

THE FAITH

The Way.

In the early ecclesia, the believers were identified as belonging to *the Way* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) even before they were actually called Christians (Acts 11:26) by the world in Antioch. Starting with Pentecost, the ecclesia was made up of believing Judahites who were identified as *the Way* because they were following a different way from the rest of their fellow Judahites. In fact, the Jewish religious leaders looked upon *the Way* as a heretical way (a sect) that needed to be destroyed. Why? Because *the Way* accepted the Messiah and, as such, sought to enter the kingdom of God, especially **the kingdom of the heavens** when the will of God will be manifested on earth among the nations. Simply, *the Way* not only saw but also longed for the coming of the kingdom of Christ. We could say that they set their hearts upon the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah. Most of the Judahites of that day rejected Jesus as the King of Israel; consequently, they have been disqualified from entering the coming kingdom of Christ. The ones of *the Way* believed on Jesus and are (will be) qualified to enter the coming kingdom. They are the true Israel of God.

There was a zealous Pharisee and Hebrew named Saul who set out to destroy *the Way*. He sought out Christians, bound them and brought them to Jerusalem. It is recorded that he made havoc of the ecclesia, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison (Acts 8:3). He even stood by and watched as Stephen, a man full of the Holy Spirit, who was of *the Way*, was stoned to death (Acts 7:59; 8:1).

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2 NASB)

As Saul was on the road to Damascus to search out Christians, seeking to destroy *the Way*, Saul met his match. On the road, he was blinded by a bright light from heaven as he heard the Lord Jesus speak to him: **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** Saul was persecuting the body of Christ which was on earth with the Head, the Lord Jesus, in heaven. On that day, Saul ceased being a persecutor of *the Way*, changed course, and began to follow a different way. Saul became Paul the apostle, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ.

Preaching *the Faith*.

And I was {still} unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.” And they were glorifying God because of me. (Galatians 1:22-24 NASB)

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In his epistles to the ecclesias, Paul used a very specific term in his writings, that is, *the faith*. Saul who persecuted *the Way* became Paul who began to preach *the faith* (e.g., Romans 1:5; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:23; 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9, 13; 6:10, 12, 21; 2 Timothy 3:8; 4:7).

Now, many Christians probably view *the faith* as merely a set of fundamental doctrines held by most believers, such as the virgin birth, the atonement, justification by faith, baptism, etc. Some might call these truths the mainstream doctrines, which are readily accepted and widely taught and held in Christendom today.

Undoubtedly, *the faith* includes these doctrines, but I propose that *the faith* actually goes far beyond these truths. When *faith* is preceded by the article *the*, it means that this is a particular type of faith. It has a specific meaning. It is more than believing in Jesus as Savior, resulting in justification by faith. *The faith* is not separate from the gospel of the grace of God, for a Christian's new life begins at this point. However, *the faith* deals with growing up with a view to what is coming.

It deals with the goal of our salvation, the purpose for God creating us and then saving us. It deals with God's purpose of the eons, which He purposed in Christ Jesus. It is a mystery revealed (1 Timothy 3:9). It is something of which we are to lay hold, for which we are to fight (2 Timothy 4:7), to strive (Philippians 1:27), and to contend (Jude 3). It is something that we are to enter (Acts 14:22; 2 Corinthians 13:5); it is something we can reject or deny; it is something from which we can depart, fall, or stray (1 Timothy 1:19; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21). Obviously, this cannot refer to our initial salvation, which is not based on anything that we can or must do. Simply, our initial salvation is not based on works but on faith.

Then, what is *the faith*? *The faith* was Paul's expression for *the Way*. Just as those of *the Way* were looking and longing for the coming kingdom, so are those who hold *the faith*. Thus, the two expressions have the same thing in view—the coming kingdom and all that is associated with the kingdom. But it is more than merely accepting that the Lord Jesus will return one day. Many Christians, when questioned, acknowledge that He will return. The real issue is whether we are holding fast to *the faith*, looking for and longing for the return of the Lord and living with a view to the coming kingdom. Are we striving to enter into the kingdom through faithfulness to the Lord in this day so that we will be glorified in His day?

Will He find *the faith* when He returns?

Paul was not alone in the use of *the faith*. In writing the book of Acts, Luke wrote of priests being obedient to *the faith* (Acts 6:7). Peter exhorted the sojourners and pilgrims to be steadfast in *the faith* (1 Peter 5:9). Jude exhorted the called ones to contend earnestly for *the faith* (Jude 3). But most importantly, the Lord Jesus used the term Himself.

