



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 18, Issue 10

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

August 2017

FORWARD, NOT BACK

I am not a Greek scholar. I have learned some Greek; perhaps just enough to make me dangerous. I do, however, know English grammar. During first year Greek classes when I was in college, the first part of the class was English grammar, figuring that even American students did not know enough about their grammar to understand Greek grammar. Although there are some minor differences, one who knows English grammar well can handle an understanding of the variations. That said, there is a common argument in Christian religious circles that just does not hold water because it is grammatically and linguistically incorrect.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

There are those who will argue that “for the remission” in this passage means “because of remission.” The argument continues that immersion in water is not necessary for salvation because it is something we do because we have been saved, if we do it at all.

If we were just dealing with English grammar, this might be a possible argument. The English word “for” can mean “because of” or “for the purpose of,” depending on context (which doesn’t help here). “I paid for the hamburger” can mean that I have already eaten the meal and am now paying for it, or it can mean that I paid in anticipation of receiving a sandwich. The context might depend on whether you were eating at Applebees or McDonalds. Other than that Peter was speaking to a group of people who had not previously put their faith in Jesus, we don’t have sufficient context to determine the precise meaning.

Enter language itself. The Greek word *eis*, translated “for” in this verse, is commonly understood to mean “unto,” “into,” or “toward.” In over 1,500 uses of the word in scripture, it never looks backward. It would be strange, indeed, if this were the only time among all those uses in which it would mean “because of.” Linguistically and grammatically it must mean here that baptism is for the purpose of, or to the end that, you may receive the remission of sins.

If this were the only verse linking something to salvation with the word *eis*, then this position, strong

though it may be, could still be questioned. But when you look at other passages that use the same word, the argument is only strengthened. What else is “*eis* salvation?”

Paul says the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom 1:16) Does anyone claim that the death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus (which Paul says is the gospel) occurred because we already had salvation? If so, then his death is meaningless.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:10)

While one might weakly argue that one might make confession because of salvation, it would be hard to argue that one believes because he is already righteous. If that were the case, then faith is of little value; you can be righteous without it. If faith looks forward, why not immersion?

Peter also talks about “faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Pet 1:5) If that salvation is “ready to be revealed,” it is not yet revealed and the faith must necessarily be looking forward, not backward.

Finally, Paul told the Jews in Pisidian Antioch that he and Barnabas were set as “a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” (Acts 13:47) If the Gentiles had already received salvation, then Paul could have saved himself stoning, beatings, shipwrecks, and imprisonments by staying at home. He was “preaching to the choir.”

No, in none of these cases does *eis* mean “because of.” How, then, can one say that baptism is because one has already received remission of sins? It makes as much sense as saying Millard Fillmore was elected because he was already President of the United States.

Contents

Forward, Not Back	1
Witness Security Program	2
Hate; Love	4

All articles Copyright 2017 by Tim O’Hearn unless otherwise noted

WITNESS SECURITY PROGRAM

A few years ago there was a television show, set here in Albuquerque, called *In Plain Sight*. It was about the U.S. Marshals Service Witness Security Program. Under that program people who have agreed to testify in certain cases (usually mob, terror, or gang related), whose lives may be endangered by doing so, and who meet certain other criteria, are given new identities in a town where they are not likely to be recognized. Although they can choose any new name, they are advised to keep the name by which they are commonly called, and perhaps the same last initial. They, and any family members in the program with them, must agree never to contact former friends or associates, and never return to the city where the previously lived, except to testify in the trial. (If they are currently in prison, they are moved to a different secure facility.) Many witnesses in the program have criminal records, and only about 17% of those subsequently commit crimes while in the program. Before entering the program they must pay off all debts, such as credit cards. Importantly, witness protection is entirely voluntary. Several aspects of the Witness Security Program have parallels in Christianity.

Those who would steal
an identity usually start
with a name.

Endangered

One cannot enter the Witness Security program unless it can be verified that by testifying in a case their life will be endangered. There is a strong presumption that associates of the defendant will attempt to kill the witness before testifying, or in retaliation for their testimony.

Humans are an endangered species. Every person's life is threatened by sin. The devil is out to kill every person. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet 5:8) He does this by tempting one to sin. "For the wages of sin are death." (Rom 6:23)

One might argue that this is true regardless of one's faith or testimony. Everyone is going to die, and that death is a result of Adam's sin. That is true. Nevertheless, Christians may be more in danger because of their testimony.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou

partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. (2 Tim 1:8)

The devil doesn't need to worry about those in the world. Most of them are going to choose sin without any effort on his part. They are not going to testify against him. Christians, on the other hand, are going to testify. They can expect retaliation (afflictions) because of their testimony. The devil has time and inclination to endanger them, because the rest of the world requires no attention. His contract is out on Christians, and he has plenty of volunteers to fulfil it.

New name

Just as those in the Witness Security program get a new name, so do we. After all, a name is closely associated with identity. Those who would steal an identity usually start with a name, and then gather other identifying information. After all, what good is stealing a Social Security number if you try to associate it with the wrong name? You will get caught.

The Bible is replete with people who had their names changed to give them a new identity. Abram, the exalted father, became Abraham, the father of a multitude. Jacob, the supplanter, became Israel (God prevails). Gideon (the warrior, although God found him in hiding) became Jerub-baal ("let Baal defend himself") after he tore down the idols of Baal. Simon ("he who hears") became Peter, the rock, and became a preacher rather than just a hearer.

And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. (Isa 62:2)

That the followers of God would get a new name (which many take to be fulfilled in Acts 11:26 when the disciples were first called Christians) indicates a change in identity for God's people. No longer would the nation of Israel alone be God's chosen ones, but also the Gentiles. God's favor would be extended to all, and so the identity of His people would change.

