

THOSE OF “THE WAY”

— FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY —

TERMS USED FOR CHRISTIANS, BY CHRISTIANS

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Christians at the beginning of the present dispensation, before they were ever called “Christians” (Acts 11:26), were known simply as those of “this way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). In each instance the word “way” is preceded by the definite article, and the expression could be better translated, “the way.”

Those believing the message proclaimed on the day of Pentecost and following were singled out through the use of this expression. They were believing Jews who followed *a way different* than that being followed by the remainder of the nation (which was looked upon by Israel’s religious leaders as *a heretical way* [Acts 24:14]), and the expression was later used relative to believing Gentiles as well (Acts 19:9).

The origin of this expression is rooted in believing the message being proclaimed to Israel relative to *salvation* as seen in the first seven chapters of the Book of Acts — a

salvation having to do with *deliverance in the kingdom*, not with one’s eternal destiny (cf. Acts 2:15-47; 3:19-21; 4:14, 30; 5:12-15; 6:8; 7:2-56). Those of “the way” had believed the message being proclaimed, and they were seeking, through every means possible — during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel — to bring about belief (in the same message) on the part of an entire unbelieving nation, the nation of Israel.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was going about the country seeking to destroy that which he and numerous other Jews viewed as *a new, heretical Jewish sect* by doing away with those of “the way”; but, on his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, he had his eyes opened to the truth which he, along with the nation, had rejected. As a result, he became *a follower* of “the way” and subsequently exhibited the same urgency and zeal toward *proclaiming* “the way” as he had previously exhibited toward trying to *destroy* “the way” (cf. Acts 8:1ff; Rom. 9:3).

The Faith

Years later, writing to the Churches in Galatia, Paul described the message which he had sought to destroy by using the expression, “the faith” (Gal. 1:23). And not only did Paul use this expression writing to the Churches in Galatia (to refer to the message pertaining to the King and the proffered kingdom, the message described simply as “the way”), but he used it numerous times throughout his ministry, referring to the same message (e.g., Acts 14:22; Rom.

1:8; Eph. 1:15; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23; I Tim. 6:12, 21; II Tim. 3:8; 4:7).

And Luke (writing Acts) used the expression, “the faith,” *the same way* relative to events prior to Paul’s conversion (Acts 6:7). And this expression was used *the same way* by those writing the other epistles (e.g., Heb. 12:2; James 2:14; I Peter 5:9; I John 5:4 [see also Rev. 2:13]; Jude 3). Then going back behind both the epistles and the Book of Acts, it was used *the same way* by Christ during His earthly ministry (Luke 18:8).

(“Faith” in all the references in the preceding two paragraphs is *articular* in the Greek text.)

In this respect, it can be clearly shown that “the faith” was a commonly used expression, seen throughout the New Testament, to refer to teachings pertaining to the proffered kingdom. Those of “the way” in Acts were those who held to “the faith.” And though Paul used the expression, “the faith,” extensively throughout his epistles after this fashion, he was far from alone in so doing. Other writers of Scripture are also seen using this expression in the same manner Paul used it.

Thus, the expression, “the faith,” does not refer to *belief in general* (i.e., as often expressed, “all the great Biblical doctrines of the faith [referring to the virgin birth, blood atonement, etc.]”), but belief *in particular*. This is what the article shows, used to point out something *particular*, something which would be evident by the context. And to say that verses such as I Tim. 6:12, II Tim.

4:7, or Jude 3 (among many others) refer to holding to that which is looked upon as “all the great Biblical doctrines of the faith” is not only *textually wrong* but *theologically destructive*.

Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (I Cor. 2:13); and when this is done, going back into the Book of Acts and carrying the matter through into the epistles, it can be clearly demonstrated exactly what the expression, “the faith,” refers to. And to misinterpret and teach contrary to that which Scripture clearly reveals about “the faith” not only *obscures* that which is taught in one realm but also invariably results in *false teaching* in another realm.

The Saving of the Soul

The Greek word *psuche*, meaning either “soul” or “life,” is used a number of different ways in Scripture, referring to things pertaining to man’s life in both the physical and spiritual realms. However, this word is never used in Scripture after the fashion in which it is often used in Christian circles — associating the saving of the soul with one’s presently possessed eternal salvation.

Rather, in Scripture, in the spiritual realm, the saving of the soul refers strictly to *present* and *future* aspects of salvation — a salvation *presently being brought to pass* in the lives of the redeemed, *but not realized until a future time* (cf. I Cor. 1:18; Heb. 1:14; I Peter 1:9).

The writers of the four gospels and the

writers of Hebrews, James, and I Peter all used the word *psuche*, soul/life, after the preceding fashion (e.g., Matt. 16:25-27; Mark 8:35-38; Luke 9:24-26; John 12:25; Heb. 10:35-39; James 1:21; I Peter 1:4-9). And these same writers (with the exception of James) also used the word referring to the physical realm as well (e.g., Matt. 6:25; Mark 3:4; Luke 12:22; John 10:11; Heb. 12:3; I Peter 3:20).

Paul used the word *psuche* thirteen times throughout the course of his epistles, and with the exception of two instances (II Cor. 12:15; I Thess. 5:23), he used the word referring only to the physical realm (e.g., Rom. 11:3; Phil. 2:30). References in the epistles to Christians either realizing or not realizing *the salvation of their souls* within the framework of the mystery revealed to Paul, are seen, in so many words, in the general epistles (including Hebrews) rather than in the Pauline epistles.

“The salvation of the soul” is not really Pauline terminology, though it is correct terminology and Paul alludes to the matter in both II Cor. 12:15 and I Thess. 5:23. Paul, referring to things pertaining to this future salvation, used two main expressions — “the gospel” and “the faith.” Those writing the general epistles, referring to things pertaining to this same salvation, used three main expressions — “the gospel,” “the faith,” and “the saving of the soul.”

However, though the writers of the general epistles used the word “gospel” after the same fashion Paul used this word (e.g., Heb. 4:2, 6; I Peter 4:17), any extensive

use of the word after this fashion was left to Paul. The “good news” pertaining to the mystery had been revealed to him, and he was the one who, logically, would continually reference this “good news.”

Thus, the terminology used by Paul and that used by the writers of the general epistles, referring to things pertaining to the salvation to be realized by Christians in the coming kingdom, differs in the preceding respects. But all the various things pertaining to the message and the end of the matter remain the same.

It all goes back to how the Spirit of God used different men to pen the Word. All the writers of the epistles dealt with *exactly the same thing*, though their emphases on different aspects of the matter were different, and their ways of expressing and saying certain things were, at times, different as well.

But because of God’s sovereign control over all matters pertaining to these men’s lives and the Spirit’s work in the matter of guarding these men from error as they wrote, that which these men wrote was *exactly, in every detail*, that which God wanted man to possess in order to understand all the various things about His plans and purposes. It was *the very Word of God*, as stated in II Tim. 3:16, *the Breath of God*.

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