“I say to you, that He will execute the justice to them quickly; but the Son of Man having come, shall He find the faith upon the earth?” (Luke 18:8 YLT) [In

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many translations, the article “the” is left out; but in the original Greek text, it reads “the faith.”]

The Lord Jesus looked ahead to a time 2,000 years later and asked this question in reference to *the* faith. The Son of Man is His Messianic title, so it refers to Him coming to take the scepter of the kingdom of this world (Revelation 11:15). In other words, when He comes to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of this world, will His people, the people of *the* Way, be holding to *the* faith? Will their way truly be different? Will they be holding fast to a particular belief? Will they be longing for His appearing? Will they be living with a view toward His coming kingdom? Will they have grown up to be placed as sons in His kingdom and be found worthy to reign with Him?

The manner in which the Greek is worded in this question demands a negative answer to the question. Jesus was saying that when He returns as the Son of Man, He will *not* find *the* faith being taught or held by most upon earth. I take this to refer primarily to the nations. Consider what is transpiring across the globe in our day as many nations face a financial crisis that has not been seen since the 1930's. There are no national leaders calling for the nations to seek God for answers. There are no national leaders declaring that the kingdom of our Lord is coming, and it is time to repent. Simply, the national leaders are trying to save a system created by man that has hit a financial iceberg and, just like the Titanic, is sinking.

However, I also believe that Jesus' words refer to the church-at-large in our day as well, which, for the most part, is too busy doing things for God and not loving the thought of the appearing of God's Son. (See *The Upward Call*, issue #03-0936, March 4, 2009, *The Ecclesia Within The Church*.) Jesus warned in the parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens that this would happen. Consequently, the leaven that the woman placed in the three measures of meal will have done its work completely by the time He returns. The teaching and understanding of **the word of the kingdom** will be leavened (Matthew 13:33). Although many might not state so outwardly, there will be many who in their hearts will be saying: “Where is the promise of His coming? My Master delays, so I will live as I want.” Some will even mock those who earnestly desire to see the love of their life, the Lord Jesus, come soon (see 2 Peter 3:3-4).

We are living in the last of the last days before the return of our beloved Lord. He will not be looking for a general faith in reference to holding a general belief in Him or holding to sound Biblical doctrine pertaining to the fundamentals. The Lord is coming back when *the* faith is not being held.

This is not to imply in any manner that holding to the fundamentals is wrong. Quite the contrary; Christians must hold to the basic beliefs surrounding the gospel of grace. They are essential. But the Lord is after maturity in His people. Christians are not to remain babes in Christ but are to grow up and be readied for His kingdom. There are Biblical truths that a Christian must be taught that deal with the mature knowledge of Christ which leads the individual to live in such a manner that he will be counted worthy to enter the kingdom and reign with Christ as one of His conquerors. The Lord knew what was ahead for His people, and He knew that as His return approaches, there will be

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many who will not be ready and waiting for His return. He will not find *the* faith amongst His own people in the last days of our present wicked eon. Oh, in many respects, many might be holding on to correct Biblical doctrine, but are they truly holding to *the* faith in reference to His return and His kingdom?

Now, some people might protest that the holding of the fundamentals is all that is needed. After all, it seems that most Bible-centered churches are strong in these fundamentals. However, if *the* faith refers to these fundamental doctrines, then the Lord Jesus cannot come back any time soon because the church-at-large is holding to these fundamentals. But we know He is coming back soon because the six days of Man's Day (6,000 years) have been completed, and we are in **a transitional period** in which the spirit of God is calling forth and preparing the conquerors that will reign with Christ and rule over the nations.

Of course, if you have read some of my other material you will know that I do not believe Scripture teaches that all believers will reign with Christ in the next eon; some will remain in the state of death to be raised in the second or general resurrection. See Article #17, January 2009, *Snatched Away [The Rapture]*, and the book *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, Volume 2.

Regardless of how one views the matter, God is not slow about His promises, but as revealed in His word, He has set a time to restore ruined man and the earth that is in the bondage of corruption. When that time is up, God will move into the final day, the seventh day of rest, the coming Kingdom Age.

Until that glorious day, we are commanded to continue in *the* faith, be steadfast in *the* faith, and to contend for *the* faith.

