

A Little Bit of Greek

Session 4: The Deity of Christ in Grammar

In person at Wai 'alae Baptist Church

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In the second session, we saw how John used the Greek imperfect and aorist verb tenses to communicate the eternity of the Word and the Word's distinction from the rest of creation and relationship to God.

While that is a powerful declaration of the deity of Christ, there are other ways the New Testament authors communicated this same truth.

I AM and The LORD

Greek is different from English in several ways. One way is how Greek used its verbs. In most English declarative sentences, we need to state the subject (S) and main verb (MV).

S MV
He runs.

In Greek, this can be written two different ways.

Αὐτός τρέχει
τρέχει

There were different reasons Greeks might use one or two words. For example,

- To specify or distinguish the subject
- To emphasize the subject

Sometimes, it could be the author's style or preference. Remember also that writing materials were not plentiful in the first century. They wrote in capital letters with little space between words. If an author chose to add a word when a shorter form could have communicated the same thing, it would seem to have been for a reason.

The Greek can state "I am" in two ways.

Ἐγώ εἰμι – I am
εἰμι – I am

In his gospel, John uses both forms. It could be his preference, but when we look at each of these collectively and in the context of the Gospel of John, it seems to be intentional.

1. "I am the Bread of Life." (6:34)

2. "I am the light of the world." (8:12)
3. "I AM WHO I AM" (8:58)
4. "I am the Good Shepherd." (10:10)
5. "I am the resurrection and the life." (11:25)
6. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (14:6)
7. "I am the vine ... " (15:1)
8. "I AM" (18:4-5)

Let's look a little closer at some of these.

For Jn. 6:34 – look at what Jesus says in 6:32. How does that help us understand what Jesus is doing and not doing when he says "I am the bread of life"? Who can do what Jesus says the bread can do?

How does John 1:4-5 help us understand what Jesus is saying in 8:12?

John 8:58 is one of the most remarkable examples. What does Jesus mean here?

How do the Jewish leaders react to what Jesus is saying?

Just before John 10:10, what does Jesus say in John 10:9? Look at 11:25 and 14:6. These along with what we saw in 6:32 and 8:12 connect the "I AM" statements to what?

Only 15:1 does not have a strong, direct tie to this same idea although vv. 6 and 8 make an indirect connection.

All of this culminates in John 20:22. What does this scene remind us of?

One other strange scene involving the "I AM" is found in Jn. 18:4-5. What happens when Jesus says "I AM"?

Here is the connection between “I AM”, “Lord”, and Yahweh.

Exodus 3:14-15 Septuagint (LXX)

¹⁴ καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πρὸς Μωϋσῆν Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, καὶ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Ὁ ὢν ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς. ¹⁵ καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς πάλιν πρὸς Μωϋσῆν Οὕτως ἐρεῖς τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ὑμῶν, θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ, ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς, τοῦτό μου ἔστιν ὄνομα αἰώνιον καὶ μνημόσυνον γενεῶν γενεαῖς.

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהַיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהַיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְגַם זַכְרִי לְדֹר דָּר:

I AM WHO I AM	Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν	אֲהַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהַיָּה
I AM	Ὁ ὢν	אֲהַיָּה
The LORD	Κύριος	יְהוָה

The Hebrew word יהוה is usually rendered Yahweh. The Hebrew words are all related to the “to be” verb. The English and Greek maintain this in verse 14, but when the personal name of God is given “Lord” and Κύριος are used instead. In fact, Hebrew texts will also use a Hebrew word for “lord” – *Adonai*. This was out of respect for God’s name – considered too holy to write or speak.

The Hebrew word is called the tetragrammaton (“four letters”) occurs more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament. Hebrew manuscripts would eventually add the vowel pointing for *Adonai* or *Elohim*. The main Scripture for first-century Christians was the LXX. John’s readers would have known the connection between “I am” and “Lord” in the LXX.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is called “Lord.” Sometimes, this is an honorific akin to “master” or “sir.” But in other places, the NT authors seem to mean much more.

Occurrences of Lord in John - Jn. 6:23, 68, 8:11, 9:38, 11:2-3, 12, 21, 27, 32, 34, 39, 12:13, 38, 13:6, 9, 13, 14, 25, 36, 37, 14:5, 8, 22, 20:2, 13, 18, 20, 25, 21:7, 12, 15-17, 20-21. All can be explained as honorific. John 20:25 is the most closely associated with the deity of Jesus. But as we have seen, John has used several other ways to show the deity of Jesus, and it is conceivable that he is at least making a connection here.

ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου **κύριον Ἰησοῦν**, καὶ πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ·

*⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

The primary profession of faith is summed up in these three words “Jesus is Lord.”

- Shift in allegiance
- Common statement in early church
- More than simply – “Jesus is teacher” or “Jesus is master”
- Summary of what Paul believes is most important about Jesus.

The Granville Sharp Rule

*When the copulative **καί** connects two singular, personal, common nouns or participles of the same case that are describing a person, if the article precedes the first and is not repeated before the second, both nouns describe the same person.*

Some people read a rule like this and think “Greek is hard.” In reality, they are saying English is hard. The only Greek word in the sentence above is **καί**.

Let’s understand the English so that we can understand the Greek grammatical rule.

Copulative – We might use a word like conjunction. A conjunction (and copulative) connects words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence. Common conjunctions are “and,” “but,” and “or.”

καί is commonly translated as “and.”

Number – Most people understand words have number. In English, there are two possibilities – singular (one) and plural (more than one). Greek has singular and plural. Some dialects have other numbers (e.g., two).

Personal – These are nouns that describe someone’s office, dignity, affinity, attributes, properties, and qualities.

Common noun – These are all nouns except those called proper nouns. Proper nouns are the personal or official names of people, places, things, and ideas.

Article – In English, we have two articles: the definite article (“the”) or the indefinite article (“a” or “an”). In Greek, there is only one article – although it has many forms depending on case, gender, and number. The Greek masculine singular nominative article is **ὁ**. It often is translated “the” but sometimes is not included in the English or is rendered as a different word depending on context.

Let's return now to the rule. Here is the pattern.

Article + singular personal common noun + καί + singular personal common noun
τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καί σωτήρος ἡμῶν

Person being described - **Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**

This is from Titus 2:13.

προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης **τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτήρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,**

¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of **our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**

In English, how many beings are being talked about?

In Greek, the Granville Sharp rule says there is only one.

Here is another example.

2 Peter 1:1

Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῖς ἰσότημον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ **τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.**

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our **God and Savior Jesus Christ:**

See if you can write the pattern above the phrase.

τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Again, according to the Granville Sharp rule, this is talking about just one person. The Peter passage has other places where this construction is used and there is no disputing that one person is being referenced.

1:11 *For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

¹¹ οὕτως γὰρ πλουσίως ἐπιχορηγηθήσεται ὑμῖν ἡ εἴσοδος εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον βασιλείαν **τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.**

3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

αὐξάνετε δὲ ἐν χάριτι καὶ γνώσει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Some people still question this rule, often citing examples that do not conform exactly to it. The rule as stated above is modified from the original so that it is more specific.

One of the main arguments against this rule is that people begin by saying that the early church could not have had such a developed view of Jesus. This is a common error that we all can make – interpreting Scripture in light of what we believe must be true.