

Teaching Them What NOT to Do: The Nuances of Negation in the Greek New Testament

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Most descriptions of negation are primarily concerned with highlighting the distinctions between οὐ and μή. Little attention is given to variation in the syntax of negation constructions. The biblical writers frequently used negation to describe what did not happen as a means of adding emphasis to what did happen. Emphasis¹ can also be assigned by highlighting a specific component of a clause rather than the entire negated clause. The purpose of this paper is to describe and illustrate the basic patterns observed in the Greek New Testament. Based on this description, representative examples will be presented that demonstrate the exegetical payoff of careful attention to negation.

0 Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to argue that the use of the negative particles οὐ and μή in declarative statements has the effect of negating the entire clause, and not just a single element of the clause. Furthermore, I will argue that what grammarians have described as word negation is in fact better understood as the pragmatic choice to place emphasis on a single element of the clause. The entire clause itself remains negated, regardless of the placement of the negative particle within the clause. The goal is to provide a unified description of the writer's options regarding negation in declarative clauses so that exegetes may better understand how to determine what is being emphasized. In other words, attention will be given to determining how the use of the negators οὐ and μή in declarative statements can be used to add emphasis to the writer's message, or some portion of it.²

In order to accomplish this, I will provide an overview of the guidelines described by the standard Greek grammars regarding the syntax of negation. Next, I will outline several principles that can bring greater clarity and confidence to the interpretation of the various syntactic permutations of negation. These principles will then be applied to passages in order to demonstrate their practical, heuristic value both for exegesis and for pedagogy. Let us now review the standard guidelines for interpreting negation provided by grammarians.

¹ This paper is intentionally written for a non-technical audience, thus 'emphasis' is used in place of the more precise term 'focus'. This analysis of information structure relies upon the theoretical framework described in Knud Lambrecht's *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For an application of this framework to the Greek New Testament, cf. Stephen H. Levinsohn's *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek* (Dallas: SIL International, 2000). For a comprehensive analysis of information structure in the Greek New Testament, among other discourse features, cf. Runge's *Lexham Exegetical Discourse Annotations: New Testament* (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, forthcoming).

² For treatments of the positive or negative expectations of interrogatives, or kinds of prohibitions, cf. Robertson (1919; 2006:917, 1155-1166); Blass et al. (1961:220-225); Moule (1959:135-137, 155-157); Porter (1992:276-285).

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Funk states in §615.2, “Where οὐ or μή negates the finite verb, the negative appears regularly just before the verb.” Based on his comments in §616 that these particles “may negate elements in the sentence other than the verb” by being placed before it, it would seem as though he views the particles as only negating a single element, and not the entire clause. However, he does not clarify exactly what he means.

Porter, on the other hand, offers a somewhat different account, stating “Clause negation often but not always [sic] appears at the beginning of a clause or proximate to the verb” (1992:282). He goes on to suggest that one may distinguish word negation from clause negation “on the basis of whether the negative is οὐ or μή” (1992:282), though he does not provide any further detail. It would seem that he is referring to the claim of BDF that “individual words or phrases are always negated by οὐ” (1961:220). Based on the examples that Porter discusses, he seems to view negation of the verb as functionally equivalent to clause negation, restricting word negation to negative pronouns and the like, such as οὐδεῖς and μηδεῖς (1992:282). He restricts his discussion of emphasis to the occurrence of double negatives.

Finally, Robertson makes the claim that, “In declarative sentences the position of οὐ is to be noted when for emphasis or contrast it comes first” (1919, 2006:1158). It is unclear exactly what he means, in that the negator is found at the beginning of a clause about 35% of the time.³

This raises a series of questions: What exactly is being negated when a negator is placed at the beginning of a clause followed by the verb, subject and object(s)? Is only the verb negated, or the whole clause? Is there any way to determine where the emphasis falls in a negated statement? What is the writer trying to communicate when the negator is placed in a non-initial position, or before some clause member other than the verb? Let’s take a look at what can be learned from how languages like Greek, tend to accomplish various tasks.

First, Givón (1984:335-36) has noted that languages which utilize movable negative particles most commonly place the negative particle immediately before the verb. No surprise here, this confirms Funk’s claim. Second, when the verb occurs in its normal position at the beginning of the clause with the negator, the exact scope of the emphasis is unclear in many cases, i.e. what is being emphasized by the use of negation. Consider the following example of a simple negated statement from English:

- (1) *John didn’t kick the ball.*

While the statement that John did not kick the ball holds true, it is unclear where, if any, emphasis might fall in this sentence. Without more information, it is ambiguous whether the entire statement is

³ 576 out of 1623 occurrences, according to the *OpenText Syntactically Analyzed Greek New Testament* (2006).

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of equal importance, or whether some portion of it is more emphasized than another. While the entire clause is negated, the scope of the emphasis is unspecified. Here is where a third principle can give us some insight.

Givón has found that by distinguishing between what is presupposed and what is asserted in a negated statement, the actual emphasis of the negation can be disambiguated and thus narrowed down (1984:328-30). Linguists have found that prototypically only asserted information can be easily negated, not presupposed information (ibid). As the presupposed information is changed, so is the emphasis of the negation. Let's return to our English example from Givón (1984:330) to illustrate this. The bold marks primary stress/intonation in the sentence.