Continue in *the* faith.

And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21-22 NASB)

While in Lystra, Paul created quite a stir amongst the people. The Jews who consistently pursued Paul came and persuaded the multitudes to stone him. Paul was thought to be dead after they had dragged him out of the city and stoned him. The disciples gathered around Paul and he rose up, and then he and Barnabas left for Derbe where they preached the gospel and made many disciples. What a testimony! After this, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and strengthened the souls of the disciples. Paul, along with those who worked with him, fought the good fight. They kept pressing on, not being derailed by the many challenges and persecutions that they faced. They literally faced death every day (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

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However, consider how Paul and the others encouraged the new disciples of Christ. They strengthened their souls by encouraging them to continue in *the* faith. *The* faith meant that there was something in view, and it was the kingdom. Paul knew firsthand that there were many tribulations awaiting those who continue in *the* faith, but only through these many tribulations do we enter the kingdom. Thus, Paul's view through *the* faith was the coming kingdom. He joined *the* faith with the kingdom. Notice how Paul was not encouraging the disciples to hold on to some basic set of doctrines. No; Paul's whole being was set on being found worthy of the kingdom and glory (our hope) and on running the race of life in such a way so as to enter the kingdom in the day of Christ.

Be steadfast in *the* faith.

Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:9 NKJV)

In both of Peter's epistles, the kingdom is in view (1 Peter 1:3-5, 13; 4:17; 5:1, 4, 10; 2 Peter 1:10-11, 16-17; 3:3-12). At the end of his first epistle, Peter exhorted the saints to be sober in respect to the devil that is like a roaring lion seeking to devour something. Peter exhorted the pilgrims of the Dispersion to resist the devil and be steadfast in *the* faith. Why? Because Peter saw that through suffering and the fiery trials we will enter into glory. **But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal [eonian] glory** (age-lasting glory or glory to be revealed in the age to come, the Kingdom Age) **by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.** (1 Peter 5:10-11 NASB [CV]).

Peter saw what lies ahead for Christians, and he was encouraging them (and us) to be steadfast or to be fixed on a purpose. What is the purpose? To enter the glory of Christ after a time of trial and suffering! When does this glory come? It comes when our Lord comes in the day of His kingdom and glory. Why are we exhorted to resist the devil? It (he) is the ruler of this world system that occupies the place of rulership among the celestials, the realm destined for the Lord's conquerors, the manifested sons of glory. The devil seeks to devour and disqualify Christians from ascending the throne with the Lord in the oncoming eon. For this reason, Peter sets the kingdom and glory before us and encourages us to be steadfast in *the* faith. In these days of trials, our souls need to be strengthened and encouraged to keep *the* faith and to run *the* race of *the* faith. See Article #10, June 2008, *Run In Such A Way To Win*.

Contend earnestly for *the* faith.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3 NASB)

Finally Jude, along with Paul, Peter, James, John, and the writer of Hebrews, saw the great danger that Christians face as the day of our Lord's return nears. The message

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related to the kingdom will be leavened and a general malaise will exist in regard to the coming of the Lord. Early in church history, the leaven was planted in the teachings of the church.

Jude saw this condition and it exercised his heart. As he began to write a letter to those who are called, loved, and kept, he changed his theme. He made every effort to write to them about their common salvation (the fundamentals) but felt the necessity to write them appealing that they contend for *the* faith. In other words, it was more than the common beliefs of every Christian. It was about contending (agonizing, striving) for something that exceeds our common salvation. What was Jude's view? It was the seventh day (vs. 14), the Lord's Day, the day of His glory (vs. 24).

Dear brethren, *the* faith is so tremendous because it speaks of all that is coming when our beloved Lord Jesus returns to meet His people in air. In that day, He will come to meet those who have contended earnestly for *the* faith. These are His conquerors.

In conclusion, consider these verses.

You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 NASB)

His own kingdom and glory speak of *the* faith.

I have gone through the glorious contest; I have run the race; I have guarded [kept] the faith. From this time onward there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who love the thought of His Appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8 WNT)

The one that keeps *the* faith loves the thought of the coming of the Lord.

Let us steadfastly continue in *the* faith! And as we do, let us love the thought of His appearing. Let us love the love of our life, our true love, the Lord Jesus!

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Scripture Abbreviations:

ALT	Analytical Literal Translation
CV	Concordant Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
WNT	Weymouth New Testament
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

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