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The Figure of Speech **Antiptosis** *in John 1:1-2*

by Jeff Stanley

Since Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille's landmark book, *Jesus Christ is Not God*, was first published in 1975 and its second edition in 1981, a significant occurrence of the figure of speech *Antiptosis* has come to light in the book of John, Chapter 1, Verses 1 and 2.

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word [*ho logos*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was with [*pros*] God [*ton theon*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was God [*theos*].

The same was in the beginning with [*pros*] God [*ton theon*].

In the Foundational Class on Power for Abundant Living Dr. Wierwille taught regarding the use of the Greek preposition *pros* in John 1:1-2:

*If any other word was used for the word "with" except this word pros, your whole Bible would fall to pieces. Because this usage "with," using this particular preposition pros, means "together with yet distinctly independent of."*¹

This little word *pros* spells big trouble for those who want to make the Word, *ho logos*, in John 1:1-2 identical with God Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. In Dr. Wierwille's paper "Forgers of the Word," he explains what they face:

In John 1:1, let the trinitarians explain how "the Word" could be with God while literally

*being "God Himself." The difficulty cannot be escaped, for how could it be the God and with the God at the same time?*²

The trinitarians I've run into don't research the apparent discrepancy with the goal of "rightly dividing the Word of truth." Those I've talked with through the years refuse to acknowledge that a discrepancy exists. Too many, instead, thunder "anathemas" while doing all they can to burn the brand of "heretic" on anyone who refuses to kowtow to their dogma. Nevertheless, John 1:1 refuses to read the way that they claim that it reads.

They want to read the verses: "In the beginning was Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was with God, and Jesus Christ was God. The same Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God." But that's not what the verses say.

Verse 1 says: "In the beginning was the Word [*ho logos*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was with [*pros*, together with yet distinctly independent of] God [*ton theon*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was God [*theos*]." Then, to make the truth so plain that not even a fool need err therein, Verse 2 reiterates: "The same [i.e. 'the Word,' *ho logos*] was in the beginning with [*pros*, together with yet distinctly independent of] God [*ton theon*]."

Of course, Jesus Christ is called "the Word," *ho logos*, in Scripture:

John 1:14

And the Word [*ho logos*] was made flesh, and dwelt among us...

But the Scripture itself is also called “the Word,” *ho logos*:

II Timothy 3:16-4:2

All scripture is given by inspiration of God [*theopneustos*, God-breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I charge thee therefore...

Preach the word [*ho logos*, the “all scripture” of Verse 16];...

Jesus Christ is the Word in the flesh, the Scripture is the Word in writing. Simple. But wait. If the trinitarians’ dogma is right, and John 1:1 makes Jesus Christ God, it also makes the Scripture God. If that’s true, then the “three-in-one deity” that everyone has been postulating for the last seventeen centuries is actually a four-in-one – with God the Scripture, I suppose, flying around in the beginning along with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

So what’s is the answer to the apparent discrepancy? Why would God say something in His Word that, literally speaking, is impossible? The answer is that these words were never meant by God to be taken literally! Dr. Wierwille wrote, in a *Way Magazine* article on figures of speech used in the Bible (and quoted himself in the Foundational Class, Session 2, Segment 7), as follows:

The Word of God is to be accepted literally whenever and wherever possible. But when a word or words fail to be true to fact, they are always figures of speech.

Figures of speech have a godly-designed emphasis which must be grasped and understood in order to fully obtain the impact of the Word. A figure of speech is always truer-to-truth than the exact or actual word or words would be.

There are over 212 different figures of speech used in the Bible, as high as 40 variations. Men may say, and they are prone to use figures of speech haphazardly, but in the Word of God they are used with divine design. Each and every one of them may be accurately catalogued and itemized as to its exactness.

There is absolutely no guesswork, for these figures of speech in the Bible are the Holy Spirit’s markings of that which God would have emphasized, for, holy men of God spoke as

they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

John 1:1 is no exception to the rule. When God told the Apostle John what to write, He knew that the result would not be literally true. God intentionally inserted a figure of speech in the third clause of the verse – “and the Word [*ho logos*] was God” – to emphasize something important.

