

**The translation of *dia rhēmatos Christou* (“through the word of Christ”) in Romans 10.17**

To put this expression in its proper place, we shall give the translation of the whole verse according to the better known English versions.

KJV “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

RSV “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”

NEB “We conclude that faith is awakened by the message, and the message that awakes it comes through the word of Christ.”

JB “So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ.”

Phil “Faith, you see, can only come from hearing the message, and the message is the word of Christ.”

TEV “So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ.”

LB “Yet faith comes from listening to the Good News—the Good News about Christ.”

In this chapter, Romans 10, Paul is concerned with the subject of the salvation of his own people, the Israelites. He says that their zeal for God is not according to knowledge (verse 2). They have not submitted themselves to being made right with God through Christ (verse 3). Salvation must come through acknowledging that Christ is Lord and believing that God has raised him from the dead (verse 9). Anyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (verses 12 and 13). But they can only call on him if they believe in him, believe in him if they have heard of him, and hear about him only if he is proclaimed to them (verse 14). This proclamation is only possible if the proclaimer is sent (verse 15). Verse 17 seems to be the summary and conclusion to this argument.

In the particular expression we are considering, a variant reading is *theou* (“of God”) instead of *Christou* (“of Christ”). Of the eight translations we have listed, only KJV follows this. Concerning *rhēmatos*, the standard dictionaries give *rhēma* as having two main areas of meaning in the NT:

(a) *a word, a saying, what is said* (see Mt 12.36, 27.14; Lk 2.17, 2.50, 5.5; Acts 2.4, 6.13, 10.22; Rom 10.18)

(b) *a thing, matter, event, happening, fact* (see Mt 18.16; Lk 1.37; Acts 5.32, 13.42; 2 Cor 13.1)

In the light of this background information, let us now comment on the various translations we have listed. Those translations which render *dia rhēmatos Christou* as “through the word of Christ” (NEB), “from the word of Christ” (JB), or “the word of Christ” (Phil) suffer from the fault of ambiguity. Does this mean a particular word or words spoken *by* Christ, presumably during his earthly life but repeated by the preacher? Or does it refer to a particular word or words *about* Christ, proclaimed by the preacher and heard by the listener? As the whole passage is concerned with a preacher and a listener, the second meaning would seem to be more probable. RSV “by the preaching of Christ” suffers from the same ambiguity, for this could mean either what Christ himself actually preached (again during his earthly life), or

what is preached about Christ. Again, the second meaning would seem to be more likely. TEV "through preaching Christ" is easier to understand. The whole of the verse in TEV is clear, for it gives the meaning that when Christ is preached a message is conveyed which establishes faith in the hearer. The meaning in LB is also clear.

All the translations are based on the assumption that *rhēma* means a word, a saying, or what is said, as in (a) above. But if it is taken as coming into the area of meaning given in (b), it is possible that *dia rhēmatos Christou* can be taken to mean the fact or happening of Christ, that is, his whole life, death and resurrection. This might be called "the Christ-event". In this case it is possible to take this whole verse as meaning that faith is the response made to the preaching of the Christ-event. A good translation would try to bring out this meaning, in some such way as follows: "So faith comes through listening to the message which proclaims the fact of Christ."

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## HOW WAS THAT?

A translation committee was working on 1 Peter, and had reached chapter 3 verse 7, which speaks of the way husbands should act towards their wives. TEV has "treat them with respect", but when the draft was translated back into English it came out as "put magic spells on them". It seems that the translator of the draft knew the English word "treat" only as a medical term, and this led him to understand "respect" as meaning some sort of tabu. His translation was therefore quite a reasonable expression of what he thought Peter was saying.

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"I really don't know who uses this report and for what. For us it has always been a necessary evil which we prepare because somebody up there wants it, then we get a copy of it to put in the file and use when the time for making next year's report comes, and so on around the circle. If I knew more about the use made of these reports, I could perhaps comment more intelligently about the usefulness of the operation of making them. The actual information in them is so sketchy that we seem never to be referring to the report as such for any useful purpose ourselves."

—Translations Consultant writing about  
the preparation of the annual report.

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The text for one of the first sets of selections for New Readers in English was prepared by taking text from Today's English Version and making various adjustments to it. At one place the wider effects of an adjustment were not checked, with a rather funny result. Near the end of the story "Jesus Calls the First Disciples" (Luke 5.1-11) the text reads:

"He (Simon Peter) and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. These included Simon's partners, James and John . . ."