- (2) a. In a context where we know that something happened, but not what:
John didn't kick the ball.
- b. In a context where we know that the ball had been kicked, but not by whom:
John didn't kick the ball—it was **Bill**.
- c. In a context where we know that John did something to the ball, but not what:
John didn't **kick** the ball—he **threw** it.

These examples illustrate that as the presupposed information changes, so does the scope of the emphasis within what is asserted. Each answer to the question asserts some new information, with the asserted information receiving the emphasis. If we go back to the first negated statement in (a), it could be used to answer any one of the four questions stated in (a)-(c): *what happened, who kicked the ball, or what did Bill kick?* Without more context, the emphasis of the negation in (a) is ambiguous. Let's take a look at some examples of simple negation from the Greek New Testament.

1 Negated clauses with the negator preceding the verb

I will begin by looking at cases where the negator immediately precedes the verb. I contend that these are best understood as clause negation, with the caveat that only the clause elements that follow the negator are potentially being emphasized, or are within the scope of the emphasis.

- (3) **Pattern 1: Negated clauses with the negator preceding the verb**
Negator + Verb + Remainder of clause components (Scope of emphasis is ambiguous)
- (4) Examples of negated clauses:
 - (a) Mt 15:26
οὐκ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις⁴
It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs (ESV).

⁴ Jesus' reply to the Syrophenician woman asserts brand new information about the children's bread and dogs that has not yet been mentioned or alluded to in the discourse. No element of this clause is presupposed.

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- (b) Luke 6:40
οὐκ ἔστιν μαθητῆς ὑπὲρ τὸν διδάσκαλον⁵
A disciple is not above his teacher (ESV).
- (c) Eph 4:30
καὶ μὴ λυπεῖτε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τοῦ θεοῦ⁶
And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (ESV).
- (d) 1 Timothy 4:14
μὴ ἀμέλει τοῦ ἐν σοὶ χαρίσματος⁷
Do not neglect the gift you have (ESV)

Each of these Greek clauses has the negator in the initial position, followed immediately by the verb. Each one asserts information about topics that are mentally accessible in the context, but that are not presupposed from the preceding context. In each case, I contend that the whole proposition of the clause is negated, and that the syntax does not specify whether any portion of the clause receives special emphasis or not. In the absence of further information, the scope of the emphasis is ambiguous.

At the beginning of the section, I made the caveat that only the clause elements that follow the negator are potentially being emphasized. In other words, the Greek writers had the choice to place elements before the negator as a means of disambiguating just how much of the proposition was being emphasized, thus excluding elements from the scope of the emphasis. In other words, the writers could restrict the scope by excluding one or more clause elements from the position following the negative particle.

- (5) Examples of negated clauses with an excluded clause member
 - (a) 1 Corinthians 8:8
βρῶμα δὲ ἡμᾶς οὐ παραστήσει τῷ θεῷ⁸
Food us will not commend to God
 - (b) Matthew 6:1
μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς⁹
reward you do not have from your Father who is in heaven
 - (c) Romans 3:20
διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ¹⁰
For by works of the law all flesh will not be justified before him.

⁵ Jesus asserts brand new information about the disciple and the teacher, shifting from the topic of the blind leading the blind.

⁶ The preceding context concerned unwholesome talk, and does not allude to either the Holy Spirit or to causing grief.

⁷ Paul has not mentioned Timothy's gift in the context, thus it is not presupposed information (though it is surely known to both of them and thus mentally accessible). Thus, the entire clause represents asserted information in its context.

⁸ Food might commend us to *someone else*, or it might *do something else* with respect to God.

⁹ There might be reward from *others*, or *something else* might be accomplished with respect to the Father.

¹⁰ Works of the law might be the basis of justification before *others*, or *something else* might be accomplished before God.

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- (d) Galatians 1:16
εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι¹¹
Immediately I did not consult with flesh and blood

These clauses illustrate that elements of negated clauses can effectively be excluded from the scope of emphasis by placing them before the negator. This effectively restricts the possible scope of the emphasis to those elements that follow the negator. Thus, when we see the pattern NEG + Verb + Remainder of clause, I contend that clause negation is still at work, with the emphasis of the negation potentially covering all of the elements following the negator. Without further information, the scope of the emphasis is ambiguous. While some have claimed that either the clause or the verb are negated in this syntactic configuration, I contend that it is more accurate to state that the whole clause is negated and that the scope of the emphasis is limited to those elements that follow the negator.

2 Pattern 2: When the negative particle precedes something other than the verb

- (6) **Pattern 2: Negator precedes non-verb element**
Scope of Emphasis
Negator + Non-Verb element + Verb

So far I have only considered clauses where the negator immediately precedes the verb, with and without clause elements preceding the negator. What if the writer wants to place the emphasis on a single member of the negated clause? How is this done? From a linguistic standpoint, there are different strategies for disambiguating the scope of emphasis in negated declarative statements. One strategy is to place the emphasized element immediately after the negator, thereby isolating the emphasized element in the position normally occupied by the verb. In other words, the pairing of the negator with a non-verbal clause element is the Greek equivalent of what was accomplished using intonation in (2) above. The same kind of emphasis can be conveyed in written English using what are called ‘cleft constructions’ to isolate the emphasized element. Let’s revisit the examples from (2) rephrased in ‘it-cleft’ constructions.