In this third clause, the noun “God” is rendered in the nominative case, when the literal case of the noun – had it been written without the figure of speech – would have been the genitive, specifically, the genitive of origin.³ Omitting the figure of speech, it would read, “and the Word [*ho logos*] was of God [*tou theou*, as given in I John 4:4].”

This figure of speech is called *Antiptosis*, or Exchange of Case. *Antiptosis* is a figure of grammar involving change whereby the case of a noun is exchanged for a case which, in literal terms, is contrary to fact.⁴ This exchange of

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cases produces a figure that nevertheless, just like all figures of speech, is “truer-to-truth” than any corresponding literal statement could possibly be. There must be something that God communicates in this third clause of John 1:1, which nothing but the figure *Antiptosis* could put across.

Don't let the technicalities of grammar fool you. They are needed to a certain extent to analyze figures of speech. But just like the vast majority of figures, *Antiptosis* occurs in both the Scriptures and everyday speech.⁵

Antiptosis is simple. I imagine that you've used the figure yourself. For instance, have you ever used the compliment, “That dress is you,” to congratulate your mother or your wife, or maybe your sister or a female friend, on her choice of wardrobe? If so, you've used the figure of speech *Antiptosis*.

On one hand, you didn't mean that the dress was literally her. On the other hand had you said, “That dress is yours,” you wouldn't have communicated much – “I know, dear. I just bought it” – when what you really wanted to put into a nutshell was, “That dress is becoming on you. It's cut and color brings out your eyes, your complexion, your hair, your figure, just so.” So, gathering dandruff under your fingernails as you diligently explored your brain cells to discover precisely how to express your thinking, you suddenly hit upon, *That dress is you*, and you put into words exactly, although not literally, what you meant. Way to go!

Without the *Antiptosis* there's hardly any other way to say it, is there? Well, the same holds true in the third clause of John 1:1. There was no better way for God to communicate what He really wants to say about His relationship to the Word, *ho logos* – both the Word in the flesh and

the written Word – than the figure of speech *Antiptosis*. That's why He used it.

Another example of *Antiptosis*, this one from Scripture, can be seen in the book of Matthew. Jesus Christ declared:

Matthew 7:12

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Literally speaking, what this verse says is contrary to fact. Just like, literally speaking, God Almighty is greater than the Word, *ho logos*, in literal terms there is more to the Law and the prophets than “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Otherwise, the Old Testament wouldn't have required nearly so many pages to be written down!

What's the most important thing the Law and prophets have to say about how God's people are supposed to treat one another? No need to guess. The Holy Spirit highlighted it –

But just to have said “for this is from the law and prophets,” although literally true, would have fallen far short of what Jesus Christ wanted to say. By exchanging the literal and factual genitive-case construction – “for this is from the law and the prophets” – for the contrary-to-fact yet truer-to-truth figure of speech *Antiptosis*, Jesus Christ underscored something important.

What's the most important thing the Law and prophets have to say about how God's people are supposed to treat one another? No need to guess. The Holy Spirit highlighted it – *all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*. How did He highlight it? By the figure of speech *Antiptosis* – *for this IS the law and the prophets*.⁶

Technically speaking, by putting the nominative case of a noun in place of the genitive case

against the facts of the case, *Antiptosis* magnifies the genitive relationship far beyond any possible superlative. In the third clause of John 1:1 it is God's relationship with His Word that He that wants to magnify.

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word [*ho logos*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was with [*pros*, together with yet distinctly independent of] God [*ton theon*], and the Word [*ho logos*] was God [*theos*].

The same ["the Word," *ho logos*] was in the beginning with [*pros*, together with yet distinctly independent of] God [*ton theon*].

