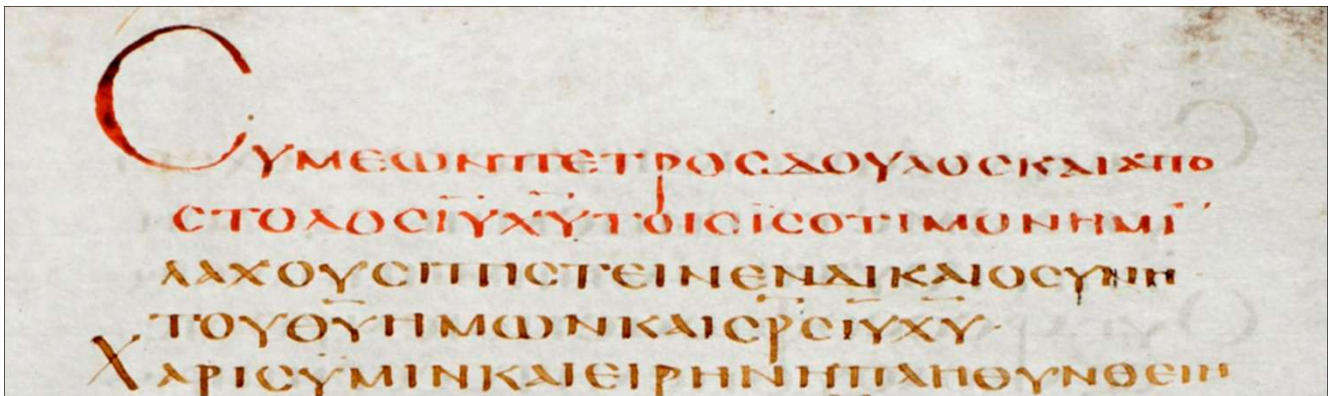


What does 2 Peter 1:1 say about Christ?

Does it say that Christ is God?



by

Dr Trevor R Allin

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What does 2 Peter 1:1 say about Christ?

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Translation of the text:

“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. ² May grace and peace be yours in abundance ...” (2 Peter 1:1-2a, NRSV)

Key words:

$\bar{\iota}\bar{\chi}$ = Jesus; $\bar{\chi}\bar{\rho}\bar{\iota}$ = Christ; $\bar{\theta}\bar{\varsigma}$ = God; $\bar{\sigma}\bar{\nu}\bar{\varsigma}$ = Saviour

(all these forms in the Genitive, using the “Divine Names” / *Nomina Sacra* abbreviations)

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For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in Spain and England on the oldest and most important early Greek manuscripts of the Bible, amongst them the Codex Sinaiticus.

¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

Introduction: The Question

The meaning of 2 Peter 1:1 is clear, as we will see in this article. In all the translations into English that I have consulted, this verse says that Christ is God – all translations except one, the Jehovah’s Witness version, as they deny the deity of Christ and in consequence they change in their version of the Bible all the Biblical verses that teach this. But we don’t need to count translations, when the original Greek text is so clear and easy to understand.

1. The Greek Text of 2 Peter 1:1

Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῖς ἰσότημον ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν πίστιν ἐν [Simeōn Petros doulos kai apóstolos Iēsou Christou tois isótimon hēmin lajousin pístin en δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, dikaiosunē tou Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou]³

An accurate literal translation is:

“Simon Peter slave and apostle of Jesus Christ to those who have received a faith of equal value (or of the same type) by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁴

A translation that is easier to understand is the New Revised Standard Version:

“Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1, NRSV)

This verse calls Jesus Christ “God”, because it says that the same person – Jesus Christ – is “our God and Saviour”.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses change the clear and simple meaning of this short passage, by means of the addition of a word that is not in the Greek texts. Thus in the 1961 edition of the “New World Translation” they write “the righteousness of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ”. They use square brackets to show that the word “the” is not in the Greek text. By adding this word, they have changed the meaning of the text, so that the word “God” seems not to refer to Jesus Christ. In their 2013 revision, they remove the brackets, to hide the fact that they have added a word here. Their version does not reflect the meaning of the Greek text.

