

IS JESUS OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOUR? (Titus 2:13)

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1. Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ ... (Titus 2: 13 (NKJV, NIV)).

2. Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and of our Saviour, Jesus Christ ... (KJV, NAB).

Can you spot the subtle difference in the way this verse is being translated?

Hint: **Option 1** says we are waiting for the appearing of the glory of *one Person*.

Option 2 says we await *two Persons*. Commentators all agree the Greek is 'deliciously' ambiguous, which explains why the history of interpreting **Titus 2: 13** has divided grammarians, and indicates why we have the two options above.

Whilst reputable Greek grammarians are equally divided, all are agreed that either possibility is based on legitimate syntactic possibilities.

Option 1 is endorsed by trinitarians who believe Jesus Christ is both **our God and Saviour**. Representative of this view are the commentary footnotes of **The NIV Study Bible, Tenth Anniversary Edition**;

2:13 *the blessed hope — the glorious appearing ... our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*. It is possible to translate this phrase "the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ" (KJV), but the NIV rendering better represents the Greek construction. It is an explicit testimony to the deity of Christ (see note on Rom 9:5).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Revised Edition) also endorses this *one Person* option by stating that, **the final phrase in v. 13 — correctly rendered in the NIV as referring to one person, "Jesus Christ"** has any number of Greek scholars in agreement. These scholars include the likes of **Daniel B. Wallace, Knight, Mounce, Marshall, et al.**

Thus, according to these popular sources, **option 1** is the preferred. For them, **Titus 2: 13** says Jesus is **our God and Saviour — an explicit testimony to the deity of Christ**.

However, I hope to show that the *two Person* interpretation of **option 2** is more likely what Paul intended to convey. Obviously, the question boils down to whether the noun *theos* (God) applies to **our Saviour Jesus Christ** or not.

First, we start with **the wider context**, the big picture.

In the introduction to **Titus** where God and Jesus are first mentioned, the two are obviously differentiated. Paul says he is **a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ ... (1:1)**. The apostle then extends to **Titus**, his **true son in the faith**, a greeting **from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:4)**. There is no ambiguity in translation here. God is defined as the Father and Jesus is the second person who is differentiated as the Messianic Lord.

The distinction of these *two Persons* is the foundational testimony of the entire New Testament (NT). God is **the God and Father of Jesus the Christ**. There is no ambiguity on this matter in any other verse in the NT which the apostle Paul penned. **(¹) (²)**

In fact, *the word theos* occurs more than 500 times in Paul's epistles (excluding the book of **Hebrews** due to its uncertain authorship). And *there is not one single instance where that description is applied to Christ!* This means that we are left with one legitimately ambiguous Pauline text in **Titus 2: 13** which, on purely grammatical considerations, may be translated either way.

We ask then: Which way does all the data point? Does one possible exception make the rule? What are the odds?

Second, the immediate context of **Titus 2: 11-14** confirms this finding. Since 'God' has already been introduced as being **the Father** in this epistle (and indeed, in every other Pauline epistle) we have every right to say that the subject of **verse 11** (the doer) when he is called **God** must surely refer to **the Father**.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that in the rest of the sentence that "God" is the same One Person as already nominated. Why would "**the great God**" in **verse 13**, be a different subject from the "God" at the beginning of the section starting in **verse 11**? Context *requires* the subject, the doer, to be the same person throughout, surely?

OBJECTION!

Someone may object: But Greg, that's precisely the point. In **Titus 2:10** it is **God** who is **our Saviour** and in **2:13 Jesus Christ is our Saviour!** Same title for both and same functions for both. This is the argument used by **William Hendriksen** in his ***New Testament Commentary* ...**

¹ Some examples are: **Rom. 1: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 3; 2 Cor. 1: 2-3; 11:31; Gal. 1: 1-3; Eph. 1: 2-3; Phil. 1: 2; 2:11; Col. 1: 2, 1 Thess. 1: 1-3, 2 Thess. 1: 1, 12; 1 Tim. 1: 1-2; 2 Tim. 1: 2, etc., etc.**

² Though of a different context there is one other highly disputed Pauline text in **Rom. 9: 5** which is plagued by grammatical variances, but examining this verse is beyond the purview of this brief article.