The Word, *ho logos*, is God in that it is impossible to know God without knowing His Word – both the written Word and the Word in the flesh, Jesus Christ. All that can be known about God and the things of God can be known from one place only, the Word, *ho logos*. For it is the God-breathed written Word that makes known the Word in the flesh, Jesus Christ, and it is Jesus Christ alone who could declare, "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;" it is Jesus Christ alone who is, "the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." That's why the Psalmist proclaimed:

Psalm 138:2

...for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Teaching this verse in the Foundational Class, Dr. Wierwille observed:

It doesn't say that about the stars. Or the planets. It says it about God's wonderful matchless Word; that He set His Word above His name. This, right here, is what He set above His name. You know, He underscored it. He underwrote it. He put His name under-

neath it. He guaranteed it. It's just like a check. You write a check for a thousand dollars, you put your name underneath it; it's as good as the name. How good's the Word? How good's the Word? The Word of God declares that it's as good as God. For the Word is as much God as God is the Word. What God has said is, is. What God says will be, will be. What God said was, was -- it was. It is God's wonderful matchless Word. And He set the greatness of this Word above His name.⁷

At beginning of the gospel of John – which is the gospel that emphasizes Jesus Christ as God's only-begotten Son⁸ – God has magnified His Word like no where else in Scripture. And God has magnified that Word exactly how He wants it magnified, far beyond any possible superlative,⁹ declaring: *and the Word was God*.

At beginning of the gospel of John – which is the gospel that emphasizes Jesus Christ as God's only-begotten Son – God has magnified His Word like nowhere else in Scripture... declaring: "...and the Word was God..."

1. Quoted from Foundational Class on Power for Abundant Living, Session 3, Segment 11 (personal transcript); see also E.W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, c.f. "with" (5., c.), p. 888.

2. "Forgers of The Word," an Advanced Class on Power for Abundant Living loose-leaf handout which I have in my files from when I was a student in that class in 1981, appears to have been written by Dr. Wierwille circa 1978.

Some theologians, pointing out that the second use of "God" in John 1:1 has no article in the Greek text, dispute the KJV's translation of the third clause. An example:

The Greek runs: kai theos en ho logos. The so-called Authorized Version has: "And [sic] the Word was God." This would indeed suggest the view that "Jesus" and "God" were identical and interchangeable. But in Greek this would most naturally be represented by "God" with the article, not theos but ho theos...

*It is impossible to represent it in a single English word, but the New English Bible, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, "And what God was, the Word was." (Robinson, *Honest to God*, 1963, pp. 70- 71, as cited at: <http://www.biblicalunitarian.com>, "But What About John 1:1?")*

Robinson, along with the others, may be right (eliminating the need for a figure of speech in John 1:1-2 altogether, not to men-

tion the need for this article, heh). But his main problem, from the standpoint of Biblical research carried out in obedience to II Timothy 2:15, is his failure to document what "would most naturally be represented" from the text of the Word of God. His opinion, for whatever it may be worth right or wrong, is still just his opinion (a.k.a. "private interpretation," which seems to be a problem ubiquitous among theologians).

Grammatically, *kai theos en ho logos* is a predicate nominative clause, in which it's normal for one or the other of the nouns to lack the article. The vast majority of such constructions in the Greek New Testament do, and for good reason. Namely, to keep straight which noun will be the subject and which is the modifying predicate noun. A quote from the section on the predicate nominative from our work-in-progress, *A Survey of Greek Syntax*, may help explain:

A clause where two nouns are linked by a substantive (usually the verb "to be") and where both nouns are in the nominative case, is a predicate nominative clause. In this construction, one noun will be the subject of the clause, while the other noun (the predicate noun) acts as a modifier ("Mary is a student," "That building is the theater," "The crop is wheat"). The predicate noun modifies the subject of the clause by naming it.

