

echo versus apecho

A study of two Greek words, εχω (echo) and απεχω (apecho)

These two Greek words in the subtitle would mean nothing to the vast majority of English readers, but our interest should be piqued if we discover that our English Bibles translates them both the same way. In essence, it means translators are saying there is no difference in meaning between εχω and απεχω! This is a bit like saying in English that septic and antiseptic have the same meaning. Obviously in the Greek as in this English example, one word derives from the other but the addition of a prefix can change the meaning drastically. In fact, in the case of the Greek being discussed, they might even be called opposites.

That Yahweh Himself gets very specific about what He writes by the Spirit, is illustrated in Mat 5:18. Jesus, referring to OT Law says: *“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”* Lk 16:17 says something similar. Again, Jesus speaking in Mt 24:35, Mk 13:31 and Lk 21:33, tells us that *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”*. We can safely deduce that the Deity meant the two Greek words, being discussed above, to be different and therefore have different meanings. Fortunately, we can easily show from scripture that this is true. Of course, all this thinking assumes that you, the reader, accept that the Deity by His Spirit authored the NT Greek writings.

The word εχω occurs often in Greek scripture and means to have, or to hold. There is no argument with the meaning of this word. Απεχω, apecho, on the other hand, is a compound word that is composed of two parts: απο, (apo), a preposition meaning *from* or *away from*, and the main part, εχω, (echo), which we already know means to have or to hold. [Note: The ο of απο is dropped since the next letter is another vowel, ε.] In the compound form, we would expect απεχω to mean: to-hold-away and so to distance something. It has the idea of putting something at a distance from something else. Thus, the title of this article, *“They have their reward,”* should really be *“They distance their reward,”* but much more on this shortly.

In the NT, απεχω (apecho) appears in two main forms, in the middle voice (apechomai), and in the active voice (apecho). The endings of these words tell us whether they are middle or active voice. In short, the active voice means that the subject does the action of the verb to something else, while the middle voice means the subject does the action of the verb for himself. If you don't understand voice, don't worry too much, as I only refer to it as the means of dividing its NT use into these two main groups. The two groups are highlighted because the KJV correctly translates one group consistently but fails to translate correctly the other group though they nearly get it right in 4-5 verses. I will discuss these in a moment.

If we consider the middle voice group, we see that the KJV consistently translate it as abstain. One can check out these verses for oneself. There are only six of them:— Acts 15:20, Acts 15:29, 1Th. 4:3, 1Th. 5:22, 1Tim. 4:3 and 1Pet. 2:11. The KJV, the NASB, the ASV all translate it as abstain and so does the NIV on all but two occasions.

So what does abstain mean? According to the dictionary, it means to hold oneself away from something. Considering what has been said above, we could say abstain means to distance oneself from something. And so in these middle voice contexts the use of the word

abstain is perfect. We could have used the more literally correct, to be holding away from oneself, but it becomes very unwieldy and abstain is far better and simpler yet still carries the full meaning. Interestingly, if one checks an English dictionary the word abstain comes from the Latin *abstainere* from *ab-* meaning *from* and *tenere* meaning *to hold*.

Let's now consider the active voice group. There are a few more of them, about 13 in all. Here are the verse references: Matt. 6:2, 5, 16, 14:24, 15:8, Mark 7:6, 14:41, Luke 6:24, 7:6, 15:20, 24:13, Phil. 4:18 and Philem. 15. To begin with I will consider the first three of these verses, Matt. 6:2, 5 and 16, because they are the reason for the title to this article. In the KJV they are translated as follows:

- Matt. 6:2 *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward.***

- Matt. 6:5 ¶ *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward.***

- Matt. 6:16 ¶ *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward.***

Notice the phrase at the end of each of these verses: **They have their reward.** The word *have* here is the word *apecho* in the Greek and so the text should read: They hold-away their reward or we might say, They distance their reward. It is **not** that they already have their reward, which implies something sinister, but rather that they distance or hold away their reward. The real implication is that the reward is still there, but that these folk have to change in some way to bring their reward to them. The use of *have* here instead of distance is of some importance theologically, but in Phil 4:18 it is of far greater importance as it puts a totally different slant to the verse.

