



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

I Timothy 4:15

**Journal
of
Theology**

Church of the Lutheran Confession

C O N T E N T S

VOLUME 14

JUNE 1974

NUMBER 2

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The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is published at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Subscriptions: \$3.00 per year, \$5.50 for 2 years, payable in advance. The month of subscription expiration is indicated on the address label.

Issues are dated: March, June, September, December.

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THE GREEK ARTICLE
AND THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S DEITY

(Part IV)

One of the earliest scholarly reactions to Sharp's Rule and his exegetical conclusions was Christopher Wordsworth's *Six Letters to Granville Sharp*, published in 1802. As indicated in the last issue of this *Journal*, Wordsworth vindicates Sharp at almost every point, through a large number of quotations from the church fathers and from later Greek and Latin writers. He shows that the principle of grammar described by Sharp was regularly observed, not only in the New Testament, but also in the writings of the Greek fathers. He traces the alleged ambiguity of the passages in question 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 of these passages, he insists, is in no way ambiguous, and it disturbs him that so many commentators between the time of the Reformation and his own day have wrongfully charged these Biblical texts with such unclarity.

The Negative Reaction of Calvin Winstanley

It was inevitable that Sharp's attack upon certain translations in the authorized *King James Version* would in time be countered. Such a negative reaction appeared in 1805, under the title *A Vindication of Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the New Testament*.¹ This treatise, also addressed to Granville Sharp, was written by an English divine, Calvin Winstanley, A.M., of whose life this writer could find no further details. Winstanley's *Vindication* contains what is probably the lengthiest and most scholarly attempt to refute Sharp's conclusions that has yet appeared.

It is indeed apparent that Winstanley expended a large amount of time in researching his treatise, and his attempted refutation of Sharp's Rule and exegetical conclusions seems at first reading to be rather convincing. But a more thorough study of his evidence and arguments soon reveals that they contain some serious flaws.

Winstanley comments as follows regarding the rules of Sharp: "These rules are all founded on the presence or the absence, of the copulative or the article; and nothing can be more imperfect than such rules." (p. 6) He apparently feels that the usage of the definite article by the writers of the New Testament is so random and unpredictable, that it makes the formation of precise rules impossible. He would thus regard the passages cited by Sharp in defense of Christ's deity as ambiguous with respect to their grammatical structure. The true interpretation of them, he feels, must therefore be based upon non-grammatical evidence, drawn from other passages of Scripture.

Winstanley attempts -- unsuccessfully, I believe -- to disparage the validity of Sharp's Rule. He finds himself compelled to admit that this rule is "generally true," but he charges it with being "defective, inasmuch as it is liable to exceptions." (p. 16) He is incapable of finding any clear exceptions in the entire body of New Testament writings, and therefore resorts to non-Biblical literature. He finds a number of "exceptions" in the *Ethics* of Aristotle, such as the following passage: *περὶ ὧν (ἀπολαύσεις) λέγομεν τὸν αἰρῶνα καὶ ἀνόλαστον* [concerning which (enjoyments) we speak of the disciplined and undisciplined man]. Such examples, however, surely do not overthrow the general validity of Sharp's Rule. At most they would suggest this modification, that in Attic Greek the article was not always repeated before the second noun when the two nouns were contradictory in meaning and therefore could not be applied to the same person at the same time. Winstanley even offers such a modification when he states that Sharp's Rule does not hold uniformly "when the signification of the nouns renders any farther mark of personal distinction unnecessary." (p. 17) He then admits, significantly, that in all the passages cited from Aristotle "the nouns, though personal, are used in a general or universal sense. In this respect, it must be confessed, they differ materially from those of which you [Sharp] would correct the common version." (p. 18)

Winstanley proceeds, then, to subjoin several quotations which, he feels, come within the limitations of Sharp's Rule and yet are direct exceptions to it. (pp. 18-21) The first is a passage from Plato's sixth

epistle, which was subsequently cited by Clement of Alexandria and Origen.² This passage, however, is so obscure, and so inaccurately quoted by Clement, that appeal cannot rightly be made to it.

The second "exception" offered by Winstanley is from Origen's *Against Celsus*: τῷ θεῷ τῶν ὅλων προσέχετε καὶ διδασκάλῳ τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ μαθημάτων τῷ Ἰησοῦ (Give heed to the God of all things, and to Jesus, the teacher of all lessons concerning Him).³ The leading terms of the clause, the two of them connected by καί, are very probably τῷ θεῷ and τῷ Ἰησοῦ, with διδασκάλῳ serving as an adjunct of τῷ Ἰησοῦ. Since both of the leading terms have an article, this passage ought not be adduced as an exception to Sharp's Rule, which requires that the article come only before the first noun, as follows: article + personal noun + καί + personal noun.

