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WHOSO FORBIDDETH TO ABSTAIN FROM MEATS

Loren Spendlove

Abstract: The double negative phrase "forbiddeth to abstain" as found in D&C 49:18 can be confusing and syntactically challenging for readers. While some have argued that the phrase should be read and understood literally, the Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints indicates that a literal reading is not correct. In this article I demonstrate that the phrase "forbid to abstain" was an accepted English idiom prior to and for a few decades following the receipt of D&C 49, even though it has vanished from contemporary usage completely. The meaning of this idiomatic expression was "command to abstain," in opposition to its literal meaning. The probable origin of this expression is the Greek text of 1 Timothy 4:3, which in English partially reads "commanding to abstain from meats." However, in Greek the phrase "commanding to abstain" would be rendered more correctly as "forbidding to abstain." I conclude that the proper reading of "forbiddeth to abstain" in D&C 49:18 is the idiomatic rather than the literal one and that it should be understood as "commandeth to abstain."

The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contains a syntactically challenging and often confusing verse: "And whoso forbiddeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God" (D&C 49:18). This revelation, given to Joseph Smith Jr. and others on May 7, 1831, was specifically directed at some of the incorrect beliefs and practices of the Shakers, including a belief in abstaining from animal flesh by some of their members.¹

The principal reason why this verse is so difficult to understand is that it contains the double negative *forbiddeth to abstain*. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* states that:

1 D&C 49, Section heading.

According to standard English grammar, a **double negative** used to express a single negative, such as ‘*I don’t know nothing*’ (rather than ‘*I don’t know anything*’), is incorrect. The rules dictate that the two negative elements cancel each other out to give an affirmative statement, so that ‘*I don’t know nothing*’ would be interpreted as ‘*I know something*’ [emphasis in original].²

Applying this double negative rule to D&C 49:18, the two negative elements (forbiddeth and abstain) should “cancel each other out,” resulting in an affirmative statement. In other words, the double negative phrase *forbiddeth to abstain* could be reworded as the affirmative *commandeth to use*. This literal reading of the verse suggests that we should not require others to eat *meats*. By the same token, we should not prohibit others from adopting a food-restricted lifestyle, such as vegetarianism. In blogs and discussion forums on the Internet, there have been many members of the LDS Church who have discussed and argued for such a literal interpretation of this verse.³

Using Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* to help us understand the meaning of words at the time that Section 49 was given, we learn that to *forbid* meant very much what it means today “To prohibit; to interdict; to command to forbear or not to do.”⁴ Webster defined *abstain* as, “In a general sense, to forbear, or refrain from, voluntarily; but used chiefly to denote a restraint upon the passions or appetites; to refrain from indulgence.”⁵ Finally, Webster defined *meat* as, “Food in general; anything eaten for nourishment, either by man or beast.”⁶ So, recast into more modern language, a literal reading of the verse could be: *And whoever prohibits others to voluntarily refrain from foods, that they should not eat them, is not ordained of God*. Understood literally, then, this verse appears to censure anyone preaching against

2 New Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd ed., 520, s.v. “double negative.”

3 Four blog sites which help show the confusion, and sometimes contention, regarding this verse: <http://www.vegsource.com/articles/catano.htm>; <http://originalfastfoods.com/forum/topics/forbidding-to-abstain-from>; <http://www.ldsveg.org/DavidKellyTheLionAndTheLamb.htm>; <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080215123831AAAd0UrI>.

4 Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, Noah Webster 1828, *Original Facsimile Edition* (San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2010), s.v. “forbid.” Webster did not paginate this text, but the volume and signature numbers are printed at the bottom of every fourth leaf.

5 Webster, s.v. “abstain.”

6 Webster, s.v. “meat.”

abstinence from certain foods, a rebuke toward anyone who criticizes a vegetarian diet or other voluntary food-restricted lifestyle.

But, is the literal meaning the correct one? In the footnote to verse 18, the LDS Church has replaced the phrase “forbiddeth to abstain” with “biddeth to abstain.”⁷ According to Webster, *to bid* meant, “To ask; to request; to invite.”⁸ Introducing this definition into our modern language version, we could then read, *And whoever asks others to voluntarily refrain from foods, that they should not eat them, is not ordained by God.* Read this way, the verse takes on a nearly opposite meaning from the literal one and appears to disapprove of anyone who encourages others to limit their diet to only certain foods, including those who persuade others to follow a vegetarian diet or other food-restricted lifestyle.