*The Greek article designates which noun is the subject, the noun without the article being the predicate noun modifier. See Acts 28:4: **ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶν ὁκτεννῶν**, "a murderer is the man." Irrespective of word order, it is the noun with the article, **ὁκτεννῶν**, "the man," which is the subject of the clause, and which is being named "a murderer" by the predicate noun **ἄνθρωπος**; thus the clause translates in English, "The man is a murderer." Again irrespective of word order, if the article were used with the other noun, **ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐστὶν κτεννῶν**, the clause would translate "the murderer is a man."*

Instances where both nouns have the article do occur in the Greek text. In such cases the subject and the modifying predicate noun may be distinguished by logic, or as in English for the most part, by word order (this topic being, for us, still a matter of research). But in the rare instances where the predicate noun has an article, it is used for emphasis. (The article, as a matter of fact, is used in a lot of Greek constructions for emphasis.)

For instance in John 17:17, both Greek nouns have the article in the predicate nominative clause that can be literally translated, "the Word thine is the truth," or illustrating the emphasis supplied by the predicate's article, "the Word thine is THE truth," or translating smoothly with the emphasis, "Thy Word is THE truth."

Avoiding "strifes of words" (*logomachia* in I Timothy 6:4) over whether "Thy Word" and "the truth" are "identical and interchangeable" as Robinson would have them, suffice to say grammatically, the subject of this clause is "Thy Word" and the predicate noun is "the truth," and not visa versa. In fact, I believe that Biblically and idiomatically the KJV's rendering, "thy word is truth," omitting the second article, would represent the best English translation if only they'd capitalized "Thy" and "Word."

3. See *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 17, 2.

4. *Biblical Research Journal*, "Analytical Outline of Figures," June 1994, (c.f. Figures of Grammar, III. Involving Change, A. In the Usage of Words, 2. By Exchange, b. Involving Syntax, *Antiptosis*).

5. From our work-in-progress, *A Guide to Figures of Speech Used in Scripture*, "Introduction":

These numbers [of individual figures of speech] may seem daunting to student just beginning study in this field. But the study of figures of speech is much simpler than it appears at first glance.

Consider the fact that everyone who uses language uses and understands the different parts of speech, whether or not he knows them by name. Likewise everyone who uses language must follow the rules of syntax, whether or not he is even aware that such rules exist.

In the same way, everyone who uses language uses, understands, and even coins numerous figures of speech, whether or not he has any knowledge of their names or their classifications. Figures of speech occur commonly and frequently in everyday conversation and general literature, even though most of them are no longer recognized or known.

Discussing this very point, Prof. Macbeth in The Might and Mirth of Literature [p. 202] assured his students that:

Molière, the great French comedian, tells of one who, taking to grammar late in life, was amazed to find that he had all his life been using substantives, adverbs, and such like, without his knowing of it. Many a capital metonymy have you produced in your day without ever dreaming of it.

So despite the numbers involved, the study of figures of speech will ring true to the general reader and Bible student. The one requirement for the reader who wants to begin gaining an analytical understanding of them and how they are used is a knowledge of basic grammar.

6. For two more occurrences of *Antiptosis* in Scripture, check John 6:63, "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," and I John 5:20, "this is the true God, and eternal life."

7. Foundational Class, Session 3, Segment 11.

8. See Wierwille, *Jesus Christ Our Passover (JCOP)*, Appendix 5 "Why Four Gospels?"

9. Since this article divides one aspect of John 1:1-2 differently than Dr. Wierwille divided it in *Jesus Christ Is Not God (JCNG)*, Chapter 4, "Who Is the Word?" a more detailed discussion is in order. Doctor attributed the apparent discrepancy in these verses to an occurrence of the figure of speech *Antanaclasis* (see Appendix E of the second edition, 1981, of *JCNG*). However, as this article indicates, I believe that the discrepancy must be attributed to the figure of speech *Antiptosis*.

If *Antanaclasis* is the explanation for the apparent discrepancy, then a figurative clashing exists between two usages in the same context of the word *logos* (see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, c.f. "*Antanaclasis*," p. 286, also check Romans 9:6, "Israel"). The remarks Doctor inserted in the citation of John 1:1-2 on page 89 of *JCNG* show the two different usages of *logos* that he worked:

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word [God], and the [revealed] Word was with [pros] God [with Him in His foreknowledge, yet independent of Him], and the Word was God.