The same criticism can be brought against Winstanley's third alleged exception: τῷ δὲ θεῷ πατρὶ, καὶ υἱῷ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ σὺν τῷ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι δόξα (Now to God the Father, and to our Lord the Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, be glory).⁴ The leading terms are clearly τῷ θεῷ and τῷ κυρίῳ, with πατρὶ and υἱῷ serving as their adjuncts. Inasmuch as both of the leading terms again have an article, this passage likewise presents no exception to Sharp's Rule.

A fourth example is once more from the writings of Clement of Alexandria: τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπου (of God and man).⁵ This phrase is similar to those previously cited from Aristotle's *Ethics*. Winstanley admits that ἀνθρώπου is used in a general sense, referring to pious Christians. As such, it is not a necessary exception to Sharp's Rule, which is limited to nouns of personal description. Furthermore, no confusion could possibly arise from an omission of the article before the second noun, for the terms "God" and "man" are mutually exclusive.

Winstanley's fifth example, from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, does admittedly appear to be an exception to the rule: μεθ' οὗ δόξα τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ καὶ ἁγίῳ πνεύματι (with whom be glory to God and the Father and the Holy Spirit).⁶ One would indeed have expected a repetition of the article before ἁγίῳ πνεύματι. Yet its absence here could hardly result in ambiguity, for the distinction between the first and third persons of the Trinity was apparently deemed too clear for any confusion

to arise. This is not the case with the four passages in the New Testament which are the object of our present study. The presence or absence of the article before the second noun in them would indeed have a crucial effect upon the interpretation!

The last "exception" cited by Winstanley occurs in the Septuagint's translation of Proverbs 24:21: φοβοῦ τὸν θεόν, υἱέ, καὶ βασιλέα (Fear God and the king, O son).⁷ The translators of the Septuagint appear in many places to have been overly servile to the Hebrew text, translating into Greek at times with an almost slavish literalism. In this verse the Hebrew text lacks an article before the word for "king." That the Septuagint should also lack the article is therefore not surprising -- especially since the two nouns, "God" and "king," are so distinct that no confusion could possibly have arisen through the omission of a second article.

The "exceptions" to Sharp's Rule are thus found to be highly unconvincing. None of them occur within the books of the New Testament itself, and most of them, if not all, are found upon examination to be no exceptions at all. We remember also the remark of a "distinguished critic," that "when a rule has been established by ninety-nine examples out of a hundred, an exception in the hundredth will not overturn it."⁸ Our review of Winstanley's book could, it seems, stop at this point. For his subsequent rejection of Sharp's exegesis of the passages in question is based largely upon his belief that he has demonstrated that the rule is severely limited by exceptions. But I shall nevertheless proceed with some comments on his exegetical methods and conclusions.

Ephesians 5:5: ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ (in the kingdom of the Christ and God). Winstanley insists that the noun χριστός must be construed as a proper name in this passage, and that the phrase τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ is therefore exempted from the operation of Sharp's Rule. Before he would be willing to accept Sharp's exegesis, that the Son is here called both "Christ" and "God," he would want to find at least one such expression in the New Testament as ὁ χριστός καὶ κύριος for "Christ the Lord," or Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός καὶ κύριος, "Jesus, the Christ and Lord." (p. 47)

Winstanley would probably find it quite difficult to

prove his assertion that τοῦ Χριστοῦ must be taken as a proper name in Ephesians 5:5. It is frequently employed in the New Testament as a noun of personal description, or appellative, and the fact that it occurs with the article in our verse makes it probable that Paul is here using it as such. If the apostle had written instead τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ, with Χριστοῦ in second position and without an article before it, then Winstanley's argument would be far more convincing.

It is unfortunate also that Winstanley refuses to accept Sharp's exegesis of τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ unless he can be shown a similar phrase employing the noun κύριος instead of θεός. It must indeed be granted that the phrase τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ is a novel expression in the books of the New Testament, but should this fact prevent us from taking it in the sense demanded by Sharp's Rule? A lengthy list could no doubt be made of phrases which are employed only once in the New Testament, but their rare occurrence would surely not cause us to set aside valid grammatical principles as we seek for the meaning intended by the holy writers.

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). Winstanley begins his discussion of this verse as follows: "I cannot think that St. Paul intended to denominate one person only in this passage, because *first*, in the Septuagint when these words κύριος and θεός are ascribed to one person, the connexion is made without the copulative; κύριος ὁ θεός, ὁ κύριος ὁ θεός, *the Lord God* -- κύριος ὁ θεός ἡμῶν, *the Lord our God*. St. Paul had only to adopt this arrangement, with which he must have been sufficiently acquainted, and the whole would have been incapable of any other sense than that which you [Sharp] attribute to it." (p. 53f.) Paul was indeed no doubt well acquainted with the phrases from the Septuagint which Winstanley here cites, yet he chose not to use them anywhere in his epistles, either of the Father or of the Son. Is Winstanley being fair, then, when he suggests that Paul should have employed them here, had he wanted to denominate one person only in our passage? What we *do* find in a reading of Paul's epistles is that he regularly used the idiom described by Sharp when he wished to refer two nouns of personal description to the same individual. Is

it really so strange that he selected this idiom for our verse?