This same verse in the Spanish language Doctrine and Covenants has been translated by the LDS Church as, “Y quién manda abstenerse de la carne, para que el hombre no la coma, no es ordenado por Dios.” Translated back into English, the verse could be faithfully rendered as “And who *commands to abstain* from meat, so that man does not eat it, is not ordained by God.” In addition, the LDS Church has translated the Portuguese and French versions of this verse in the same manner as the Spanish, demonstrating that this was an intentional wording by the Spanish language translators. All three of these foreign language translations agree very closely with the footnoted version found in the English language Doctrine and Covenants but stand in opposition to the literal reading of the verse in English.

Given these divergent interpretations of this verse from the Doctrine and Covenants, it is apparent that the key to unlocking the intended meaning of the words lies in correctly understanding the phrase “forbiddeth to abstain.”

Idioms

Not all phrases can or should be understood literally. For example, the affirmative words *yeah* and *right*, when used sarcastically — *yeah, right!* — project an opposite meaning to that of the individual words. *Friendly*, as defined by Oxford, primarily means “kind and pleasant.”⁹ In that sense, *friendly fire* is never friendly. Even if during wartime one mistakes one’s friends for enemies, shooting at them could never be construed

7 Footnote to D&C 49:18.

8 Webster, s.v. “bid.”

9 Oxford, 694, s.v. “friendly.”

as kind and pleasant. These two phrases are called idioms, “a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words.”¹⁰ Idioms are found in all languages and are not to be understood literally at the risk of serious miscommunication.

The purpose of this article is to show that the phrase “forbiddeth to abstain” was an accepted English idiom prior to and during the time that Section 49 was received, and its idiomatic meaning was “commandeth to abstain,” which is similar to “biddeth to abstain,” but even stronger.

Idiomatic Usage of “Forbid to Abstain”

Cited below are 12 examples in which the phrase *forbid to abstain* was used by its authors as an idiomatic expression with the intended meaning of *command to abstain*. The original citations range in date from the 16th century to the mid-19th century and have been arranged chronologically.¹¹ While most of the referenced citations originated in England, one had its origin in the United States, and at least two of the English citations were subsequently reprinted in New York. I was unable to identify any usage of this idiomatic expression post-1866. All sources that I was able to locate, from the late nineteenth century to the present, used the phrase strictly in the literal sense.

Published in 1648 in London, a book entitled *The Theatre of Gods [sic] Judgements [sic]* explained that “it is to good reason, that Scripture *forbids us to abstain* from the lust of the flesh and the eyes, which is of the world and the corruption of mans [sic] own nature”¹² [emphasis added]. It is obvious from the context of this passage that the intended meaning of “forbids us to abstain” cannot be the literal one, which would prohibit us from refraining from the lusts of the flesh. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14). Instead, the intended meaning of “forbids us to abstain” in this passage must be “commands us to abstain.” Otherwise, read literally, the passage would be affirming

10 Oxford, 864, s.v. “idiom.”

11 The earliest citation is from a letter by Edmund Guest, the bishop of Rochester during the sixteenth century, and published in a work by Edward Cardwell, *A History of Conferences and other Proceedings Connected with the Revision to the Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: University Press, 1811). See note 18.

12 Thomas Beard and Thomas Taylor, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements: Wherein is represented the admirable Justice of God against all notorious sinners, great and small, specially against the most eminent Persons in the World, whose exorbitant power had broke through the barres of Divine and Humane Law* (London: S.I. & M.H., 1648), 282.

that the scriptures encourage us to follow the lusts of the flesh and our own corrupt nature.

In a work published in London in 1653 by Thomas Taylor, coauthor of the previous work, Dr. Taylor tells us of Paul's "predictions of men in the last times, broaching doctrines of divels [*sic*], forbidding to marry, and *forbidding to abstain* from meats as unclean"¹³ [emphasis added]. Dr Taylor was apparently referencing, at least in part, 1 Timothy 4:3. This verse in the 1560 Geneva Bible reads:

"Forbidding to marie [*sic*], and *commanding to absteine* [*sic*] from meats which God hathe [*sic*] created to be receiued [*sic*] with giuing [*sic*] thanks [*sic*] of them which beleue [*sic*] and knowe [*sic*] the trueth [*sic*]" [emphasis added].

