remarks* in the 3rd London edition of 1803, pp. 104f. and 115f.

4. The Greek passages cited here by Wordsworth are fifty-four in number, and extend from the second century to the twelfth, a period of nearly a thousand years. The Latin citations total sixty.

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