Winstanley continues: "But, *secondly*, had he preferred the insertion of the copulative to designate the same person, it is highly probable that he would have chosen a different arrangement, so as to preserve to the noun κύριος its usual construction; τοῦ κυρίου καὶ θεοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, which would also have determined, beyond dispute, the application of θεοῦ." (p. 54) While Winstanley is correct in observing that the phrase "our Lord and God" was more commonly used of Christ in the early years of the Christian church than the phrase "our God and Lord," this fact in no way compels us to remove 2 Thessalonians 1:12 from the application of Sharp's Rule. As we have seen,⁹ Christopher Wordsworth was able to find a number of passages in the writings of the Greek fathers which employ the very phrase "our God and Lord" as a reference to Christ. As to the New Testament itself, there is only one passage which refers to Christ in which the opposite arrangement occurs, namely John 20:28: ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (my Lord and my God). Moreover, if the phrase θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου of James 1:1 be allowed as a reference to Christ,¹⁰ then there would be one further passage in the New Testament which would present the arrangement of words that we find in our passage: "God and Lord."

"*Lastly*," Winstanley continues, "If to these arguments be added the consideration that St. Paul frequently employs the noun θεός absolutely in direct contradistinction to our Lord Jesus Christ ... ; and that your [Sharp's] rule is liable to various and indisputable exceptions, you may perhaps think that an impartial reader may have sufficient reason to add the passage at the head of this discussion to those exceptions." (p. 56) In answer to this, one need only point out that there is no reason, theological or doctrinal, why Paul should not have referred to Christ as "God" in our passage, and that it is simply not true that Sharp's Rule is liable to "various and indisputable exceptions." Winstanley is not able to prove a single clear exception to this rule in the entire volume of the New Testament!

Titus 2:13: τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus). Winstanley first chooses to introduce a comma

after θεοῦ, and then argues that μεγάλου applies to both θεοῦ and ὠπτήρος, and that this explains why the article is not repeated. This surely seems rather forced, for while it would not be at all unusual to speak of "the great God," the expression "great Savior" would be highly unlikely. But even if we should grant that μεγάλου referred to both nouns, would Sharp's Rule indeed no longer apply? Even Winstanley is forced to admit quite candidly that "it is very rare to meet with nouns personal in the singular number, constructed as above; I mean with an article and adjective common to two following nouns, relating to *different* persons." (p. 68, my emphases) This is virtually an admission that according to the normal rules of grammar both nouns, "God" and "Savior," should be applied to "Christ Jesus." It is significant that Winstanley is willing to set aside "the natural and obvious sense" of a passage in his attempt to find what he feels is the author's "true sense." (cf. p. 70) Such an approach can easily lead to a form of *eisegesis* -- interpreting a passage according to the exegete's idea of appropriateness of meaning or expression, rather than according to the actual grammatical construction of the passage itself.

One remaining argument which Winstanley brings against Sharp's exegesis of Titus 2:13 serves as an illustration of this wrong kind of Biblical interpretation. He states: "The words τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ have in themselves a just claim to be considered as one of the pre-eminent and incommunicable titles of God the Father. It is more agreeable to the general tenor and language of scripture so to regard them." (p. 68) This is nothing else than a biased theological presupposition!

2 Peter 1:1: ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ ὠπτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ). Winstanley admits that according to the grammatical construction of the passage Sharp's exegesis would be correct -- both nouns, "God" and "Savior" would apply to "Jesus Christ." The parallelism of expression in verse 11 (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ ὠπτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) would, he says, support this conclusion. But once again he feels constrained to reject this interpretation on the basis of what he calls "the broad principles of general criticism." (p. 65)

What are these "broad principles" which he chooses

in preference to the narrow grounds of grammatical accuracy? The first is this: "The attributes *Lord* and *Saviour*, applied to the same person, are usually connected by the copulative; but the nouns *κύριος* and *θεός* are as regularly connected without it ..., and therefore the interposition of the copulative must appear to render St. Peter somewhat ambiguous." (p. 65) But the words *κύριος* and *θεός* occur together without an intervening *καί* only seven times in the whole New Testament, and not one of these occurrences is in the writings of Peter. Does "general criticism" indeed teach us to conclude that because two words, not necessarily connected at all, are used in one way a half-dozen times, they cannot be used in another way, when that other way is fully agreeable to the idiom of the language and to good sense?