The King James Bible contains similar language:

"Forbidding to marry, and *commanding to absteine* [*sic*] from meates [*sic*], which God hath created to bee [*sic*] receiued [*sic*] with thankesgiuing [*sic*] of them which beleue [*sic*], and know the trueth [*sic*]" [emphasis added].

Both of these editions of scripture contain the phrase "commanding to abstain," but Dr. Taylor rendered the phrase as "forbidding to abstain." It is apparent that Dr. Taylor considered "forbidding to abstain" and "commanding to abstain" to have equivalent meanings.

A little over a century later, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, published in London in January 1777, wrote upon the subject of vengeance, especially as it related to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, who was defiled by Shechem. The author, Sylvanus Urban, wrote, "Yet where, except in the sword of a parent, or a brother, where is redress for this grievance?"¹⁴ Urban's answer was:

"The arm of Vengeance! And yet, are we not *forbidden to abstain* [emphasis added] from blood, on any provocation? We are, and we *should* [emphasis in original] be: A moment's reflection is founded in the law of eternal rectitude. It is man's to err, and to mend; be it God's to punish and to pardon."¹⁵

13 Thomas Taylor, *The Works of that Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, not hitherto published* (London: T.R. & E.M., 1653), 45.

14 Sylvanus Urban, *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London: D. Henry, 1777), 111.

15 Urban, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 111.

As Urban explained, only God is entitled to vengeance. Man's responsibility lies in mending one's own errors and not in avenging the wrongs of others. As in the two previous examples cited, Urban used the phrase "forbidden to abstain" to mean "commanded to abstain." This same article by Urban was reprinted in its entirety in a book entitled *The Sublime and Beautiful of Scripture*, in 1795, in New York.¹⁶

John Jay was one of the founding fathers of the United States and its first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Recorded on April 22, 1793, under the caption of "Draft of John Jay's Charge to the Grand Jury of the Circuit Court for the District of Virginia," are Justice Jay's notes on a legal matter. Those notes read:

would not the Laws of Reason and Morality direct them to
 behave to each other with Respect, with
 Justice, with Benevolence, with good Faith_ Would
 direct
 not those laws *forbid them to abstain in* from violence
 to abstain from interfering in their respective domestic
 Governm^t [*sic*] and arrangements, to abstain from causing
 Quarrels and Dissentions [*sic*] in each others [*sic*] families,
~~to abstain from seducing the Individual Members of those~~
~~Families into~~¹⁷ [emphasis added].

In the original draft, the word "forbid" was crossed out, and the word "direct" was written above the line, demonstrating that this change was made only after the subsequent words had been written. In contrast, the word "in" was crossed out in-line and replaced by the word "from," showing that this change was made immediately. This tells us that Justice Jay most likely felt comfortable with the usage of "forbid them to abstain" and only on reflection decided that the phrase needed more clarity, so he replaced "forbid" with "direct." Since the rest of the paragraph addressed abstinence from interference, quarrels and dissensions, it seems clear that Justice Jay's original meaning of "forbid them to abstain from violence" could not possibly have been to encourage violence, which would be the literal interpretation, and would place it in opposition to the rest of the paragraph. Rather, it is apparent that the original meaning

16 Courtney Melmoth, *The Sublime and Beautiful of Scripture, Being Essays on Select Passages of Sacred Composition* (New York: Tiebout & O'Brien, 1795), 83.

17 Maeva Marcus, *The Documentary History of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1789-1800*, 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 361.

of “forbid them to abstain” must have been to “direct them to abstain,” as he subsequently reworded it.

In *A History of Conferences and other Proceedings Connected with the Revision to the Book of Common Prayer*, published in 1811 by the Oxford University Press, Edward Cardwell cited a letter by Edmund Guest, the bishop of Rochester in the 16th century. Guest, among other things, commented on the teachings of Paul. He wrote, “Paul *forbids us to abstain* not only from that which is evil, but also from all that which is not evil, but yet hath the appearance of evil”¹⁸ [emphasis added]. Guest most likely was referring to Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, which in part reads, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes 5:22). Clearly, Guest’s usage of “forbids us to abstain” cannot be understood in the literal sense. His meaning is undoubtedly the idiomatic one – to command or direct us to abstain not only from evil, but also from the appearance of evil.¹⁹

Printed in 1822 in London, the writings of the late William Gilpin were recorded in *Sermons Preached to a Country Congregation*. In Sermon XX he stated that “it is not only *forbidden to abstain* [emphasis added] from all *outward acts* [emphasis in original] of revenge, but to abstain from all *inclination* [emphasis in original] to it.”²⁰ Gilpin’s usage of “forbidden to abstain” is in agreement with prior citations and should be understood in the idiomatic sense as “commanded to abstain.”

