

Is Jesus God in 2 Peter 1.1?

by Servetus the Evangelical

The New Testament (NT) has two epistles whose authorship is accredited to the Apostle Peter. Titles of books and letters of the Bible were often penned after they were written and probably by a different hand. The early church unanimously accepted that Peter wrote 1 Peter; but for centuries the church disputed whether he wrote 2 Peter. Most modern, historical-critical, NT scholars have rejected that he did so. Since its salutation attests to Peter's authorship, and for other reasons, I am inclined to accept that he did.

The only problem passage in 1 and 2 Peter that has to do with whether Jesus is God is 2 Peter 1.1. It has grammatical problems very similar to those in Titus 2.13 and 2 Thessalonians 1.12, which mostly concern word order. The question is, Does the last phrase in 2 Peter 1.1 mention Two Persons, viz., the Father and Christ, or One Person, viz., Christ? The One Person view calls Christ "God;" the Two Persons view does not.

The problematic phrase in 2 Peter 1.1 reads in the Greek text as follows, with an interlinear translation supplied below it:

- *tou theou hemon kai soterou Iesou Christou*
- the God of us and Savior Jesus Christ

Only a few English Bible versions translate this phrase in 2 Peter 1.1 with two Persons in view, in which case it *does not* call Jesus Christ "God." In contrast, almost all English versions translate it with one Person in view, so that it *does* call Jesus Christ "God." Bible versions (abbreviated in parenthesis) render this clause as follows:

Two Persons View:

- "of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (AV)
- "of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ" (ASV, RSVmg, NRSVmg, NWT)

One Person View:

- "of our God and Savior(,) Jesus Christ" (RV, NAB, TCNT, RSV, NEB, JB, NASB, NIV, NJB, REB, NRSV, ESV)

Reasons which support that 2 Peter 1.1 calls Jesus Christ "God" are as follows, with rebuttals appended:

1. In the Greek text, the absence of an article preceding *soterou* (Savior) indicates that the pronoun *hemon* (our) applies only to *theou* (God).
Rebuttal: J.N.D. Kelly says "'Savior' tended to be anarthrous [no article],... and in any case the correct use of the article was breaking down in late Greek."
2. The doxology to Christ in 2 Peter 3.18 indicates the author could call Christ "God."
Rebuttal: Doxologies addressed to Christ are irrelevant as to whether he is called "God" because Jesus said of the Father, "it is his will that all should pay the same honour to the Son as to the Father" (John 5.23 New English Bible).
3. Since it was common in Hellenistic lands to call religious and political figures "our God," it would have been natural for this author to call Christ "our God and Savior."
Rebuttal: Divine inspiration prohibits pagan influence.
4. The nearby compound construction with its anarthrous *soterou* (Savior), in 2 Peter 1.11 ("our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"), parallels "God" and "Savior" in v. 1, which suggests that both are compound titles.

Rebuttal: The compound title, “Lord and Savior,” appears nowhere else in the NT except in 2 Peter, and it occurs four times (2 Peter 1.11; 2.20; 3.2, 18). This evidence along with the generally accepted late date of authorship for 2 Peter suggests that the words, “Lord and Savior,” had by then become a fixed formula, making an article preceding “Savior” assumed. This repeated compound title, “Lord and Savior,” in 2 Peter is not a suitable parallel for “God” and “Savior” in 2 Peter 1.1.

The following reasons support that 2 Peter 1.1 *does not* call Jesus Christ “God:”

1. The author would not call Jesus “God” in v.1 and inject confusion by distinguishing God and Jesus later in the same sentence, in v. 2—“the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” So, the ambiguity in v. 1 should be interpreted by the clarity in v. 2.

Rebuttal: If the author had wanted to distinguish the Father and Jesus in v. 1 he would have clearly done so, as in v. 2.

2. The expression, “our/the Lord and Savior (Jesus Christ),” had become a fixed formula so that the use of “God” in v. 1 must be intended to distinguish God and Jesus.

Rebuttal: Authors should be considered free to vary a stereotyped expression.

3. The position of the pronoun *hemon* (our) between the two nouns—*theou* (God) and *soteris* (Savior)—separates and thus distinguishes them.

Rebuttal: When two nouns have one article, one personal pronoun applies to both.

4. If Peter authored 1 and 2 Peter he would not have written, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1.3), and then call Jesus “God” in 2 Peter. Plus, Peter never calls Jesus “God” in any of his evangelistic speeches recorded in Acts

Murray Harris has thoroughly surveyed the scholarly landscape regarding this dispute in 2 Peter 1.1. He says the One Person view of it is “endorsed by the great majority of twentieth-century commentators with varying degrees of assurance.” But it should be noted that only a few prominent NT exegetes wrote commentaries on 2 Peter in the 20th century, partly because most of them thought Peter did not write it, and some did not think it should have been included in the NT. Preeminent lexicographer Walter Bauer is typical of those scholars who are non-committal. He insists concerning both 2 Peter 1.1 and 1 John 5.20 that “the interpretation is open to question.”