- (7) a. *Who kicked the ball? It was not John (who kicked the ball)—it was **Bill**.*
b. *What did John kick? It was not the ball (that he kicked)—it was the **dog**.*

Notice that in each case the negator is placed just before the emphasized element in the isolated cleft construction.¹² I contend that placing the negator immediately before some non-verb clause element prototypically has the same effect in Greek as the use of cleft constructions and intonation in English.

¹¹ Paul might have *done something else* besides consulting (and *did* something else, stated in the following verses, i.e. he did not go up to Jerusalem, but went away to Arabia) or he might have consulted with something *other than* flesh and blood. The emphasis is not on ‘immediately’, as implied by many English translations.

¹² Placing primary emphasis on verbs requires a different kind of strategy, and will be discussed in the section 3.

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This claim is consistent with the claims of Robertson that the position of οὐ is to be related to emphasis (1919, 2006:1158), and it seems to represent the spirit of Funk's claim that individual clause elements can be singled out. However, I claim that the pragmatic placement of the negator is for emphasis' sake and not to negate the single element. The presence of the negative particle indicates that the entire proposition is negated. The writer has made the choice to disambiguate the scope of the emphasis by narrowing it to a single clause member rather than the entire clause, in contrast to Pattern 1 above. I will now apply these principles to negation examples taken in NT.

In the following examples, the negative particle occurs immediately before some clause element other than the verb. I contend that the entire proposition is still negated, as in Pattern 1. However, while all of the elements following the negator could potentially be emphasized in Pattern 1, in Pattern 2 the scope of the emphasis is effectively limited to the single element. This means that other clause elements may precede the negator without affecting the scope of negation, just as in pattern 1. Footnotes for each verse provide the Pattern 1 retroversion of the negated clause.

(8) Examples of a single non-verb element being emphasized in a negated clause

(a) Matthew 5:29

συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἐν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου βληθῆ εἰς γέενναν
For it is to your advantage that you lose one of your members and not your whole body be thrown into Gehenna (contrasting with the 'one part' in the preceding clause).¹³

(b) Galatians 5:1

στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε
therefore keep standing firm and do not again be subject to a yoke of slavery (i.e. they formerly were subject to it).¹⁴

(c) Ephesians 4:20

ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν
But not in this way did you learn Christ (i.e. you learned him in *another way*).¹⁵

(d) Philippians 3:3

οἱ... καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες
who... glory in Christ Jesus and not in the flesh having confidence (i.e. contrasts with boasting in *Christ Jesus* in the preceding clause).¹⁶

¹³ The English can be rephrased using Pattern 1 to read 'in order that...the whole of your body would not be thrown into Gehenna.' This verse creates a double-difference contrast, where a set of two things are compared: a)lose b)one member b') your whole body a') thrown into hell. The point of emphasizing ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου is both to contrast with 'one member' and to emphasize the gravity of the decision: *all of you* will be lost, not just one part.

¹⁴ The English can be rephrased using Pattern 1 to read 'and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.' Gal. 4:8 describes how they had once been enslaved, whereas now in 5:1 he tells them that they have been called to freedom. He calls them not to go back to their former ways, thereby re-enslaving themselves.

¹⁵ The English can be rephrased using Pattern 1 to read 'but you did not learn Christ in this way.' Notice that ὑμεῖς, a presupposed element, can be placed before the negator just as in Pattern 1, outside the scope of the emphasis. In 4:17-20, Paul describes the way that the Gentiles walk, and the impurity that they practice. Οὕτως refers back anaphorically to the Gentile manner of life to contrast it with the manner of following Christ that they *did* learn.

¹⁶ The English can be rephrased using Pattern 1 to read 'and not having confidence in the flesh.' The emphasis on having confidence 'in the flesh' draws the reader's attention to what will form the topic of the following section

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- (e) 1 Corinthians 6:12d
ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπό τινος
rather **not** I will be enslaved under anything¹⁷

In each of these examples, I contend that the effect of placing the non-verbal element after the negator is to signal that the element is singled out for emphasis in the context. I further argue that the entire clause is still being negated, not just the single element. Instead, the single member is singled out for emphasis' sake.

3 Pattern 3: Emphasis on corrective or restrictive information introduced by ἀλλα/ει μη

It was noted in the description of Pattern 1 that while the entire proposition of the clause is negated, a specific portion might indeed receive emphasis. However, the actual scope of the emphasis is ambiguous without additional information. I claimed that using Pattern 2, placing the negator before some clause element other than the verb, is one means of disambiguating which element(s) is within the scope of the emphasis. Linguists have noted that a second means of disambiguation is to add additional information that disambiguates the intended scope. The scope may be either the entire clause or a portion of it. Consider again examples (2) and (6) for a moment, repeated as (9) below for convenience' sake.

- (9) a. In a context where we know that something happened, but not what:
John didn't kick the ball.
- d. In a context where we know that the ball had been kicked, but not by whom:
*John didn't kick the ball—it was **Bill**.*
*It was **not John** (who kicked the ball)—it was **Bill**.*
- e. In a context where we know that John did something to the ball, but not what:
*John didn't **kick** the ball—he **threw** it.*
*It was **not the ball** (that he kicked)—it was the **dog**.*

Each of the negated clauses describes what did *not* happen, emphasizing the element that is corrected using the cleft constructions that follow (i.e. 'it was **Bill**' or 'it was the **dog**'). What is more, notice that the question could have been answered much more easily by skipping the negative statement and simply providing the positive answer. Thus, the result of providing a negative answer followed by a positive one is to create a rhetorical 'counterpoint-point' set. In most of these examples, the negated clause

beginning in v. 4, i.e. Paul being the quintessential person to have had confidence in the flesh, as ridiculous as that might be.

