

Englishman's Greek

Chapter 6

THE GREEK NEGATIVE

1A. THE TWO NEGATIVE PARTICLES--οὐ and μή

οὐ is almost always used with the indicative mood. For an explanation of the indicative mood, see [Chapter 8](#).

μή is almost always used with moods other than the indicative, such as the subjunctive and imperative. It is also used with participles and infinitives.

The difference between these negatives is pictured graphically by a young man proposing to his lady friend. If she answers him with μή it may only mean that she wants to be coaxed a little longer, or that she is still in a state of uncertainty; but if she responds with οὐ he may as well get his hat and leave at once (Dr. A.T. Robertson). When John the Baptist was asked if he was "that prophet" (compare Deut. 18:18-19) he simply replied οὐ (see John 1:21).

1A. THE USE OF THE NEGATIVE IN QUESTIONS

1B. QUESTIONS EXPECTING A NEGATIVE ANSWER (NO!)

When μή or μήτι is used with the indicative mood, most often a negative answer is expected.

Examples

- 1) The classic example of Judas--Matthew 26:25. Judas expected a negative answer from the Lord even though in his heart he knew that the answer was YES.
- 2) Matthew 7:98-10 "Will he give him a serpent?" (Expected answer: "NO, of course not!")
- 3) Luke 22:35. The expected answer is negative and that's exactly the answer that was given!

4) Luke 17:9. The expected answer is negative and that's exactly the answer that was given!

5) 1 Corinthians 1:13 "Was Paul crucified for you?" Expected answer: Obviously not! This verse could be rendered as follows: "Certainly Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he?"

AN EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE:

Sometimes **μη** with the indicative is used in a question that does not demand a negative answer, but on the contrary, it almost seems to demand a positive answer yet with some HESITANCY. See John 4:29 and Matthew 12:23.

2B. QUESTIONS EXPECTING A POSITIVE ANSWER (YES!)

When **οὐ** (sometimes written as οὐκ or οὐχ) or **οὐχι** is used with the indicative mood, a positive answer is expected.

Examples

1) Matthew 13:55 "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Expected answer: "Yes, He certainly is")

2) Luke 12:6; Luke 17:17. Both of these expect a "YES" answer.

3) Acts 13:10 "Will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Expected answer: "Yes, you will not cease! You will continue to pervert the right ways of the Lord!")

4) 1 Corinthians 14:23

5) 1 Corinthians 6:19 (6:9 etc.). Paul knew that they knew these things, but he was putting them in remembrance of these vital truths. 1 Corinthians 6:19 could be rendered, "Certainly you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, don't you?"

3B. VARIOUS EXAMPLES OF BOTH.

See Mark 4:21 and Luke 6:39. In each of these verses you will find an example of both kinds of questions (a question expecting a negative answer and a question expecting a positive answer). Read each verse. Which question expects a negative answer? Which question expects a positive answer?

The following passages are of doctrinal interest. The letter "N" before the verse indicates that the question expects a negative

answer and the letter "P" before the verse indicates that the question expects a positive answer.

Theology Proper (the Doctrine of God)
(N) Romans 3:3; 11:1 (God's Faithfulness) (N) Romans 9:14 (God's righteousness) (N) Romans 9:20 (God's Sovereignty) (P) Romans 9:21 (God's Sovereignty)
The New Birth
(N) John 3:4 (Nicodemus did not understand, but did he really think the new birth involved going back into the womb a second time?)
The Greatness of Christ
(N) John 4:12; 8:53 Was Christ greater than Jacob? Greater than Abraham?
The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts
(N) Read 1 Corinthians 12:29-30. What is the answer to all these questions? How does this help us understand those in the Charismatic movement who claim that ALL BELIEVERS should speak in tongues?
Justification and its Relationship to Good Works
(N) James 2:14. The faith that saves is the faith that works. This passage can be rendered, "Certainly that faith (faith without works) can't save, can it?" Expected answer, "No, of course it can't." (P) James 2:21 Abraham demonstrated his faith by works.

1A. THE DOUBLE NEGATIVE (οὐ μή)

The double negative occurs slightly less than 100 times in the New Testament (a listing of all these occurrences can be found in *The Englishman's Greek Concordance*, listed under μή). In these cases the negative idea is greatly strengthened. It becomes a very powerful negative. "This is the strongest way to negate something in Greek" (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 468). The meaning is something like this: **"Never, positively not! It will never happen! It's unthinkable! There is not even the slightest possibility that it will ever happen!"**

The double negative is of great doctrinal interest as seen from the following examples:

<p>Inspiration Matthew 5:18; 24:35</p>
<p>Forgiveness of Sins Romans 4:8; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17</p>
<p>Eternal Punishment Revelation 21:27</p>
<p>The Filling of the Spirit Galatians 5:16</p>
<p>Human (Fallen) Nature Matthew 16:22; 26:35; John 13:8</p>
<p>Eschatology The Tribulation: Matthew 24:21; 24:34; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 The Rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4:15</p>
<p>Eternal Security John 6:37; 11:26; Revelation 2:11; 3:5</p> <p>There are two other passages on eternal security (John 8:51 and 10:28) which add the phrase "forever" (in the Greek text, not apparent in the English text). Thus John 10:28 would literally read: "they shall never (double negative) perish forever" or "Forever, they will never perish." This is somewhat redundant in English but very strong in Greek. It shows that there is no possibility of the believer ever perishing. Likewise, John 8:51 literally says, "He shall never (double negative) see death forever" or "Forever he shall never see death." That's quite a promise!</p>

Probably the best example of the use of Greek negatives is found in Hebrews 13:5. In this one verse the double negative occurs twice and there is another negative that occurs once. This makes a total of five negatives in one verse! It could be translated as follows:

I will (1) never (2) ever leave thee, (3) no, I will (4) never (5) ever forsake thee.

It's the strongest negative way that the Bible could say that He will be with us forever! Five negatives with a very positive message!