2. The Grammatical Structure

We need to examine carefully the following phrase:

τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
[tou Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou]
“of the God our and Saviour Jesus Christ”

The word order is different from English but in accord with standard Greek practice. The two nouns “God” and “Saviour” are joined by the word καὶ [kai], which means “and”. These two nouns refer to the same person, Jesus Christ. They say that He is our “God and Saviour”.

To be able to say what the Jehovah’s Witnesses say, it would be necessary to add as a minimum one word to the Greek, probably two. But those words are not there.

³ In this pronunciation guide, “th” is pronounced as in the English word “think”, “ch” has the value that it has in the Scottish pronunciation of the word “loch”, ē is a long “e” and ō is a long “o”.

⁴ Literal translation by the author of this article.

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It could not be clearer.

Here is the structure:

τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος – Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

In English this is:

from our God and Saviour – Jesus Christ

The very same verse starts with another phrase that has exactly the same structure:

Συμεὼν Πέτρος δοῦλος καὶ ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
[Simeōn Petros doulos kai apóstolos Iēsou Jristou]
“Simon Peter slave and apostle of Jesus Christ”.

Here again we have two nouns, in this case “slave” and “apostle”, which are also joined by the same word καὶ [kai], “and”. These two nouns refer to the same person, in this case to Simon Peter. They say that he is a “slave and apostle”.

Here is the structure:

Simon Peter: slave and apostle

But the verse says more. It also says of whom Peter is the “slave and apostle”: of Jesus Christ. He is not the “slave” of one person and the “apostle” of another person; he is the “slave and apostle” of the same person, Jesus Christ.

Here is the structure:

slave and apostle of Jesus Christ

The Jehovah’s Witnesses accept this, and do not divide Peter’s status as a “slave” and his status as an “apostle” between two people, or between God the Father and Jesus Christ. Their version has, “a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ”.

So in the first verse of this letter we have the same grammatical structure twice.

3. The Focus of 2 Peter 1:1: God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, or only Christ?

When we look into the detail of the grammatical structure, we must not forget the meaning of what we are reading, at the level of the phrase, the sentence and the entire letter.

The author starts by describing himself as the “slave and apostle of Jesus Christ.”

In the New Testament, is anyone called the “slave and apostle of God”? Let us look separately at each word.

Slave

In the New Testament is anyone called a “slave of God?”

First, we need to clarify the meanings of words. The Greek word for “slave” is “δοῦλος” [doulos]. However, “slaves” in Roman society in New Testament times were sometimes highly-regarded members of the staff of wealthy people, often their administrators, secretaries or even advisers. This status is very different from the picture that modern readers are likely to have when they see the word “slave”. They are likely to think of people who were oppressed, abused, mistreated and denied any autonomy or dignity by 18th and 19th century slave owners, especially in the USA. For this reason, many modern translations of the New Testament use words such as “servant” to translate the Greek word “δοῦλος” [doulos]. However, here we shall not base our research on words used in English translations, but on the Greek

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word used in the New Testament. This gives us more reliable results than searching for a given English word, which may or may not reliably indicate the Greek text, depending on the translation consulted.

We are here only looking at the metaphorical use of the word “δοῦλος” [doulos] in the New Testament to describe a servant of God. We are not looking at the references to slaves of human “masters/mistresses”.

So we return to our question: In the New Testament is anyone called a slave *of God*? Yes. Twice. In Titus 1:1 Paul calls himself a “slave of God”⁵. Significantly, he goes on to say “but apostle of Jesus Christ”⁶.

The other use of this phrase is by the Lord’s brother James, who starts his letter with the words

Ἰάκωβος θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος
[Iakōbos Theou kai Kurioi Iēsou Christou doulos],
“James, slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1).⁷

In all other cases in the New Testament where writers describe themselves as a “δοῦλος” [doulos], “slave”, whether of God or of Christ, the reference is to Christ alone.

In Romans 1:1 the Apostle Paul writes:

Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφορισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ,
[Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou klētos apostolos afōrismenos eis euangelion Theou]
“Paul slave of Christ Jesus called (as an) apostle set apart to the gospel of God”.

In Galatians 1:10 he describes himself as a “slave of Christ”⁸.