¹⁷ The English can be rephrased using Pattern 1 to read 'but I will not be enslaved under anything.' The previous part of the verse makes the point that while all things are lawful, not all are profitable. The repetition of 'all things are lawful' in the second part of the verse begs for reading οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπό τινος as elaboration of what Paul meant by 'not profitable'. While there is license to engage in all things, one must consider the consequences carefully. Though there is freedom, Paul effectively chooses not to exercise it.

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serves to highlight something that functions as a *counterpoint* in order to set the stage for a more important *point* that follows. Use of the counterpoint-point strategy results in effectively giving the positive answer more emphasis than it would have otherwise received using only the positive answer. While the counterpoint is often less salient in the context than the point, this is not always the case. One way of explicitly indicating this is through use of the construction οὐ μόνον... ἀλλὰ καὶ... ('not only... but also...'), where the following statement adds an equally important element to the first clause (cf. (11e) below).

In roughly one quarter of the instances of negation found in the Greek NT, there is a counterpoint-point strategy at work to restrict or correct the negated clause by supplying additional information introduced by either ἀλλὰ or εἰ μὴ¹⁸. It is therefore important to note that the use of a negated clause followed by a restriction or correction functions as a rhetorical counterpoint-point device, just as was the case with the English examples above. The net result is to create a negated counterpoint that has the effect of drawing greater attention to the point that follows than would have been achieved by simply stating the positive proposition by itself. In other words, the counterpoint-point strategy represents the choice by the writer to add extra emphasis to the point through the creation of the counterpoint. This use of additional information is summarized below as Pattern 3.

(10) **Pattern 3: Scope of emphasis disambiguated by ἀλλὰ/εἰ μὴ**

Negator + Verb + Remainder + (καὶ + Clause)¹⁹ ἀλλὰ OR εἰ μὴ + Clause or Clause elements

The added information can either be an entire clause, or simply the salient elements that are replacing elements in the negated clause.²⁰ We will now consider examples of Pattern 3 found in the Greek New Testament.

¹⁸ The following are some general observations about the function of exceptive clauses in the NT:

- In cases where the exceptive clause *precedes* the main clause, it functions to establish a specific 'frame of reference' for the clause that follows (e.g. Matthew 24:22; Mark 8:14; 13:20; John 9:33; 15:22; 18:30; Romans 9:29; 1 Corinthians 7:17).
- In cases where the exceptive clause *follows* the main clause and is preceded by either a negated main clause or an interrogative clause, the exceptive clause receives emphasis with respect to the main clause. This is due to the counterpoint-point relation with the negated clause, or by supplying the answer to the question posed by the interrogative pronoun in the main clause (e.g. Luke 5:21; Romans 11:15; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Corinthians 2:22; Ephesians 4:9; Hebrews 3:18; 1 John 2:22; 5:5). The few exceptions that I found to this latter point are Acts 26:32; 1 Corinthians 14:5; and 15:2.

¹⁹ Cf. Mat 5:15.

²⁰ It should be noted that one can reasonably view the additional clause elements following ἀλλὰ as either a compound part of the negated clause, or alternatively as a separate main clause which exhibits ellipsis. Based on attested data like the following, where both the negation and replacement precede the main verb of the clause, the former proposal seems more likely.

(a) Luke 5:32

οὐκ ἐλήλυθα καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλὰ ἁμαρτωλοὺς εἰς μετάνοιαν.

I have not come to call (the) righteous but sinners to repentance.

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(11) Examples of an emphasized element (i.e. Pattern 2) replaced by information introduced by ἀλλά.²¹

(a) Matthew 10:20

οὐ γὰρ ὑμεῖς ἐστε οἱ λαλοῦντες ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τὸ λαλοῦν ἐν ὑμῖν.
It is not you who are the ones speaking, rather it is the Spirit of our Father who is the one speaking through you.²²

Pattern 1 version: The ones speaking are not you, rather the one speaking for you (is) the Spirit of our Father.

(b) John 7:10

τότε καὶ αὐτὸς ἀνέβη οὐ φανερώς ἀλλὰ [ὡς] ἐν κρυπτῷ.
Then he also went up, not openly but in secret.²³

Pattern 1 version: He did not also go up openly, but in secret.

(c) Romans 13:5

διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν.
Therefore it is not only because of anger that it is necessary to be subject, rather it is also because of conscience.²⁴

Pattern 1 version: Therefore it is necessary to be subject not only because of anger...

(d) 1 Corinthians 14:2

ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλώσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ ἀλλὰ θεῷ
For it isn't to men that the one speaking in tongues speaks, rather to God.²⁵

Pattern 1 version: For the one speaking in tongues does not speak to men, but to God.

(e) Philippians 2:4

μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἐτέρων ἕκαστοι
It isn't your own things that each should look out for, rather [also] the things of others.²⁶

Pattern 1 version: Each should not look out for your own things, but [also]...

