

Sharp's Rule: A Summary

Granville Sharp, commonly remembered as an English philanthropist and abolitionist, lived from 1735 to 1813. His interests extended into the Biblical languages, and his writings include several treatises on aspects of Hebrew and Greek grammar. His most notable work was first published in 1798, its title indicating his purpose for writing: *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*. Sharp recognized that the King James Version of the Bible had obscured several proof passages for Christ's deity, and he was determined to restore the proper understanding of these passages on the basis of Greek syntax. (Syntax is the study of how words are put together to form meaningful phrases, clauses, sentences, etc.)

As one might expect, Sharp's book stirred up much controversy. Among the most able defenders of his conclusions were Christopher Wordsworth (the youngest brother of the poet William Wordsworth), Thomas Fanshaw Middleton (an Anglican bishop), and A. T. Robertson. After all the dust has settled, the rule enunciated by Granville Sharp stands as one of the most firmly established rules of Greek grammar. (For a full explanation and defense of Sharp's Rule, see the series, "The Greek Article and the Doctrine of Christ's Deity," in the *Journal of Theology* of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, September 1973 through December 1974. The issues for March and June 1975 cover Colwell's Rule and John 1:1.)

Sharp's Rule may be summarized in this form:

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

Note these *restrictions* upon the rule:

1. The nouns have to be in the **singular** number, not plural.
2. The nouns have to be **personal** nouns, not proper names. According to Sharp's definition, personal nouns are nouns which are descriptive of personal relations, qualities, offices, ranks, and such like. [See the passages below for the following examples of such personal nouns: "Christ" (properly a title of office), "God," and "Savior."]
3. As used by Sharp, the term "nouns" includes **substantives, adjectives, and participles**.

Sharp's Rule finds application in many passages of the New Testament. The passages of most interest, of course, are those which deal with Christ's deity. These passages are chiefly the following, in which the elements illustrating Sharp's Rule are underlined:

Ephesians 5:5: . . . ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ

Inaccurate KJV translation: ". . . in the kingdom of Christ and of God"

The meaning of the Greek text: ". . . in the kingdom of Him who is Christ and God"

Accurate Beck translation (*An American Translation*): ". . . in the kingdom of Christ, who is God"

Titus 2:13: . . . τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Inaccurate KJV translation: ". . . that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"

The meaning of the Greek text: ". . . the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

Accurate NKJV translation: ". . . the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"

2 Peter 1:1: . . . ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Inaccurate KJV translation: ". . . through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"

(Note here how the KJV *correctly* translated 2 Peter 1:11, which presents the same syntax in the Greek as verse 1: ". . . the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There is no syntactic or grammatical justification for rendering the key phrases with a different word order: "of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" in verse 1, and "of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" in verse 11. Were the translators, perhaps, willing to call Jesus Christ "Lord" but reluctant to call Him "God"?)

The meaning of the Greek text: ". . . by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

Accurate NKJV translation: ". . . by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ"

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