In Colossians 4:12 he describes Epaphras as a “a slave of Christ (Jesus)”⁹.

Jude, another of the Lord’s brothers, begins his epistle with the words

Ἰούδας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος,
[Ioudas Iēsou Christou doulos]
“Jude of Jesus Christ slave”, i.e., “Jude, slave of Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:1)

So the word δοῦλος [doulos], “slave”, can be used as a servant of God, but this is not its predominant usage in the New Testament. Normally it refers to a servant *of Christ*.

Apostle

Secondly, in the New Testament, is anyone called an “apostle *of God*?”

The word “apostle” means “one who has been sent”, and it was Christ who chose twelve people from among His many followers and called them “apostles” (Mark 3:14, Luke 6:13). *He* then sent them to preach the message of the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:1-2). After His resurrection, *He* sent them to all nations to preach the gospel and baptise in the Name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:20).

If we look at the use of the word “apostle” in the New Testament, we find it never speaks of an “apostle of God the Father”. In every case that specifies who has sent an apostle, it is always Jesus Christ. It speaks of an “apostle of Christ Jesus” (for instance, in 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1) or of an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (for instance, in Titus 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1). It is Jesus Christ who makes apostles and sends them out.

⁵ δοῦλος θεοῦ [doulos theou]

⁶ ἀπόστολος δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [apostolos de Iēsou Christou]

⁷ This reflects occasional use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (e.g. Psalm 27:9, which in the Septuagint numbering is Psalm 26:9).

⁸ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος, [Christou doulos]

⁹ δοῦλος Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ], [doulos Christou Iēsou]

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To return to 2 Peter 1:1,

- in the New Testament, it is possible, but rare, for someone to be called a slave of God. In any case, the structure of 2 Peter 1:1 does not make this a possible meaning in this verse.
- in the New Testament, apostles are only called apostles of Christ.

2 Peter 1:1 follows the pattern of the rest of the New Testament and the writer describes himself in the first part of the verse as being “a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He then goes on (in the same verse) to speak of “the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ”. So the focus throughout 2 Peter 1:1 is only Jesus Christ, not God the Father, nor God the Father and Christ.

4. References in the New Testament to “God the Father” and to “the Lord Jesus Christ”

On those occasions in the New Testament where the writer does speak of God the Father and Jesus Christ, the structure is completely different from the one that we find in 2 Peter 1:1. The most common phrases are:

- “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”¹⁰ (for example, in Ephesians 6:23, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2)
- “God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord”¹¹ (for example, in 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2)
- “God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour”¹² (for example, in Titus 1:4).

In 2 John 3 we have the phrase “from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son”¹³.

The structure of the phrase “our God and Saviour Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:1 is very different from all these ways of referring, separately, to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when the writer does refer both to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (in the very next verse), he does use a structure similar to the one seen in the above examples: “May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” (2 Peter 1:2 NRSV)¹⁴ The structure of this phrase is totally different from the structure used in 2 Peter 1:1.

5. Another Example in this Epistle of the Structure in 2 Peter 1:1: 2 Peter 3:18

As indicated above, in the first verse of this letter we have the same grammatical structure twice. But, as if that were not enough, the epistle ends with another phrase with the same structure:

αὐξάνετε δὲ ἐν χάριτι καὶ γνώσει τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα
[auxánete de en cháriti kai gnōsei tou kuríou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou. autō hē doxa
καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος. (2 Peter 3:18)
kai nun kai eis hēméran aiōnos]

The literal translation is:

“But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever.”

The New International Version, Anglicised edition, translates this as follows:

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever!” (2 Peter 3:18 NIB)

The phrase that we need to examine is this one:

¹⁰ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ In certain grammatical contexts, the forms of these words can change, but with the same meaning. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 1:1, the phrase is ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ.

¹¹ ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν

¹² ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν

¹³ παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ παρὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς

¹⁴ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθεῖ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. [charis hūmīn kai eirēnē plēthuntheīē en epignōsei tou theou kai Iēsou tou kuríou hēmōn]

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τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
[tou kuriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou]
“of the Lord our and Saviour Jesus Christ”

Here is the structure:

τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος – Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

In English this is:

of our Lord and Saviour – Jesus Christ

The two nouns “Lord” and “Saviour” are joined, as before, by the word καὶ [kai], “and”. These two nouns refer to *the same person*, to Jesus Christ. They say that Jesus Christ is our “Lord and Saviour”.