(b) Luke 22:42

εἰ βούλει παρένεγκε τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· πλὴν μὴ τὸ θέλημά μου ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν γινέσθω
If you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.

(c) John 7:24

μὴ κρίνετε κατ' ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε.
Do not judge according to sight, rather with righteous judgment judge.

²¹ In each instance, the negated clause functions as a counter-point, highlighting the 'point' which is introduced by ἀλλά.

²² Verse 19 states that the disciples should not be anxious when they are called to testify before government officials. The use of γὰρ indicates that the information that follows strengthens or supports v. 19 (cf. Heckert 1996:31-36), stating the reason *why* they should not be anxious. This reason could have been much more simply stated by omitting the negated counter-point.

²³ In John 7:4, Jesus' brothers call him to do his works *openly* instead of *in secret* so that he might be seen. Jesus responds by stating that his time has not yet come for such open displays, and tells them to go to the feast without him. Verse 10 clarifies that Jesus is being consistent with what he said, since he went *not publicly* but *in secret*.

²⁴ In Romans 13:1, Paul commands that everyone be subject to the ruling authorities, for they have been instituted by God. He then provides practical benefits of living in subjection, viz. that one who keeps the law faces no fear of punishment. Verse 5 clarifies that while this pragmatic reason is useful, there is another important reason: for conscience-sake.

²⁵ Paul introduces what will be the topic of the following discourse through the use of the negated counterpoint and point. His goal is to help the Corinthian believers compare what is accomplished by prophecy versus by tongues by making a distinction between *who* in being addressed by each.

²⁶ The main verb governing the participle of this verse is the subjunctive φρονῆτε, which is followed by a series of five participial clauses illustrating in practical terms what kinds of things we should think the same regarding. If

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(12) Examples of Pattern 1 clauses with ἀλλά replacing clause elements

(a) Matthew 20:28

ὥσπερ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν

Just as the son of man did not come to be served, rather to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.²⁷

(b) 1 John 4:10

ἐν τούτῳ ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη, οὐχ ὅτι ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήκαμεν τὸν θεόν ἀλλ' ὅτι αὐτὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπέστειλεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἰλασμόν περὶ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν.

In *this*²⁸ is love:

not that we have loved God,
rather that he loved us
and sent his son as a propitiation for our sins.²⁹

(c) Mark 2:17

οὐ χρειάν ἔχουσιν οἱ ἰσχύοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλ' οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες οὐκ ἦλθον καλέσαι δικαίους ἀλλὰ ἀμαρτωλούς (Cf. Luke 5:32).

The healthy have no need of the doctor, rather the sick ones have [need]. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.³⁰

(d) 2 Timothy 1:7

οὐ γὰρ ἔδωκεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς πνεῦμα δειλίας ἀλλὰ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀγάπης καὶ σωφρονισμοῦ. For God has not given to us a spirit of timidity, rather [a spirit of] power and love and self-control.³¹

(e) 1 John 2:16

πᾶν τὸ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου ἐστίν.

For all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the boast of

one accepts the bracketed reading of the adverbial καὶ, then the clause element that is replaced is essentially 'added' to 'your own interests' in order to reinforce the thematic connection between the two elements.

²⁷ The entire clause of v. 28 is negated, and several components are excluded from the scope of the emphasis through being fronted. The ἀλλά clause introduces two infinitival clauses which replace διακονηθῆναι in the initial proposition.

²⁸ 'This' is a forward-pointing (a.k.a. proleptic or postcedent, cf. Wallace 1996:319) pronoun, used to draw additional attention to the proposition to which it refers (cf. Runge 2007). Thus, the propositions are highlighted both through the use of the forward-pointing pronoun, and by the counterpoint-point created by the use of negation.

²⁹ Note that the negative particle precedes the subordinate conjunction ὅτι in both clauses, which I construe as placing the entire clause within the potential scope of emphasis, and not simply ἡμεῖς or αὐτὸς. On this basis, I contend that these pronouns function as what are traditionally called 'contrastive pronouns' rather than emphatic ones. In other words, they are fronted to establish contrasting topical frames of reference for what follows. They are not being emphasized, but serve to create another 'double difference contrast' where we/God is contrasted with he/us. The latter member in each set is the most important element of the clause, but does not receive emphasis.

³⁰ The presence of a single, comparable element in the ἀλλά clause disambiguates which element most likely receives emphasis in the negated clause.

³¹ The ἀλλά introduces a compounded set of things that God *did* give us to replace what he did *not* give us.

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life—it is not of the Father, rather it is of the world.³²

(13) Examples of Pattern 1 clauses with ἀλλά replacing the entire negated clause

(a) Matthew 13:21

οὐκ ἔχει δὲ ρίζαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρός ἐστιν
It does not have roots in itself, rather it is shortlived.