In *A Complete Course for Englishmen to Obtain the French Language at Home*, printed in 1827 in London, the author provided translations of many French words into the English language. *Se garder* was translated by the author as “to keep, to *forbid to abstain from*, to take care not”²¹ [emphasis added]. In an English-French dictionary from the same time period (1833) and also published in London, the following was given for the definition and translation of *to forbear*:

18 Edward Cardwell, *A History of Conferences and other Proceedings Connected with the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer; From the Year 1558 to the Year 1690* (Oxford: University Press, 1811), 49.

19 This same passage by Guest was reprinted in New York in 1902, in a book written by Henry Gee and entitled *The Elizabethan Prayer Book & Ornaments* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1902), 216–217.

20 William Gilpin, *Sermons Preached to a Country Congregation; To which are added a few Hints for Sermons; Intended chiefly for the use of the younger clergy*, iii (London: Trustees of William Gilpin, 1822), 224.

21 J. N. Vlieland, *A Complete Course for Englishmen to Obtain the French Language at Home* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1827), 88.

To FORBEAR, anciently FORBARE. [To cease from anything, to intermit, to omit voluntarily, to abstain] Cesser de, interrompre; omettre, s'abstenir, se garder, s'empêcher, se retenir, s'arrêter, se contrindre. To FORBEAR oneself from [to withhold] s'abstenir, se garder de²² [emphasis added, brackets in original].

In the first example cited above, one of the translations of *se garder* is to *forbid to abstain from*. In the second example, *se garder* is interpreted as to *forbear*, or to *abstain*. On the surface these two definitions seem to contradict one another. *Se garder* cannot mean to *forbid to abstain* and to *abstain* unless *forbid to abstain* was intended to be understood as the idiomatic expression. Additionally, since *se garder* was also translated as *to take care not* in the first citation, it fits that the author intended *forbid to abstain* as *command to abstain*.

In his *Short Lectures on the Church Catechism*, printed in 1845 in London, Augustus O. FitzGerald, rector of Fledborough, Nottinghamshire, published lectures on various topics. In Lecture XXIX he stated:

As we are *forbidden to abstain* from whatever is likely to lead to the shedding of blood, it is our duty to keep away from all places where our bad and angry passions may probably be excited; and in particular from those ill-ordered public houses, where the loose and profligate assemble with the purpose of tempting the less wary visitor to drink and gamble.²³ [emphasis added]

Again, “forbidden to abstain” can only be properly understood as “commanded to abstain” in this context.

Printed in Edinburgh in 1851, a translation of John Calvin’s preaching about the evils and idolatry of the “domain of the Pope” was reproduced in a book entitled *Calvin’s Tracts: Tracts containing Antidote to the Council of Trent*. In reference to the Roman Catholic practice of abstaining from eating flesh on Fridays, Calvin wrote:

22 Joseph Wilson, *A French and English Dictionary; Containing full explanations, definitions, synonyms, idioms, proverbs, terms of art and science, and rules of pronunciation in each language* (London, Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1833), 216.

23 Augustus O. Fitz Gerald, *Short Lectures on the Church Catechism* (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1845), 181.

To interdict the Eating of Flesh under the name of Religion, and bind the consciences of believers by such an interdict, was plainly tyrannical, and as the Apostle expresses it, (1 Tim. iv. 1–3,) “devilish.” And seeing the Lord had left it optional to eat flesh daily, or abstain for a lifetime from eating it, nothing *forbids you to abstain* on particular days. For why may not that be occasionally lawful which is at all times free? Thus you may without sin obey an iniquitous command, provided your intention be to make a concession to the ignorance of the weak, and not also to enthrall your mind by those fetters of tradition.²⁴ [emphasis added]

As the English translation of Calvin’s writing explained, the Scriptures do not forbid [command] us to abstain from eating flesh on particular days of the week. We can eat flesh any time that we want, or we can choose to abstain for a lifetime. But, if we choose to obey the “iniquitous command” of the Pope by abstaining from flesh on a particular day (Friday, for example), we can do so without committing sin so long as our intent is to not offend the weak. Caution, however, needs to be observed so that we are not enthralled in the “fetters of tradition.” As with the prior examples, the only proper way to understand this passage is in the idiomatic sense.