Indeed, this same structure also occurs *twice* in this verse. The first time that it occurs is the phrase “in the grace and knowledge” – once more, two nouns, “grace” and “knowledge” joined by the same word as before, “and”. As in all of the other cases, these two nouns also refer to *the same person*. In this case that person is Jesus Christ. The phrase speaks of “the grace of Jesus Christ” and of “the knowledge of Jesus Christ”.

Here is the structure:

in the grace and knowledge – of Jesus Christ

6. 2 Peter 1:1 and 3:18 Compared, Side by Side

Let us compare the phrase describing Christ in the first verse of this epistle with the one that occurs in the last verse of the same epistle.

2 Peter 1:1	2 Peter 3:18
from our God and Saviour – Jesus Christ	from our Lord and Saviour – Jesus Christ

Higher up in this article it will be observed that the Greek structure is also identical in these two verses.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses accept this structure when it occurs in 2 Peter 3:18 and in their version they have “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”, which is correct. But they refuse to translate in the same way *the same structure* in verse 1 of the same letter.

7. This Same Phrase also Occurs in Three More Places in the Same Epistle.

The first two places are 2 Peter 1:11 and 2:20.

2 Peter 1:11

τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
[tou kuriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou]
“of the Lord our and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Here is the translation both by the NIV and by the NRSV:

“of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

The truth is that there are no two ways of saying it. That is what the Greek text says.

2 Peter 2:20

ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
[en epignōsei tou kuriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou]
“through the knowledge of the Lord [our] and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

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In 2:20, the word “our” is missing in some manuscripts, but this doesn’t change the meaning of the phrase, and the structure is the same.¹⁵

The NIV has:

“by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 2:20, NIB),

and the NRSV has:

“through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 2:20, NRSV).

In any case, *the structure is the same*:

of the Lord [our] and Saviour – Jesus Christ

The normal English word order would be:

of the/our Lord and Saviour – Jesus Christ

In both of these cases, the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible has the correct translation.

2 Peter 3:2

The same structure also occurs in a shorter phrase in 2 Peter 3:2, which differs merely in that it lacks the word ἡμῶν [hēmōn], “our”.

μνησθῆναι	τῶν προειρημένων	ῥημάτων ... καὶ τῆς	τῶν	ἀποστόλων ὑμῶν
[mnēsthēnai	tōn proeirēménōn	rēmátōn ... kai tēs	tōn	apostólōn humōn
“to remember the previously-spoken	words ...	and of the	by the	apostles your
		<i>refers to</i>	<i>refers to</i>	
		<i>the word</i>	<i>the word</i>	
		<i>“commandment”</i>	<i>“apostles”</i>	

ἐντολῆς τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος.¹⁶
 entolēs tou kuríou kai sōtēros]
 commandment of the Lord and Saviour”

The NRSV translates this as:

“remember the words spoken in the past ... and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken through your apostles.” (Here they have repeated the word “spoken”, but this is implied by the context and does not change the meaning.)

The phrase on which we are focussing here is:

τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος

In English this is:

of the Lord and Saviour

Again in this case, the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible has the correct translation. *They change the text only in 2 Peter 1:1, to prevent their readers from seeing that the original Greek text says that Christ is God!*

In the words of a person who has studied these texts and recently wrote to me,

“it is translated as "Lord and Savior" (the same person) by the NWT [New World Translation by the Jehovah’s Witnesses], revealing their lack of impartiality when translating. The three verses are exact grammatical parallels with 2 Peter 1:1.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus have “our”, while this word is missing in Codex Vaticanus.
¹⁶ To shorten the quotation slightly and focus on the structure that we are studying, we have removed a phrase that does not affect the meaning of the part that we are examining here.
¹⁷ In personal correspondence

This comment summarises the situation correctly and is completely justified. The way that the Jehovah's Witnesses change the meaning of 2 Peter 1:1 reveals their doctrinal bias. It is not an accurate translation.