(b) Eph 6:4

Καὶ οἱ πατέρες, μὴ παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν ἀλλὰ ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ κυρίου.
And Fathers, do not provoke your children, rather nourish them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.³³

(c) 2 Peter 1:16

Οὐ γὰρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις ἐξακολουθήσαντες ἐγνωρίσαμεν ὑμῖν τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δύναμιν καὶ παρουσίαν ἀλλ' ἐπόπτει γεννηθέντες τῆς ἐκείνου μεγαλειότητος.
For it was not having followed cleverly-made myths that we made known to you the power and the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, rather it was having become eyewitnesses of that greatness.³⁴

(d) Luke 18:13

ὁ δὲ τελώνης μακρόθεν ἐστὼς οὐκ ἤθελεν οὐδὲ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπάρει εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ἀλλ' ἔτυπεν τὸ στήθος αὐτοῦ...
But the tax collector, standing far off, was not willing even the eyes to lift to heaven, instead he was beating his chest...

In the case of negated clauses followed by an excepted element, the broad initial statement is scaled back to exclude a single thing, which receives emphasis. It is something like having a table full of items, sweeping all of them on the floor, and then placing back on the table the single element that you want people to focus on. The initial clause indiscriminately negates all of something in order to set the stage for some exception as a means of highlighting the excepted element.

(14) Examples of clause negation which is restricted, typically by εἰ μὴ³⁵

³² Most of v. 16 is spent asserting what the writer wants to comment on, and the comment is made using a negated counterpoint and a positive point.

³³ It would seem that 'your children' could be construed as outside the scope of emphasis since it is stated pronominally (αὐτὰ) in the positive assertion that follows.

³⁴ Note that the pre-verbal circumstantial clause is negated, not the main clause. The ἀλλά clause replaces only the circumstantial clause by describing how it was that they *did* come to them. The negated clause is replaced by a like-kind element.

³⁵ For examples of individually negated words which are replaced by positive, exceptive counterparts:

(a) Matthew 24:36

Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος.
Concerning that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, except the Father alone.

(b) Mark 9:29

τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθῆναι εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ.
This kind can be driven out with nothing except with prayer.

(c) Luke 4:26-27

καὶ πρὸς οὐδεμίαν αὐτῶν ἐπέμφθη Ἥλιος εἰ μὴ εἰς Σάρεπτα τῆς Σιδωνίας πρὸς γυναῖκα χήραν.²⁷

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- (a) Matthew 12:24
οὗτος οὐκ ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ Βεελζεβούλ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων.
This one does not cast out demons except by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.³⁶
- (b) Mark 6:4
οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ.
A prophet is not dishonored except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his house.³⁷
- (c) 1 Corinthians 7:5
μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε ἀλλήλους, εἰ μήτι ἂν ἐκ συμφώνου πρὸς καιρόν,
Do not deprive one another except out of agreement for a season.³⁸
- (d) 2 Timothy 2:5
ἐὰν δὲ καὶ ἀθλήῃ τις, οὐ στεφανοῦται ἐὰν μὴ νομίμως ἀθλήσῃ.
If someone should also compete, he is not crowned unless he competes lawfully.³⁹

4 Pattern 4: Remainder of clause components + Negator + Verb

In the discussion of Pattern 2, it was claimed that placing the negator before a non-verb clause element was the syntactic means of disambiguating what is being emphasized in a negated clause. In the discussion of Pattern 1, I claimed that placing the negator and the verb at the beginning of the clause does not necessarily place any special emphasis on the verb; the scope of the emphasis in such cases is ambiguous unless additional information is provided which can disambiguate the situation, as in Pattern 3. This raises the question of how a writer could unambiguously place emphasis on only the verb.

I noted that Greek allows writers to place clause elements outside the scope of emphasis by placing them in front of the negative particle. This has the effect of narrowing the scope of the emphasis to what follows the negator. This same principle provides the answer to our question of how to unambiguously place emphasis on the verb. One need only place the verb at the end of the main clause with the negator immediately before it. This effectively narrows the scope of emphasis to only

καὶ πολλοὶ λεπροὶ ἦσαν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ ἐπὶ Ἐλισαίου τοῦ προφήτου, καὶ οὐδεὶς αὐτῶν
ἐκαθαρίσθη εἰ μὴ Ναιμὰν ὁ Σύρος.

And to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath of the Sidonians, to a widow woman.
And there were many lepers in Israel in [the time of] Elisha the prophet, and none of them did
he cleanse except Naaman the Syrian.

³⁶ The general statement that he does not cast out demons is restricted by an exception, indicating that it can only be done *by means of Beelzebul*. The Pharisees could have much more easily made their point by stating that he cast out demons by Beelzebul, but this would not have carried the same emphasis.

³⁷ A prophet is indeed dishonored, but only in certain circumstances. Jesus could have much more simply stated that a prophet is only dishonored in his hometown, etc. However, the use of a negated clause plus a restriction has the effect of adding emphasis to the excepted elements.

³⁸ The writer is telling the Corinthians that it is permissible to deprive one another, but only under circumstances. He could have more simply said only to deprive one another for a season, but the counterpoint-point device makes the point much more forcefully.

³⁹ Someone who competes is indeed crowned, but only if he competes lawfully. It would have been easier simply to state that only the one competing lawfully can be crowned, without the counterpoint.

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the verb since all the rest of the clause elements have been excluded. I will refer to this final pattern used to emphasize the verb as Pattern 4, described below.