Besides the general promise of a new name, God also said that those individuals that overcome will be given one. In the Revelation, that promise is made to "him that overcometh" in both the congregations at Pergamos and Philadelphia. (Rev 2:17; 3:12) Like those in witness protection, the new name will be hidden from those that knew the person before. Unlike that program, though, the individual does not select the new name. Instead, God will "write upon" him the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and a new name. His identity is now in God, not in his former life.

No contact

“How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:2) For all practical purposes, the individual going into the Witness Security program dies. With the closing of all previous debts and the change of name, that old person no longer exists. Accordingly, he or she no longer lives in the community nor has contact with those in the former life. The Marshals Service claims that no person in the program has been killed as long as they follow the rule about cutting off contact with non-protected people from their old life. While a Christian may not be able to cut off all contact with the physical world, or even move to a new city with new acquaintances, the new believer is expected to cut off all contact with the former way of life.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. (Rom 6:3-7)

We may not be able to cut off all ties with those we knew in our former life. We may even sin, but we will no longer live there. We are to cut off contact to such an extent that “they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot.” (1 Pet 4:4) Although we may maintain the same physical appearance, our old acquaintances will not even recognize us.

Recidivism

It has been said that the wanted man should be the safest driver on the road. That is because drawing attention to himself by lawless behavior could end up with being arrested for the crime for which he is wanted. As before mentioned, about 17% of criminals who go into witness protection commit another crime. That is much lower than the recidivism rate for people being released from jails. There may be two reasons for this. One is that they don’t want to call attention to themselves. The other is that they are not allowed into the program if they pose a danger to their new community.

Calvinist doctrine notwithstanding, there is no guarantee that one who comes to Christ will not return to his former residence. There is considerable practical evidence of this, even if you limit the control group to preachers alone. There is even more evidence in the scriptures. Someone has pointed out over 200 passages that talk about the possibility of, as Jesus put it in Revelation 2:4, leaving “your first love.” That is not to

say, however, that it is likely. Just as the rate of people in the Witness Security program who commit crimes is low, so the rate of recidivism among those who have followed Christ is low.

Voluntary

Finally, entry into the program is voluntary. There is a commercial for a certain brand of luxury car in which a man is being offered entry into the Witness Security program. He is given a new name, new identification papers, even a new house. When they tell him that he will have to settle for a nondescript SUV rather than his luxury SUV, he says, “I’ll take my chances.” He turns down the program.

Unfortunately, he is typical of many people in the world. Short-term satisfaction or material goods take precedence over saving one’s life. One thing is clear in

No person in the program has been lost as long as they cut off contact with non-protected people from their old life.

scripture. “I can’t be saved for you, and you can’t be saved for me.”

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Cor 5:10)

Christianity and Islam, if not others as well, have histories of attempts at forced conversion. Witness the Inquisition in which “heretics” (who may, in some cases, have been more closely aligned with the things written in the Bible) and Jews were faced with the choice of conversion or death. Islam is known, justly or not, for spreading their religion with the edge of the sword. Even today the newspapers are full of reports of Christians who attempt to force the truths of the Bible on unbelievers. God, on the other hand, makes the choice available, but forces no one to follow Him.

The Witness Security program is not new. It is just new in being applied to witnesses in government courts. There is a much older witness security program that has many of the same characteristics. One key word is security. The marshals brag about their record, but God is more secure than they are. Participants just have to follow the guidelines for the program. And they must be ready to testify. It is, after all, the *witness* security program.

HATE; LOVE

In the 1955 movie, *Night of the Hunter*, Robert Mitchum plays a self-appointed preacher who believes he is God's instrument to punish "lustful women." On the knuckles of his left hand the word HATE is tattooed, with LOVE in tattoos on his right knuckles. At one point he tells the children, who he suspects of having some money that he wants, that the tattoos signify the conflict between hate and love that has existed since the fall of man, but that love will always triumph. Although he has a twisted concept of love that includes murder while singing "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms," his explanation that love always triumphs is a valid one.

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. ... But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. (Lk 6:28-29, 36-37)

This is true in a generic sense, but it also has great meaning for those who would try to save those who are lost. We won't win converts by hating them into the church.

Back around the 1950s a common approach to try to teach the gospel was to ask a person, "If you died today would you go to heaven or hell?" Or, to be more blunt, "You are a sinner and are going to hell. Let me tell you how to change that." Those who approached others with these statements usually did not get very far. They were likely to have a door slammed in their face. Over time

people realized that a better approach was some variation on "I am happy that I am going to heaven, but I sure would love it if you would go with me." Of course, this approach only worked if the person using it showed that they really meant both parts of the statement. If they didn't seem interested in heaven themselves, it was difficult to convince anyone else that it was worth looking into. If they didn't show a genuine interest in the person to whom they were talking, they came across as liars or hypocrites. (Door-knocking campaigns may have their place, but nothing beats a good relationship over time to convince someone of your love.)

Unfortunately, some people in America have gone back to the 50s in their attitudes. From the political stage and social media, you hear stories about how certain people (usually labeled Liberals) should comply with Christian principles, whether they agree with them or not. In business we should, apparently, hit the unbelievers over the head with the Bible rather than serve them with love. (For example, if you don't believe in selling liquor, stay out of the grocery store business in many states.)

We don't need to make enemies of people we consider sinners. They are already inimical to God; there is no need to reinforce that. A good quote is going around, saying, "don't look down on someone because they sin differently than you." Our approach to friends who are still in sin should not be "I am right and you are wrong." We should acknowledge that we have been wrong, too, and have changed for the better.

When Jesus said, "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt 5:16), he didn't mean for us to burn the sinners' houses down.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123