Even the very context (verse 14) ascribes to *Jesus* functions which in the Old Testament are ascribed to *Jehovah*, such as *redeeming* and *purifying* (II Sam. 7:23, Ps. 130: 8; Hos. 13:14; then Ezek. 37:23) and that the word *Savior* is in each of the three chapters of Titus ascribed first to *God*, then to *Jesus* (Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3: 4,6). It is therefore evidently the purpose of the author of this epistle (namely, Paul!) to show that Jesus is fully divine, just as fully as is Jehovah or as is the Father. (³)

Dr James White is another well-known trinitarian apologist who in his *The Forgotten Trinity* argues that in **Titus 2:13** the noun *theos* applies to Christ. (⁴) He says, the context gives *no reason whatsoever* to think that two persons are in view here. Only Christ is under discussion. One must wonder, then, why anyone would *wish* to find a second person, since the context does not push in that direction.

Dr. White adds that there is simply no reason, outside of theological reasons (which should not drive our translations in the first place), to avoid the proper rendering of Titus 2: 13 or 2 Peter 1: 1. Both testify to the deity of Jesus Christ.

James White is one who, like **Hendriksen** proposes that v.14, which speaks of how Christ *gave himself for us, that he might ... purify for himself his own special people*, demonstrates that Jesus is being referred to as the God of the OT. How so?

He contends:- To the person whose ear is attuned to the words of the Old Testament, this is a phrase [*his own special people*] that would bring to mind none other than Yahweh himself ... the context, then, is one that would find no problem at all in calling Jesus '*God and Saviour*,' since it has freely applied to Him words that had been used by God's people for centuries to describe Yahweh their Saviour.

The argument is that OT texts ascribed to Yahweh are in the NT now applied to Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus must be God! On the surface this kind of reasoning sounds plausible, does it not? However, to make Jesus Yahweh because God's people are also called Christ's people, is an unwarranted leap in false equivalency.

What does Jesus himself say about this subject of God's own *special people*? He prayed ...

Father ... I have made Your Name known to those whom You gave me from the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word ... I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones You have given

³ **William Hendriksen**, *New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Banner of Truth, 1972, p374 (Italics original).

⁴ I am indebted to **Patrick Navas** for his treatment of this section on **Dr James White**. I highly recommend his book *DIVINE TRUTH OR HUMAN TRADITION? A Reconsideration of the Roman Catholic-Protestant Doctrine of the Trinity in Light of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures*. (**Patrick's** treatment of **Titus 2: 13** is one of the most thorough I have seen anywhere.) See pp 289. Emphasis added).

me, because they are Yours, and everything of mine is Yours and everything of Yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them (John 17: 6-10).

Three times in this short space Jesus states that believers have been given to him by God the Father. Believers in Christ are the special people whom God has set apart. Indeed, Jesus makes the astounding claim that everything of mine is Yours and everything of Yours is mine. All who are in Christ are therefore God's very own.

In John 10: 26f our Lord explains that he is authorised to give his sheep eternal life, and that they shall not perish nor be snatched out of his hand precisely because my Father who has given them to me is greater than all , and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one — in this matter!

God has no elect persons outside of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and purified by his word and sanctifying Spirit: And don't forget that Christ himself belongs to God! You are Christ's and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3: 23)! Therefore, to belong to Christ is to be God's own special people.

To infer that because Christians are spoken of in Titus 2: 14 as Christ's special people (Cf. his sheep) proves the title the great God from verse 13 must necessarily refer to Jesus because in the OT God has a special people for Himself is special pleading. We are Christ's own special people for the reason adduced; You are Christ's and Christ is God's.

FOLLOWING 'THE RULE'?

We must point out a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of Bible translation. I refer to "the Granville Sharp Rule" which has significantly influenced most of our modern versions relating to this question of translating Titus 2: 13.

Granville Sharp (1735-1813) was a staunch anti-slavery advocate who also became rather concerned at the growing numbers in the Church of England who were questioning the Deity of Christ. To counteract what he considered was a disturbing trend, he came up with a never-before heard 'rule' for translation. Looking for a predetermined outcome, he was hardly an unbiased commentator. (5)

Sharp contended that when the connecting word (conjunction) "and" joined two nouns of the same case, and when the first noun has the definite article and the second noun does not, that the two nouns refer to the same subject.

⁵ For those interested in his new Granville Sharp "rule", it is stated thusly:- "When the copulative *kai* connects two nouns of the same case, if the article *ho*, or any of its cases, precedes the first of the said nouns or participles, and is not repeated before the second noun or participle, the latter always relates to the same person that is expressed or described by the first noun or participle ... I don't blame you for saying this is clear as mud!

Simply stated, because there is only one definite article governing the nouns “God” and “Saviour” in **Titus 2: 13**, then there is only one person in view — making Jesus both! And the majority of modern Bible translations over the last 200 or so years have adopted this Johnny-come-lately “rule”!