8. An Argument used by the Jehovah's Witness

The Jehovah's Witnesses sometimes speak about the position of the word ἡμῶν [hēmōn] (our) in verse 1, and say that this indicates that the two nouns, "God" and "Saviour" refer to two different "people": one to the Father and the other to Christ. But this is not the case. What is more, in 2 Peter 3:18 they don't apply this "rule" which they have invented, because there they don't need it. The truth is that their "rule" does not exist. They have invented it themselves, and they apply it when it suits them. The word ἡμῶν [hēmōn] (our) is in the same position in both verses, because that is its normal position.¹⁸ It does not mean that "our" applies only to "God" and not to "Saviour", as they claim.

9. An "inclusio"

To summarise, the structure is exactly the same in the last verse of the letter as in the first verse of the letter, and this is undoubtedly intentional: the letter begins and ends speaking of what is most important about Jesus Christ. He is:

"our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (1:1) and

"our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (3:18).

Starting and ending a passage, a letter or a book with the same idea or the same words is a literary technique of ancient times called (with a Latin word) an "inclusio". It frequently occurs in the New Testament and serves to indicate the meaning of everything that comes between the first use of the phrase and its last use. In this case it indicates to us that the most important thing in this letter is that it talks about Jesus Christ and who He is: our God, Lord and Saviour.

10. 2 Peter 3:18, Too, Indicates that Christ is God

2 Peter 3:18 doesn't call Christ "God", but it says something equivalent to this:

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος.
[Iēsou Christou. autō hē doxa kai nun kai eis hēméran aiōnos]
"Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and for all eternity."

In the book of the prophet Isaiah we read that God says:

"I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols. (Isaiah 42:8, NRSV)

God does not give His glory to others, but 2 Peter 3:18 gives that glory to Christ, for all eternity. It is another way of saying that Christ is God.

11. The Tactics of the Jehovah's Witnesses

In the headquarters of the Organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the state of New York, USA, there has for many decades been a team of researchers constantly looking for any phrase that they can quote from any person in order to support their erroneous ideas and their version of the Bible that falsifies the meaning of the original texts.

As is to be expected, in the course of twenty centuries, many people have written many things about the Biblical text, some of them accurate and others completely mistaken. The Jehovah's Witnesses of course only quote the phrases or the authors who seem to support the sect's point of view, and the Organization

¹⁸ This is the same word order that we see in the "Lord's Prayer", where the first two words, "Our Father" in Greek are Πάτερ ἡμῶν [Pater hēmōn], literally "Father our" (Matthew 6:9)

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hides what is said or written by the overwhelming majority of the experts in the Biblical texts – and sometimes even what they all say, when no-one supports their interpretation!

This is not acceptable and it is not even honest; it hides the truth and by this means deceives readers of the Bible, the text of which the Jehovah's Witnesses change so that the falseness of their doctrines is not seen.

In the case of 2 Peter 1:1, the Jehovah's Witnesses have found something written by someone more than a century ago and they refer to it in order to justify their version of this verse. But it doesn't matter what this gentleman may have written at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th, especially as the Greek text of 2 Peter 1:1 is not disputed and it is very clear and easy to understand.

It is not possible to analyse this text without looking at the Greek, but the Jehovah's Witnesses count on the fact that the majority of their hearers or readers – and even the majority of their members – will not understand Greek, so they try to persuade them by changing the clear meaning of the text and by using selected quotations from writers who are not representative of the world-wide academic consensus.

The mere fact that they have had to go back so far to find someone that they are able to quote is an indication of the weakness of their argument. It also demonstrates the lack of support for their interpretation of this verse amongst experts in Biblical Greek.

Conclusion

It would be possible to quote other examples of this same structure in the Greek text of the New Testament, but it does not seem to me that it is necessary. These numerous examples – *all of them from the same author and in the same letter!* – demonstrate beyond all doubt the meaning of the text of 2 Peter 1:1. It says that Christ is God.

For more on this theme, I would recommend that you read my article “Was Jesus Worshipped in the New Testament and the Early church?”, which can be found here:

<https://livingwater-spain.com/worship.pdf> Chapter 7 is especially relevant.