The same [revealed Word] was in the beginning with [pros] God.

Thus, the two clashing usages of *ho logos* would be 1) the Word, *ho logos*, that was God, in the first and third uses, and 2) the revealed Word, *ho logos*, that was together with yet distinctly independent of God, in the second and fourth uses (the fourth use being referred to by a pronoun).

However the demonstrative pronoun translated "The same" in Verse 2, *houtos*, precludes two usages of *logos* and the figure of speech *Antanaclasis*. The *logos* that "was God" in Verse 1 is the antecedent that *houtos* points back to, locking in its usage as identical with the *logos* that was "with God" in Verse 2.

The word translated "in" in both of the "in the beginning" phrases is the Greek preposition *en*, which when used in reference to time can mean "during" (*Companion Bible*, Appendix 104, vii, see also Matthew 2:1, "*en*," 2nd use, "during the days of King Herod"). So it would be possible to translate both phrases "during the beginning," eliminating the need for strict consonance with Genesis 1:1 (which Doctor discusses in *JCNG*, pp. 84-85). I see no reason Biblically why all four occurrences of *ho logos* in Verses 1 and 2 cannot mean "the revealed Word."

But if I'm right, and *ho logos* means "the revealed Word" in all four uses, we're back to square one with an apparent logical discrepancy. The "difficult part" is not in how, during the beginning, the revealed Word could be with God yet distinctly independent of God. God's revealed Word was with God in His foreknowledge. Yet at the same time, God knew that its accomplishment would hinge upon the independent free-will believing of men – foremost being the Lord Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 46:9-10, Acts 2:23, Ephesians 1:4, II Timothy 1:9, I Peter 1:20, etc.; see also page 87 of *JCNG* and Appendix 7 of *JCOP*).

The "difficult part" of Verses 1-2 (difficult due to seventeen centuries of trinitarian error and an ongoing Dark Age in the field of figures of speech) is the third clause of Verse 1: "and the [revealed] Word [*ho logos*] was God [*theos*]." The figure of speech *Antiptosis*, as detailed in this article, places the solution of the apparent logical discrepancy right in the "difficult" third clause itself, in the nominative case of the noun "God."

I believe that what I've set forth in this study is right. If I'm wrong, I'd be glad to see the particulars. I wouldn't know God's rightly-divided Word, including the field of figures of speech, without the teaching ministry of Dr. Wierwille. What Doctor worked from the Word of God, for me – by God's mercy and grace – will always carry more weight than what anyone else, living or dead, will ever work. The corpus of his work continues to stand as a great bulwark of truth.

But the knowledge available of the figure of speech *Antiptosis* was sketchy, at best, during Dr. Wierwille's lifetime. Around the turn of the 20th century, E.W. Bullinger in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* had categorized *Antiptosis* and listed examples (pp. 507-509). But 22 of his 25 examples are more simply explained as varieties of the genitive case.

The name, *Antiptosis*, is from the Greek preposition *anti*, meaning "against" or "instead of," and the verb *piptein*, meaning "to fall." *Antiptosis* is a falling of one nominal (noun) case over against another. The English designation is Exchange of Cases.

According to my research, *Antiptosis* is most closely related to *Heterosis*, Exchange of Accidence; *Antimereia*, Exchange of Parts of Speech; *Hypallage*, Interchange; *Syllepsis*, Change in Concord; *Hendiadys*, Exchange of One for Two; and *Hendiatrix*, Exchange of One for Three. All these figures categorize themselves as Figures of Grammar, Involving Change, in the Usage of Words, by Exchange, involving Syntax. (See *A Guide to Figures of Speech Used in Scripture*, "Analytical Outline of Figures," posted on our website.)

So far, I have been able to document two varieties of *Antiptosis*: Nominative for Genitive and Accusative for Genitive. But our figures of speech work at the *Biblical Research Journal* is still very much in progress. Added light from readers regarding any aspect of the field are most welcome.

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