An article appearing in *The United Presbyterian Magazine* in 1856 laid out its arguments for abstinence from intoxicating liquors:

Since our use of intoxicating liquors, however lawful, leads by the force of example to abuse on the part of others, we are bound to abstain. That is the principle on which we take our stand, and we would earnestly exhort our Christian brethren to consider, whether it is possible to evade its force. The utmost you can plead is, that the Bible allows you to use intoxicating liquors; you cannot pretend that it commands you to use them; you cannot pretend even that it *forbids you to abstain* from their use.²⁵ [emphasis added]

It is this author’s belief that the most that one can reason from the Bible is that it allows the use of intoxicating drinks. One cannot, in the

24 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Tracts: Containing Antidote to the Council of Trent* (Edinburgh, Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 378.

25 *The United Presbyterian Magazine*, 10 (Edinburgh: William Oliphant & Sons, 1856), 499.

author's opinion, claim that the Bible "commands you to use them," nor can one argue that the Bible "forbids [commands] you to abstain from their use." Again, it is apparent that the author intended the phrase "forbids to abstain" to be used as the idiomatic expression meaning "commands to abstain."

In another article from the same year, *The Bristol Temperance Herald* encouraged its readers to practice abstinence from intoxicating drink:

The utmost that you can plead as to intoxicating drink, is that the Bible *admits* [emphasis in original] the use of it; you cannot shew [sic] a single passage which, directly or by inference, commands its use, or *forbids you to abstain* [emphasis added]. There is much to urge to self denial [sic] for the sake of others—the very spirit of the gospel and of its founder is such.²⁶

This article, like the previous, contrasted "commands its use" with "forbids you to abstain," leading us to the same conclusion that the author's intended meaning of "forbids you to abstain" is actually "commands you to abstain."

Although additional examples could be given, one final example will suffice to demonstrate the broad and prevalent usage of the idiomatic expression *forbid to abstain*. In *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review*, printed in London in 1866, Sylvanus Urban reminisced on some of the changes that had come upon the church over the centuries:

Happily, no longer is there danger of the Dean of Lincoln, as in the fifteenth century, entering the chapter-house with armed retainers; nor is a vicar, if below the order of priest, liable, as formerly, to be chastised on his bare back; ecclesiastics of every grade may now with impunity wear chequered [sic] hose, may keep dogs within the precincts, may ask friends to dinner without notice to the cook of the common table, may even stay out of close after curfew bell, although not disposed to wear a sword. They need not now, let us hope, as they formerly were at Exeter, be *forbidden to abstain* from keeping public banquetings in the church, "especially in the choir;" nor is there much danger of their being guilty of indecent gestures

²⁶ *The Bristol Temperance Herald*, 12, XX (Bristol: Committee of the Bristol Total Abstinence Society, 1856), 179.

during divine services, or before performing miracle plays.²⁷
[emphasis added]

In the citation above, Urban listed a series of prohibitions to which clerics were subjected in earlier times, which appeared to have changed by the time of his writing. One of those changes was that they were no longer “forbidden to abstain from keeping public banquetings in the church, ‘especially in the choir’.” Urban’s source for at least some of this material appears to be a book printed a year earlier in London, entitled *Cathedralia: A Constitutional History of Cathedrals of the Western Church*. The author of this work, Mackenzie Walcott, wrote that members of the clergy in Exeter, “were forbidden to keep public banquetings and drinkings in the church, specially [*sic*] in the choir, and to talk during divine service.”²⁸ Walcott’s “forbidden to keep public banquetings” and Urban’s “forbidden to abstain from keeping public banquetings” are opposite statements if interpreted literally. Urban’s usage, though, was undoubtedly the idiomatic rather than the literal one, which aligns the two statements with each other.