(15) **Pattern 4: Negator precedes verb at the end of clause**

Scope of Emphasis

Remainder of clause components + Negator + Verb

The principles described regarding the use of Pattern 3 to restrict or correct elements from the negated clause apply equally well to Pattern 4. Furthermore, as was the case with the previous patterns, I still contend that the entire clause is being negated in Pattern 4, only the specified scope of the emphasis has changed in comparison to the other patterns. Let's take a look at some examples from Greek

(16) Examples of only the verb being emphasized in a negated clause⁴⁰

(a) Matthew 12:25

πᾶσα βασιλεία μερισθεῖσα καθ' ἑαυτῆς ἐρημοῦται⁴¹
καὶ πᾶσα πόλις ἢ οἰκία μερισθεῖσα καθ' ἑαυτῆς οὐ σταθήσεται.
Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste.
Every city or house divided against itself will not stand.⁴²

(b) James 1:20

ὀργὴ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ οὐκ ἐργάζεται.
For the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.⁴³

(c) Romans 13:10

ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται.
Love does not work wrong against a neighbor.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ It is important to note that while a verb may be emphasized in a negated clause, the positive alternative introduced by ἀλλά can replace the subject or object of the negated clause, and not just the verb. For example:

(a) 1 Corinthians 7:4

ἡ γυνὴ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀνὴρ,
ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τοῦ ἰδίου σώματος οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει ἀλλὰ ἡ γυνή.
The wife [over] her own body does not have authority, rather her husband [does].
Likewise, also the husband [over] his own body does not have authority, rather the wife [does].

(b) Ephesians 4:29

πᾶς λόγος σαπρὸς ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ὑμῶν μὴ ἐκπορευέσθω, ἀλλὰ εἴ τις ἀγαθὸς πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χρείας,
ἵνα δῶ χάριν τοῖς ἀκούουσιν.
Every unwholesome word out of your mouth let it not come out, rather if [there is] anything good
toward the building up of the need [let it come out] in order to give grace to those hearing.

⁴¹ Notice that the verb of the positive statement is in the final position, in parallel with the negated clause. The same principle regarding emphasizing the verb in negated clauses holds true for positive clauses as well. Most are aware that placing a clause element at the beginning of the clause is a primary means of marking emphasis in Koine Greek. Therefore, fronting the verb, since it prototypically occurs first, cannot be used to mark emphasis. Placing the verb in the final position is the equivalent of fronting a non-verb element. However, caution must be exercised in making such judgments: fronting non-verb elements and placing the verb in final position are *both* potential markers of emphasis. One needs to analyze what is presupposed in the context to make a determination, as asserted information is prototypically what is emphasized, commonly referred to as the 'focus' of the clause by linguists (cf. Lambrecht 1994, Dik 1984; Levinsohn 2000).

⁴² This house might do something else, such as *fall*.

⁴³ The anger of man might do something else to the righteousness of God, such as *offend* it.

⁴⁴ Instead, love might *prevent* wrong against a neighbor.

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(d) 1 Corinthians 10:13

πειρασμός ὑμᾶς οὐκ εἴληφεν εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπινος πιστὸς δὲ ὁ θεός,
ὃς οὐκ ἔάσει ὑμᾶς πειρασθῆναι ὑπὲρ ὃ δύνασθε ἀλλὰ ποιήσει σὺν τῷ πειρασμῷ καὶ τὴν ἔκβασιν
τοῦ δύνασθαι ὑπενεγκεῖν.

A temptation has not overtaken you except what is human; and God is faithful: He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, rather He will provide with the temptation also the way of escape to be able to endure it.⁴⁵

(e) Romans 7:7

ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἔγνων εἰ μὴ διὰ νόμου·
τὴν τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαν οὐκ ᾔδειν εἰ μὴ ὁ νόμος ἔλεγεν· οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις.

Rather, sin I did not know except through the law. For desire I would not have known except the law said, “Do not covet.”

I contend that placing the verb at the end of the clause, preceded by the negative particle, is intended to signal that the verb is receiving primary emphasis within the negated clause. Using Pattern 1 would not have unambiguously accomplished this task. As with the other patterns, the entire proposition of the clause is negated. The pragmatic placement of the negative particle simply marks the intended scope of the emphasis. Pattern 4 does *not* have the affect of negating only the verb.

5 Conclusions

I began by describing some of the standard accounts provided by Greek grammarians regarding the use of the negative particle in declarative clauses. Robertson correctly associated its use with emphasis. Porter correctly associated its use with clause negation. However, a complete picture of the dynamics at work was lacking. My goal was to provide a unified framework that could account for the kinds of constructions found in the Greek New Testament. I also sought to provide heuristic guidelines that would enable exegetes to better relate the syntax of the negated clauses to the emphasis the writer intended to convey. I presented four patterns that describe the basic variations observed in negated clauses.

Pattern 1: Negated clauses with the negator preceding the verb

Negator + Verb + Remainder of clause components (Scope of emphasis is ambiguous)

Pattern 2: Negator precedes non-verb element

Scope of Emphasis

Negator + Non-Verb clause component + Verb

Pattern 3: Scope of emphasis disambiguated by ἀλλα/ει μη

Scope of Emphasis

Negator + Verb + Remainder + (και + Clause) ἀλλὰ OR ει μη + Clause or Clause elements

⁴⁵ The first statement makes clear that some temptation has indeed overtaken us: that which is common to man. This is followed by a counterpoint-point set describing God's care for us, not allowing us to be tempted beyond what we can withstand. Instead, he provides a way of escape.