I note that for **William Hendriksen** the final deciding factor in plumping for **option 1** and Jesus’ full Deity (the *one Person* reading) is his almost exclusive appeal to the **Granville Sharp** “rule”. **Hendriksen** goes so far as to say that, **No valid reason has ever been found which would show that the rule does not apply in the present case** (i.e. to **Titus 2: 13**). Oh *really?* We shall see!

WHO MAKES THE ‘RULES’?

What is conveniently overlooked, is that **Sharp** had half a dozen exceptions for his novel ‘rule’, because as a blanket rule it just doesn’t work. It’s no rule! (⁶)

The only thing I will say here is that when the NT was written, we cannot know if such a rule existed. So it cannot be decisive. In his **Grammar** (Vol. 3, p. 181) **Moulton-Howard-Turner** explains that, **Sometimes the definite article is not repeated even when there is a clear separation in idea.** (⁷)

All of this evidence points to the fact that many of our modern translations are determined not by grammatical or hermeneutical considerations, but sadly, by those with a theological point to prove.

The trinitarian **THE EXPOSITOR’S GREEK TESTAMENT** (Ed. **W. Robertson Nicoll**) concludes that, **On the whole, then, we decide in favour of ... the rendering of this passage, *appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ* [the *two Person* option]. The grammatical argument [**Granville Sharp’s Rule**] is too slender to bear much weight, especially when we take into consideration not only the general neglect of the article in these epistles but the omission of it before *saviour* in **1 Tim. 1: 1; 4:10**.**

So much for this “rule”! I cannot go past this brilliant piece of satire by **Eric H. H. Chang**; What seems surpassingly strange is that the early Greek speaking Fathers, and other Greek speakers in the early church, appear to have been unaware of any such “rule” in their language!

The Greek speaking bishops and scholars who supported the trinitarian position in the 4th century seem never to have thought of using such an obvious “rule” to their advantage — if such a rule existed!

⁶ For the reader who wishes to explore this further, I recommend this presentation by **Jerry Wierwille**:-
<https://youtu.be/jXOd9hvuZTA?si=J18rLaPIGSuMvAuF>

⁷ For another brilliant expose of this “rule” see <https://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/the-granville-sharp-rule#top> by **Sir Anthony Buzzard**.

This “rule” had to wait until some European scholars, whose native language was not Greek, elevated it to the level of a “discovery” ... Poor 17th century King James Version was, of course, too early to benefit from it! (⁸)

Are you still persuaded by these scholars and their sterling efforts to convince you that **Titus 2: 13** makes Jesus **to be our great God and Saviour** on the basis of a novel “rule”? Or are you just confused by all these obtuse arguments? Is there a simpler, better way to decide how to translate **Titus 2: 13**? Well, yes, of course there is! I am going to show that the Bible is always its own best interpreter. Always work from the clear and stated obvious to the less clear. The deciding test as always is ...

WHAT DID JESUS HIMSELF SAY ABOUT THE SECOND COMING?

Given that **Titus 2:13** is addressing the doctrine of the Second Coming, the *Parousia*, the acid test surely is what Jesus himself said about the matter. The eminent prince of Greek scholars, **Henry Alford** says the sense of **Titus 2: 13** is exactly the same as Jesus’ words in **Matthew 16: 27**;

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each according to his works.

We may compare the similar statement of Jesus in **Mark 8: 38** and **Luke 9: 26**;

For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Jesus is quite clear. At his Second Coming he will come **in the glory of his Father**. And note that he will be manifested as the glorified man from heaven ... he comes as **the Son of Man**. Even those who believe “Jesus is God” do not say **the Son of Man** is a title for Deity. They know Jesus is referring to his humanity — his “human nature”.

God has **appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained** (Acts 17: 31). The man Jesus comes **in the glory** and authority **of his Father God**. This much is crystal clear.

STEPHEN’S VISION IN ACTS 7:56

The martyr **Stephen** gazed into the open heaven. He shouted, “**Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” He **saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He saw two distinct persons in his vision**. One of those persons was non-Deity — **the Son of Man**. That man was **standing at the right hand of God**.**

⁸ *THE ONLY TRUE GOD: A Study of Biblical Monotheism*, Xlibris Corp., 2009, p187.

That phrase, **the glory of God**, is the same phrase we see in **Titus 2:13**, except that there it is **the glory of the great God**. No less a commentator than **C. K. Barrett** suggests that this vision was for **Stephen** “a glimpse of the Parousia” (⁹) The parallels between both of these Scriptures are not incidental.

