

Appreciating the Precision of the New Testament Greek

Note: Most people do not know the definition of certain words used in this article. I used them just in case a reader does know them and desires to validate what I said. It is okay if you do not know them. You can read this article without knowing them and still get an understanding of what I am mainly trying to communicate.

I recall a conversation with an unbeliever. Though unbelievers do not generally believe many claims of the Bible, I called attention to John 20:28 just to show him that the Bible ascribes deity to Jesus. Here is that verse with its immediate context.

The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

I pointed out to him that Jesus did not correct Thomas' assessment. (There are other places in the Bible where people attempt to worship angels or men of God and those being worshiped tell them to stop doing so because they are only angels or men.)

After pointing these things out to the unbeliever, he gave a response that I was not expecting. He said that Thomas was not addressing Jesus as deity but merely expressing amazement that Jesus was alive. He said that Thomas' expression was similar to what many people say when they are amazed... like "Oh my God! It is you Jesus! It is true, you are alive." Because I never heard of such an interpretation, I was caught off guard and the conversation came to an end because of other circumstances.

It has been a few years since that conversation. Because John 20:28 seems so clear to me, I did not see any reason to revisit the issue with that unbeliever. I have found that even if a person were to hold up absolute proof to an unbeliever, he would not believe. ("*But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead' "* -Luke 16:31).

During the past two years, I applied myself to acquiring knowledge of New Testament Greek. I am amazed how much precision the N.T. Greek afforded the authors of the New Testament to accurately express their thoughts. God saw to it that His message was expressed precisely and N.T. Greek made that possible. Of course, God arranged for Greek to be available at just the right time. (At the fullness of time, to be exact.)

In case you would like to see an example, I would now like to revisit John 20:28 using the Greek. Though this explanation still would not be able to cause my unbelieving friend to repent, it might encourage my Christian friends to see how much God cares about the preservation of His Word.

ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (John 20:28).

Here are the main words along with the English translation

Θωμᾶς	Thomas
ἀπεκρίθη	answered
καὶ	and

εἶπεν	said
αὐτῷ	him
μου	my
κύριός	Lord
θεός	God

I now wish to point out a few things that more precisely indicate what these Greek words imply. In the Greek, the spelling of words give precise clues that unlock the meaning of the author.

Him (αὐτῷ) The Greek spelling indicates that this pronoun is of the dative case. The dative case (as compared to the genitive, nominative, accusative, vocative cases) was used purposely to tie the action of the verbs (“answer” and “said”) to the pronoun “him.” In other words, the actions of answering and saying were aimed at the recipient “him” (“him” being none other than Jesus in this context.) So, the dative spelling shows that αὐτῷ is accurately translated “to him.” This proves that Thomas was addressing his exclamation (my Lord and my God) directly to Jesus.

Thomas was responding directly to Jesus by answering Jesus’ words, “*Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*” To which Thomas answered Jesus directly, “*My Lord and my God.*” This was a response directed to Jesus. It was not directed to God the Father. It was directed to Jesus as represented by the dative pronoun “him” (αὐτῷ). Besides this, John included the word ἀπεκρίθη (answered) in addition to the word εἶπεν (said). So, there can be no doubt that Thomas was answering Jesus directly.

Lord, God (κύριός, θεός) The spelling of these Greek words indicate that they are both in the nominative case. In the Greek of those days, if a noun or pronoun was being directly addressed, it would normally be in the vocative case and the spelling would reflect that. But in this verse, κύριός, θεός (Lord, God) are both in the nominative case. It just so happens, probably due to Semetic influence, that the New Testament writers chose to use the nominative^[1] case instead of the vocative case when God is the One being addressed. It was a more formal expression because it was addressed to God. This is John’s way of stressing the idea of Jesus’ deity as it was expressed by Thomas.

My (μου) The spelling of my (μου) indicates the genitive case indicating possession. Since this response is directed to Jesus, Thomas is telling Him that He is his Lord and his God.

Hopefully, this consideration of how Greek words with precise spelling were chosen by the human authors (as they were moved by the Holy Spirit) to convey exactly what they wanted to say.

[1] except for one verse with a special situation