1 Timothy 4:3 and Greek – The Probable Origin of the Idiom

William Thomson, in his book published in 1816 and entitled *The New Testament Translated from the Greek*, provided us with a possible explanation for how the phrase “forbid to abstain” became an English idiom with a meaning opposite to the literal one. The King James Version of 1 Timothy 4:3 currently reads:

Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats,
which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of
them which believe and know the truth.

Thomson stated that this verse could be translated from the Greek into English as, “*Who command not to marry, to abstain from meats, &c.*”²⁹ [emphasis in original]. Thomson continued:

The words κωλύοντων ἀπέχεσθαι, though, when literally rendered, are *forbidding to abstain*, yet according to Greek

27 Sylvanus Urban, *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Review*, II (London: Bradbury, Evans & Co., 1866), 245-246.

28 Mackenzie E. C. Walcott, *Cathedralia: A Constitutional History of Cathedrals of the Western Church* (London: Joseph Masters, 1865), 163.

29 William Thomson, *The New Testament Translated from the Greek; And the Four Gospels Arranged in Harmony*, III (Kilmarnock, Scotland: H. Crawford, 1816), 256.

idiom, two negatives, which are implied in the above mentioned words more strongly deny; therefore they are to be rendered *commanding to abstain*, or *forbidding to use*; because in English two negatives amount to an affirmative.³⁰ [emphasis in original]

According to Thomson, “forbidding to abstain,” the literal translation from the Greek, had the effect of more strongly denying the use of something. But since the rules of grammar are not the same in English, 1 Timothy 4:3 was written “commanding to abstain” by the English translators. This creates the strong possibility that “forbidding to abstain” became an English idiom for “commanding to abstain” due to the Greek version of 1 Timothy 4:3, and its English adaptation.

Ernest De Witt Burton, in his book entitled *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, published in Edinburgh in 1898, wrote, “When a negative is followed by one or more similar compound negatives or by the double negative οὐ μή the effect is a strengthened negation.”³¹ This supports Thomson’s claim that two or more negatives in the Greek “more strongly deny,” and do not, as in the English “amount to an affirmative.”

A.T. Robertson wrote the following in his book from 1919 entitled *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*:

The compound negatives [in the Greek] merely strengthen the previous negative. This emphatic repetition of the compound negative was once good vernacular in both English and German, but it gave way in literary circles before the influence of the Latin. It was always good Greek.³²

οὐ is a Greek word that, according to Strong’s Concordance (3756), is the absolute negative and can mean *no*, *not*, *nay*, *neither*, *never* or *none*.³³ μή, according to Strong’s Concordance (3361), is “a primary particle of qualified negation (whereas 3756 expresses an absolute denial),” and can mean *no*, *not*, *neither*, *never* *not* or *nothing*.³⁴ However, Strong’s

30 Thomson, *The New Testament Translated from the Greek*, 256–257.

31 Ernest De Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1898), 186.

32 A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, third edition (New York, Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 1165.

33 <http://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isindex=3756>.

34 <http://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isindex=3361>.

Concordance also assigned a separate number to the combination of these two Greek words:

3364, οὐ μή (from 3756 / οὐ, ‘not a fact’ and 3361 / μή, ‘not a possibility’) – a double negative which emphatically conveys, ‘not a fact ... not even a possibility!’ – literally, ‘no, no!’³⁵

The author of Hebrews in the New Testament wrote, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Hebrews 13:5) In the Greek, the final part of that verse, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” is written “οὐ μή σε ἀνῶ οὐδ’ οὐ μή σε ἐγκαταλίπω.” A literal translation into English could be rendered:

οὐ	μή	σε	ἀνῶ	οὐδ’	οὐ
μή	σε	ἐγκαταλίπω.			
Never	not	you	will I leave	nor	never
not	you	will I forsake.			

This verse is unusual in the New Testament in that it contains a double negative phrase (οὐ μή) and a triple negative phrase (οὐδ’ οὐ μή). But, the force of both of these phrases in the Greek is to amplify the negative meaning. So, in order to agree with the Greek, when translated into English both phrases are expressed with only one negative each: I will *never* leave thee, *nor* forsake thee.

Protestants, Catholics, and Shakers

The Reformation brought many disagreements on points of doctrine and interpretation of scripture between Protestants and Catholics. One of those disagreements centered around Paul’s prophecy in 1 Timothy:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith ... forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:1, 3)

Just as differences exist today about how D&C 49:18 should be understood, similar disagreements have existed between Protestants and Catholics around the correct reading of these verses from 1 Timothy.