The salient point is that both passages speak of **the glory of God** and identify a second non-Deity person standing next to, and distinct from, that one God. This is another reason favouring the *two Person* rendering of **Titus 2: 13**.

With this in mind, we may legitimately translate **Titus 2: 13** as the **Revised English Bible (REV)** does: It says “**we are awaiting the appearing of our great God and Saviour’s glory — Jesus Christ.**” Jesus Christ **is** the glory of God displayed! (¹⁰)

DEFICIENCY DISAPPOINTMENT

In passing I cannot help but note in his impassioned plea for his *one Person* exegesis of **Titus 2: 13**, that **William Hendricksen’s** primary appeal is to the **Granville Sharp Rule**. He writes that, **No valid reason has ever been found which would show that the rule does not apply in the present case**. He fails to cite reputable Greek grammarians who disagree! His faith in “the rule” is almost Quixotic!

But for me, the biggest deficiency in his exegetical method is that he fails to cite even once the testimony from the mouth of Jesus himself concerning the Second Coming. We have noted how Jesus categorically distinguishes *two Persons* in his Second Coming teaching. It’s as though the “rule” carries greater weight than the plain teaching of Jesus! Something doesn’t smell right!

If **Titus 2: 13** does in fact, call Jesus **our great God and Saviour**, then it is an exceptional verse. It would be the *only* place where there is no distinction between the Persons of God the Father and Jesus the Christ in the context of the Second Coming. Further to the examples already alluded to, take this one ...

Now may our God and Father Himself, and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you ... so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones (1 Thess. 3:11-13).

Two Persons — and in the context of the return of our Lord Jesus.

WE AWAIT THE GLORY OF GOD

You have heard the expression, “**The devil is in the detail**”. **Titus 2: 13** is such a verse — speaking metaphorically, of course! Pay attention to what the apostle exhorts us to be eagerly on the lookout for. It is the **appearing of the** [divine] **glory**.

⁹ As quoted in **ACTS: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series** by **David J. Williams**, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990, p146 (See my article, “**LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT!**” for a fuller treatment of the reasons why Stephen saw a vision of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as he was being killed.)

¹⁰ Cf the similar construction in **Col. 2:2** where **the knowledge of God’s mystery is Christ**. (NASB, NRSV).

This is not to be rushed over. And it turns out to be a most significant point, for the apostle did not simply speak of **the appearing of the great God**, but of **the appearing of the glory** of (or, **from**, or **belonging to**) the great God.

Throughout the Scriptures, Christ is always associated with God's glory. God's glory is primarily seen in His Son. Not only has the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ entered into God's glory, but he now shares in that glory and reflects that glory perfectly. God has given His glory to Christ. He has answered Jesus' great prayer in **John 17** that the Father would give him the glory promised to him before the world began.

When Jesus comes back we will see the glory of God fully displayed in him! We believers now, by faith, see **the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4: 4-6)**. The image is not the original. The image reflects the original. It is God who has exalted the Messiah to share in and to display His glory.

It is always **to the eternal God ... God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (Rom. 16: 27). In all things God is to be glorified through Jesus Christ (1 Peter. 4: 11)**.

Applying all of this to **Titus 2: 13**, what we can say for sure, is that the most consistent way to think about the Second Coming is to understand that when Jesus Christ is manifested through his Lordship over the world, that all will see **the glory of our great God and Saviour** fully manifested through Jesus Christ. **Two Persons**.

IN CONCLUSION

There is no denying the syntactical ambiguity of the Greek structure of **Titus 2: 13**. Our trinitarian friends, to be quite blunt, want millions of readers to think **Titus 2: 13** is a slam-dunk, self-evident proof, for the Deity of Christ, based on nothing more than syntactic ambiguity spiced up with some special pleading from a novel "rule" nobody ever heard of until two hundred years ago! But what they also don't tell you is that ...

Many reputable Greek grammarians who are themselves trinitarians, disagree with their own colleagues when they translate the verse to say that Jesus is God! In this article I have, by and large, resisted the temptation to cite those scholars (there are many!). Anybody can make a case by quoting the scholars!

But one thing's for sure: Where there is syntactic ambiguity, translation must be determined by other well-established hermeneutic methods, such as clear parallel statements in other Scriptures. If this verse is saying that Jesus Christ our Saviour is **the great God** himself then, it is the only instance in the Pauline epistles — of which there are over 500 examples — where Jesus is called *theos*, "God".

Therefore, my own translation preference, based on all the evidence is:- **We are eagerly waiting for the appearing of our great God and Saviour's glory — Jesus Christ**" (as per the **REV**). Let the earth be filled with the glory of God in Christ!