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Pattern 4: Negator precedes verb at the end of clause

Scope of Emphasis

Remainder of clause components + Negator + Verb

These patterns can be more generally summarized by saying that the potential scope of emphasis in a negated clause is limited to the clause elements following the negative particle that are not presupposed. When the verb immediately follows the negator at the beginning of the clause, the scope may include the other asserted clause elements following the verb as well (Pattern 1). When a non-verb element immediately follows the negator, regardless of its location in the clause, the scope of the emphasis is prototypically limited to the single clause element (Pattern 2). Additional information may be supplied which serves to restrict or correct all or part of the negated clause, which effectively creates a rhetorical counterpoint and point. In such cases, the positive element receives emphasis as well (Pattern 3). Unambiguously emphasizing the verb requires moving all non-verb elements to a position before the negator so that only the verb remains after the negator (Pattern 4).

These claims are not made in a vacuum, even though they do represent a departure from the standard accounts. They are consistent with the principles linguists have postulated for the pragmatics of negative particles in verb-initial languages like Greek. However, the principles cannot account for all of the data by themselves, they are not a silver bullet. They must be incorporated into a larger framework of information structure in order to account for the balance of the data.

I have found a limited number of instances where the negator is left in the clause-initial position and a contrastive topic is placed in the position following the verb. In each case, there is an emphasized element, but the emphasis is established using the typical strategy used in positive clauses, namely placing the most important clause element before the verb. So while these examples do not follow the principles I have outlined above, they fall very much within the more widely employed strategies of structuring information. These instances do not use the negator to signal the emphasis. The examples are fairly evenly distributed across the NT books, but they represent a small minority in comparison to kind of usage that I have described above.⁴⁶ In each case the entire clause is negated, and the emphasized element is placed between the contrastive topic and the verb of the clause.

(17) Examples of Negator + *Contrastive topic* + Emphasized element + Verb

(a) Matt 5:30b

συμφέρει γάρ σοι
ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου
καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου εἰς γέενναν ἀπέλθῃ
For it is better
that you lose one of your members
than that *your whole body* go into hell.

⁴⁶ Cf. Matt 5:30; Luke 11:35; John 4:12; Acts 7:48; Rom 9:8; 2 Corinthians 2:1; 9:3; 12:17; 1 Thes 5:15; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2:5.

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- (b) Luke 11:35
σκοπέει οὖν μὴ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν
Therefore be careful lest *the light in you* be darkness.
- (c) Acts 7:47-48
Σολομῶν δὲ οἰκοδόμησεν αὐτῷ οἶκον ⁴⁸ ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁ ὑψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ
But it was Solomon who built a house for him. ⁴⁸ Yet *the Most High* does not dwell in houses made by hands
- (d) 1 Tim 6:1
Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δοῦλοι τοὺς ἰδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν
ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία βλασφημηῖται
Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor,
so that *the name of God* and *the teaching* may not be reviled.

There are also instances where a *casus pendens* construction is used to introduce a new concept. This construction by definition uses a pronoun to refer back to the *pendens* information. In this case, the *pendens* information is the most important part of the clause, but cannot easily be placed in a position of emphasis. Use of the *casus pendens* introduces the new information, while the resumptive pronoun can easily be placed in a position of emphasis. This is the case in Rom 9:8.

- (18) Examples of *Casus pendens* + Emphasized pronoun + Verb
- (a) Rom 9:8
τοῦτ' ἔστιν οὐ τὰ τέκνα τῆς σαρκὸς ταῦτα τέκνα τοῦ θεοῦ
ἀλλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας λογίζεται εἰς σπέρμα
This means that *it is not the children of the flesh* who are the children of God,
but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Notice that the resumptive pronoun has been eliminated in translation, and that the *pendens* information has been translated in an 'It-cleft' construction, which clearly signals that it is emphasized. The ἀλλὰ clause following the negated clause replaces the emphasized element, just as described in Pattern 3.

An even less-frequent anomaly is to have the emphasized element located outside the scope of emphasis that I have described. The few unambiguous instances that I have found to date involve a negative proposition that is presupposed. In the case of John 6:7, the content of the negated portion of the clause is presupposed, and the fronted element is what is being asserted:

- (19) John 6:7
διακοσίων δηναρίων ἄρτοι οὐκ ἄρκοῦσιν αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἕκαστος βραχύ [τι] λάβῃ
Two hundred denarii of bread would not be enough that each one should receive a little something.

It would seem that Philip presupposes that no amount of bread would be enough, not even as much as 200 *denarii*. Another example is found in Mark 9:28, where the disciples are asking why it was that *Jesus* could cast out the demon but *they* could not. The fact that they were unable to do this is presupposed.

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The most important information in this context is the subject, since the action is presupposed, why *them*?

(20) Mark 9:28

καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς οἶκον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν "Ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό

And when he had entered • the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

Examples (17)-(20) illustrate the need for careful attention to be given to differentiating between what is being asserted and what is presupposed. The principles that I have proposed are a work in progress, and they help to clarify what conclusions can be drawn from the syntax of negated declarative clauses. While the principles that I have outlined will hold true in the majority of cases, these final examples underscore that they must be applied within a larger framework of information structure in order to adequately and consistently explain the usage found in the Greek New Testament.

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