35 <http://biblehub.com/greek/3364.htm>.

Protestants, who have translated this verse in the idiomatic sense due to the differences in Greek and English grammar, have claimed that the Catholics were the target of Paul's prophecy since Catholic clergy were forbidden to marry, and since all members of the Catholic Church were forbidden to eat meat, other than fish, on Friday. Catholics, on the other hand, by literally interpreting the verse from the Greek have accused the Protestants of apostasy because they refused to ever abstain from meats.

The Reverend Edward Burton, in his book from 1829 entitled *An Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age, in Eight Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford*, provided his commentary on 1 Timothy 4:3. He said that "it will be observed that the words *and commanding*, in v.3. are not in the Greek"³⁶ [emphasis in original]. He continued,

But it is easy to see, as many commentators have pointed out, that some word equivalent to *commanding* must be supplied. Fr. Costerus, a writer of the Romish church, takes a very different view of the passage; and by interpreting it literally, without supplying any other word, he thinks that the protestants, *who* [literally] *forbid to abstain from meats*, may have been intended by St. Paul.³⁷ [emphasis in original]

Burton acknowledged that a literal translation of 1 Timothy 4:3 from Greek to English, as suggested by Costerus, would provide the opposite meaning of "command to abstain from meats." But Burton argued that:

Such an argument as this is beneath criticism, and can only provoke a smile where we ought to be serious: but I mention it, to shew [*sic*] how cautious we ought to be in interpreting scripture; and how easy it is to become ridiculous, when we follow party feeling rather than charity and sound reason.³⁸

In his book *Stromata Procatolica; A Series of Papers Principally Procatolic, or Antidotal to Antichristianism*, printed in London in 1864, E.W. Attwood argued, as did Costerus, for a literal interpretation from the Greek of the verse from 1 Timothy. In his argument, he accused the Protestants of fulfilling Paul's prophecies of apostasy, just as the Protestants had accused the Catholics. Attwood wrote:

³⁶ Edward Burton, *An Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age, in Eight Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Samuel Collingwood, 1829), 436.

³⁷ Burton, *An Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age*, 436–437.

³⁸ Burton, *An Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age*, 437.

Has it ever occurred to you [Protestants] that the word *commanding* [emphasis in original], in the second clause of the sentence in your translation [KJV], is an interpolation on the original; so that the force of *forbidding* [emphasis in original] in the first, a word that is not an interpolation, may apply not only to the expression “to marry,” but to the following one, “to abstain from meats?” It is already shown that you [Protestants] often virtually abstain to marry by your luxurious and popular idea of economy, that is, of sufficiency for a household: as to meats you *actually and notoriously forbid to abstain from them* [emphasis added], pronouncing it an absurdity to decline the supplies of the Creator from whatever motive, whether restraint of the flesh or obedience to the Church, and those fools or mad who do so from either motive.³⁹

Attwood did not set forth any evidence to back a literal interpretation from the Greek for the clause “forbidding to abstain,” although he does appear to support its literal use. His primary argument seems to be that the Protestant Bible introduced the word “commanding” as an “interpolation,” a “spurious word or passage inserted in the genuine writings of an author.”⁴⁰ Protestants, on the other hand, while agreeing that the word *command* is not in the Greek, believe that its inclusion is necessary to correctly understand the original intent of the Greek.

The Douay-Rheims [Catholic] Bible from 1850 contains the following for 1 Timothy 3:4, “Forbidding to marry, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful, and by them that have known the truth.” Not only are the words “and commanding” not found in this verse, but the word “forbidding” in front of “to abstain from meats” is also not present, consistent with the original Greek wording. Although “forbidden” is omitted in the Greek, Attwood and others would agree that the clause should still be understood as “forbidding to abstain from meats.” However, as previously noted by Thomson and others, two negatives in Greek more strongly deny a statement, while in English two negatives make an affirmative. As such, the clause “forbidding to abstain” should either be written “commanding to abstain” or “forbidding to use” when translated into English.

39 E.W. Attwood, *Stromata Procatolica; A Series of Papers Principally Procatolic, or Antidotal to Antichristianism*, (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1864), 135.

