

The Doctrine of Negative Compliance

*A Report by the Always-Right reverend Doctor
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Picture this!! Moses descends from Mount Sinai with a law written by God's own hand. We can assume, perhaps, that this is the second time, since the tablets didn't last very long the first time (you may remember why Moses broke them).

"Whatcha got, Moses?" inquire the curious, but very religious, children of Israel.

"I have the law of God in his own writing," comes the reply from the one who has just come from the presence of holiness. "Gather all the folks together, and let me read it to you."

After assembling the entire population of the mobile Desert City, Moses begins to read the holy word. "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" – and all the others.

I would be willing to suggest that there was, about half way back in the congregation, an old boy who nudged his neighbor and said, "Those are good laws. I wonder why God is giving them to us? I've never done any of those things."

And his neighbor said "Well, God looks on the heart, and He knows I'm right with Him. And it's not adultery if she commits adultery first."

Someone who overheard the conversation asked them to keep it down so this would get over quickly, because he had something really important to do. And besides, "We need some definitions to go with this."

And then another party spoke up and said "Well, that sounds like Old Testament theology to me. That doesn't apply any more."

Sound familiar?

In this modern day of theological misapplication, it seems that we have progressed to the point that we can tell exactly what God does NOT mean, but we cannot tell what he DOES mean. Rest assured that, whatever is in the scripture applies, but it does not apply to me. And there must be a very good reason why it does not apply to me. We spend more time arguing as to why the Word of God does not apply than we spend applying it. Then we preach to our people that if God even HINTS at something, we should pay attention.

So I offer you a few examples of what I have been told (many times by preachers) that the Word of God does NOT mean.

EXAMPLE: Exodus 20:14 - Thou shalt not commit adultery.

1. It does NOT mean you can't marry more than once if the first one doesn't work out. After all, it's not good for man to be alone.
2. It does NOT mean that you can't fool around if your spouse isn't responsive to your needs. Was it your fault you chose her?
3. It does NOT mean the primary church leadership can only have one spouse (although it MAY mean that they can only have one at a time, so as to be an example of restraint)
4. It does NOT apply if you can get your marriage annulled.
5. It does NOT apply if a court of competent jurisdiction says you are free to pursue another "relationship." After all, we live in a country of laws.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Example: I Peter 1:16 - Be ye holy even as I am holy

1. It does NOT mean that I can't have a little nip when I get home from work. After all, it's been a long day.
2. It does NOT mean that I should be deprived of social functions that lend themselves to immorality.

3. It does NOT mean that I need to curtail my vile language in the privacy of my own home. After all, it's my house.
4. It does NOT mean that I have to deprive my kid of the opportunity to go to the dance where he can try to help some young lady hold her top up. After all, everyone does it, and it's just being a good Boy Scout.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Example: Malachi 3:10 - Bring ye all the tithes

1. It does NOT mean that God expects ten percent. Whatever I give is considered a tithe.
2. It does NOT mean that my math skills need to improve.
3. It does NOT mean that I will be considered a robber if I don't give tithes and offerings, despite what Malachi seemed to think.
4. It does NOT mean ten percent of ALL my increase.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Example: I Timoth 2:9 - Let your women dress in modest apparel

1. It does NOT mean I can't wear my tight jeans, because this is the 21st century – as long as I don't bend over (then it might not be the 21st century).
2. It does NOT mean I can't wear my bathing suit, because mine is modest. And I look like a barn with legs while wearing it.
3. It does NOT mean there should actually be a back to my dress.
4. It does NOT mean anything worn at a wedding. Weddings are exceptions to the Word of God.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Example: Ephesians 5:23 - The man is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church.

1. It does NOT mean that the man is the head of the woman, even though we all know Christ is the head of the church.
2. It does NOT mean that the man will be held accountable for his family.
3. It does NOT mean that the woman is to be scripturally submissive to her husband.
4. It does NOT mean that a family will be dysfunctional if the proper authority roles are reversed. That's just the way we decided to do it.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Example: Deutoronomy 22:5 - It is an abomination for a woman to wear what pertains to a man, or for a man to wear a woman's garment.

1. It does NOT mean anything at all. God just put it in there to confuse us. Or maybe he's talking about those transvestite things.
2. It certainly does NOT mean that females are not to wear britches (*breeches* in the scriptural sense), even though that particular article of clothing seems to be the ONLY article of clothing in scripture that is designed and reserved EXCLUSIVELY for male attire. (Remember the priests?)
3. It does NOT mean anything that is purchased in the ladies department at Dillard's, even if it looks like a hanky with handles.
4. It does NOT mean anything IF you are engaged in certain occupations, such as flying over a pommel horse with nothing on that could possibly be considered attire at all, or working at a cash register.

So I have a simple question – WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

If we ask this question often enough, we may come to the inescapable conclusion that we know a lot about what God does NOT mean, but we have barely scratched the surface of what He DOES mean. Now figuring out all the things that God does not mean could take a lot longer than actually applying ourselves to the task of discovering what He DOES mean, don't you think?

So if we change our theological paradigm, and begin our exegetical pursuits with the goal of unearthing what God means, we might find our task so much simpler that we might have time for preparing a good message once in a while. But not to worry. They won't think you mean it. Can you blame them?

Doc Trin

PS. A follow-up (or several) to this article may become necessary as we discover more about what God does not mean.