Winstanley continues: "It will be said, why then do you [Winstanley] not understand him [Peter] according to the prevailing idiom of the language? I answer, because he appears to me to have explained himself in the very next verse, *ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν*. It is not very probable that he would thus, in immediate consecution, use the words God and the Saviour Jesus Christ, and, God and our Lord Jesus Christ, first to signify one person, and then two; without any assignable reason for so remarkable a difference." (p. 65f.) Surely Winstanley is aware of the grammatical difference between these two verses, the second passage adding an article after the copulative *καί*: *καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν*. Apparently he does not think it "very probable" that two different meanings should be expressed by two different grammatical forms!

The exegetical vagaries indulged in by Winstanley in so many places of his book prompt a few additional remarks before we move onward in our study of Sharp's Rule and the four passages. First a word in behalf of grammatical interpretation in the exegesis of Holy Scripture. T. F. Middleton, in the preface to his significant treatise, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article*, expresses it well: "To the Grammatical interpretation of the N.T. every sensible and unbiased Christian will give his strenuous support. When, indeed, we consider how many there are who seek to warp the Scriptures to their own views and prepossessions, it seems to be the only barrier which can be opposed successfully against

heresy and corruption. Partial Versions may be framed, and false Expositions sent forth into the world: but these cannot, if the friends of religion accurately study the original of the Scriptures, long mislead mankind. It was the judicious admonition of one of the Fathers, and the lapse of centuries has not abated its force or propriety, ἡμεῖς οἱ πιστοὶ παρ' ἑαυτοῖς ἐξετάσωμεν καὶ βασανίσωμεν τῶν ῥημάτων τὴν ἀκρίβειαν [Let us who believe on our own part examine and test out the accuracy of the things which are spoken]."¹¹ Winstanley disparages such grammatical interpretation and sets it aside repeatedly in his interpretation of Scripture. The result is that his own "views and prepossessions" have come to influence the direction of his exegetical conclusions. And these conclusions he presumptuously labels as the "true sense" of the holy writers!

Surely an observance of the usage of the definite article is an important part of the grammatical interpretation of the New Testament, for the presence or absence of an article often has a significant effect upon the meaning. It can, moreover, surely be demonstrated that the evangelists and apostles were not as capricious and arbitrary in their use of the definite article as Winstanley suggests. According to such grammarians as Middleton and A.T. Robertson, these writers probably always had a reason for using or not using an article in a particular passage. It is true, of course, that we may not always be able to determine the reasons for their usage -- the use of the article with proper names being a case in point.

But there is surely no reason why we should be in doubt concerning the meaning of the holy writers when they employ that idiom which is described by Sharp's Rule. For it is indeed one of the most firmly established of all the rules which pertain to the usage of the article. If, for the sake of argument, we temporarily exclude the four passages presently under study, there are no exceptions to the rule in the entire New Testament! Winstanley, now, suggests that our four passages are such exceptions. But does he realize that this suggestion involves an implicit denial of the integrity of the writers, Paul and Peter? For these apostles employed the idiom with great frequency, and with an obvious understanding and appreciation of its force. If they had now used this idiom in these four verses in a manner contrary

to the force which it clearly has in the remainder of their writings, they could indeed be justly charged with inexcusable carelessness, if not with deliberate deception. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, if the writers had not intended to identify Jesus Christ with "God" in these verses, they surely expressed themselves in a manner which they must have known would mislead their readers. But, of course, such a situation could not be possible, inasmuch as they were writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

(to be continued)

C. Kuehne

FOOTNOTES

1. Calvin Winstanley, *A Vindication of Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the New Testament* ... (Liverpool: W. Jones, 1805).
2. The passage can be found near the end of Plato's sixth epistle, addressed to Hermeias, Erastus, and Corsicus. The later citations are in Clement's *Stromata*, chap. 14, and in Origen's *Against Celsus*, book VI, chap. 8.
3. Book III, chap. 75.
4. Winstanley identifies this reference only as follows: "See note in Burgh's *Enquiry*, 359."
5. Winstanley fails to identify the precise location of this quotation in the writings of Clement.
6. Chapter 22.
7. This verse is quoted in the interpolated *Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrneans*, chap. 9.
8. In Mr. Marsh's *Letters to Mr. Travis*, p. 257. Cited by Middleton on p. xlv of the preface to his book on the Greek article. See footnote 11.
9. Cf. *Journal of Theology*, March, 1974, p. 16f.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 19f., footnote 1.
11. Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article* (Cambridge: J. & J.J. Deighton, 1833), p. xxxix. In the next issue of this *Journal*, I shall, God willing, present Middleton's views with respect to Sharp's Rule and the four passages which we are studying.