40 Webster, s.v. “interpolation.”

A Shaker tract printed in 1810 in Albany, New York, entitled *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, and republished in 1856 "by the United Society, called Shakers,"⁴¹ asserted that both the Protestants and the Catholics were wrong in their interpretation of this verse from 1 Timothy. The tract acknowledged that "the word *commanding* in 1 Timothy iv. 3 – is put into the text by the translators"⁴² [emphasis in original], but it also claimed that "that text of scripture would read with propriety and in harmony with others without the bold ellipsis."⁴³ In other words, the clause *to abstain from meats* should be left without the addition of *and commanding* or any other words, including *forbidding*. In addition, the Shaker tract made the assertion that,

According to their highest and most approved critics, the word *koluo* [κωλύω], which the translators have rendered in this place, "*forbidding*," originally and radically signified to *confine, constrain, bind, or shut up*, and that "*commanding*" is not in the original. Therefore, the text in the original reads literally *binding, confining, or constraining to marry*, to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving, &c.⁴⁴ [emphasis in original]

However, Strong's Concordance gives the following definition for *koluo* (κωλύω): "2967 – From the base of κολαζω - *kolazo* 2849; to estop, i.e. prevent (by word or act):– forbid, hinder, keep from, let, not suffer, withstand."⁴⁵ As shown, Strong's definition of κωλύω is in opposition with that provided in the Shaker tract. A possible reason why the Shaker tract gave a differing definition for the word *koluo* (κωλύω) is that Shakers did not marry, and they "established celibacy as the cardinal principle of the community."⁴⁶ So, Shakers preached that apostates were those *constraining to marry* rather than those *forbidding to marry*, and

41 Benjamin Seth Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, Exemplified by the Principles and Practice of the True Church of Christ*, fourth edition (Albany: The United Society, 1856), Title page.

42 Benjamin Seth Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, Containing a Statement of all things pertaining to the Faith and Practice of the Church of God in this Latter-Day*, second edition (Albany: E. & E. Hosford, 1810), 324.

43 Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, second edition, 324.

44 Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, fourth edition, 285.

45 <http://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isindex=2967>.

46 Encyclopaedia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/537839/Shaker>.

supported this preaching with their unique interpretation of Paul's writing to Timothy.

In yet another deviation from the accepted understanding of this verse, the Shaker tract further claimed that the word "meats," as used in this verse, had nothing to do with physical food at all.

The meat which Christ Jesus spake of eating, was that of abstaining from his own will, and doing the will of God! "I came not to do mine own will," are his words – "*I have meat to eat that ye know not of – my meat is to do the will of him that sent me.*" And the same that was his meat, became also the meat of his followers. Their meat was to take up the cross, *and abstain from fleshly lusts*, and do the will of Jesus Christ, as he did the will of his Father. This was the true meat, which God had appointed to be received with thanksgiving by them that believed and knew the truth.⁴⁷ [emphasis in original]

The tract concluded that, as to "abstaining from meats," neither the Protestants nor the Catholics understood the verse correctly, and that "the Papists and the Protestants may continue to divide between themselves, as they have already practically done, by charging it [apostasy] upon each other."⁴⁸

Conclusion

I demonstrated in this article that *forbid to abstain* was an accepted and broadly used English idiom, especially as it pertained to matters of religious import, and that the meaning of this idiom was in direct opposition to its literal meaning. This idiom first appeared in English literature, no later than the early sixteenth century, and continued in use until at least 1866. As such, the idiom was still in use at the time that section 49 of the Doctrine and Covenants was received by Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1831.

As demonstrated by multiple writers, a literal translation from the Greek of *forbidding to abstain from meats* does not properly express the intent of Paul's writing to Timothy. In English, his intent would best be written as *commanding to abstain from meats*. Additionally, it is very probable that this idiom developed as a direct result of the Greek rendering of 1 Timothy 4:3. Because two negatives in Greek more strongly

47 Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, second edition, 325.

48 Youngs, *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, fourth edition, 285.

deny, *forbidding to abstain* in Greek should be rendered *commanding to abstain* in English.

Accordingly, D&C 49:18 would be best understood if the word *forbiddeth* were replaced by *commandeth*, which would give us: “And whoso commandeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God,” which is precisely how the LDS Church has translated this verse in its current Spanish, Portuguese, and French editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. This idiomatic interpretation is given even further strength when read together with verse 19 of the same section. “And whoso [commandeth] to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God. For, behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance” (D&C 49:18–19).

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