- Phil. 4:18 reads in the KJV: *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus* The phrase, *But I have all, and abound*, once again has *have* where the Greek has *apecho* and so should read, *But I distance all (or I hold away all), and abound.* Literally it reads: *But I distance all, and I am abounding.* This is a huge difference in meaning and, correctly translated, shows the wondrous beauty of God's supply for Paul and how this now fits perfectly with the teaching of Jesus about riches.

I could end this article at this point, for the importance of such compound words as *apecho*, has been fully demonstrated and needs only to be applied by the reader to the rest of these verses. However, lest some accuse me of cherry picking scriptures, I will consider now the rest of the active voice verses.

- Lk 6:24 is very similar to the three verses already discussed above. It is translated in the KJV: "...for **ye have received** your consolation." The words *ye have received* translates *apecho* and so should be ...**ye have held away** your consolation. Again we could write **ye have distanced** your consolation, but this might not be considered correct English by some.

- Mt 14:24 is included here because one Greek text (The Critical Text) uses *apecho* while the Greek text that the KJV is based on is quite a different word in the Greek. The differences in the texts are highlighted in blue below. The first four words and the latter part of the verse is the same in both texts, but the blue middle parts differ.

Matt. 14:24 *Το δε πλοιον ηδη μεσον της θαλασσης ην...*

Matt. 14:24 *Το δε πλοιον ηδη σταδιους πολλους απο της γης απειχεν...*

Since *apecho* (underlined) appears in the Critical Text it needs to be discussed here. The KJV of the verse will not be discussed since the comparison of the two major Greek texts is a study in itself.

So what does the Greek Critical Text say. The literal English translation is given below each Greek word.

Το δε πλοιον ηδη σταδιους πολλους απο της γης απειχεν
 the Now boat already stadia many from the land was-holding-
 away

Or in better but literal English:

Now the boat, already many stadia from the land, was holding-away.

[Note: Since the word stadia occurs seven times in the NT, it is important that we don't convert the word to English type measurements, for if we do this we lose the significance of the numbers given in the text. e.g. In Rev 14:20 talks about 1600 stadia. If we say a stadia is about 200 metres, then 1600 stadia is about 320km. 320 tells us nothing about the number 1600 and so any significance to this number would be lost by the conversion.]

• Mt 15:8, Mk 7:6, Lk 7:6, 15:2, 24:13 are all verses which imply or talk about distance from something. Consider each in turn.

— Matt. 15:8 *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

— Mark 7:6 *He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*

— Luke 7:6 *Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof:*

— Luke 15:20 *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

— Luke 24:13 *And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs (stadia).*

All these verses have something to do with holding away from something or being distant from something.

Matt. 15:8 ...but their heart is far from me... = ...but their heart is distancing me.

Mark 7:6 ...but their heart is far from me... = ...but their heart is distancing me.

It is not just that their heart is far from God but rather that their heart actively holds away/distances God.

Luke 7:6 ...And when he was now not far from the house ... = ...but he already not being far distant from the house...

Luke 15:20 ...But when he was yet a great way off... = ... But he still being far distant, his father saw him...

Luke 24:13 ... which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs (stadia)... = ...into a village, being distant from Jerusalem, sixty stadia...

This study serves to highlight the importance of the meaning of compound verbs in the Greek. So often the translators see no difference in meaning between the base word and the compound word. This can have significant consequences for the meaning of the text as was shown in Phil. 4:18 (above).

Some readers will even say, all this matters little as it does not change anything regarding salvation. Whether it does or doesn't affect salvation can not be fully determined until the whole counsel of God is understood. Such errors must leave us wondering about other areas of scripture which may need revising.