

201 SPIRITS IN PRISON

BY B. G. SCHOLS

Peter spoke of Christ "being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). The terms "flesh" and "spirit" are either instrumental or locative. Instrumental would mean the flesh was the means by which He was put to death, and the spirit was the means by which He was made alive. Locative would mean Christ was put to death "in the flesh," that is, bodily, but His spirit continued to live. He was put to death in the flesh, but His spirit continued to be infused with life. "In the spirit" refers to the inner principle in contrast to the flesh. It is that which Christ had in common with us. Thus as Christ died, we shall die. As that was not the end of Him as He was alive in the spirit, so with us. A slightly different idea refers to His resurrection in a "spiritual body." This influences our interpretation of verse 19.

"In the flesh" means as a man in His human nature -- as a man distinguished from His higher nature over which death has no power. Death to Him was what death is in any other case, the separation of the spirit and body with all the pains of that separation. As far as His human nature was concerned, He died. The spirit, set free from the body, receives new life. It comes alive to spiritual realities in a way impossible while united to the flesh. Thus mortal suffering is the pathway to spiritual enlargement. So long as Christ or any of us are alive in the flesh, we cannot commune with the spirit, but once the spirit is freed, it can deal with the spiritual realm. Being delivered from the burden of the flesh, He was alive to new energies, new and blessed activities. He was in a new sphere of activity.

"In which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing" (1 Pet. 3:19, 20). This is an exceedingly difficult passage with differing interpretations and variations. "The spirits" would correspond to His "in spirit." Thus many believe Jesus went "in spirit," while His body

was in the tomb, to preach to others who had died. A variation says He preached only to angels who had been cast down. In this view, the preaching was not done while Jesus was in the flesh. What the substance of His preaching was, we are not told by Peter. There are three ideas. Some say He preached salvation; others His triumphant Messiahship; still others, damnation to the disobedient. The word means to proclaim as a herald and is not the word for evangelism or good news. Thus it would not be salvation. If this interpretation be correct, I would say He preached His Messiahship. There is no suggestion anywhere of an opportunity for salvation after death, and much that opposes the idea (2 Cor. 5:10; Luke 16:26). An objection to this view is that it does not agree with what Jesus said about where He was going when He died (Luke 23:43, 46). Why just these dead is another objection. No one should be dogmatic about the meaning of the verse.

The second interpretation is that Jesus preached after His resurrection through the apostles to spirits in the prison of sin like unto those lost in the days of Noah. A variation is that after His resurrection, in His spiritual body, He proclaimed His triumphant Messiahship.

The third explanation is that Noah preached to men by the spirit of Jesus, and now those to whom Noah preached are dead. This agrees with 1 Peter 1:11. This would fit the word translated "preached." If it is objected that it says, "Christ went," Paul answers that in Ephesians 2:17.

"In prison" is used to denote the state or condition of the spirits that were disobedient, and are waiting condemnation at the last day (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). It is better to suffer with Christ now than to suffer with them in prison. They are in a dreary place apart from the souls of the blessed. Prison must be the destiny of unbelief and disobedience. The word suggests fearful thoughts and dark unsatisfied questions. These were those who had

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412 East King Street Shippensburg, PA 17257

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heard, but refused to accept the message (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah must have called for their repentance. If they had a preacher among them but heeded him not, they were unbelieving and disobedient. Let us listen while we are in the flesh on earth.

The people continued to be disobedient, but God's patience waited during the building of the ark. God never acts hastily in bringing destruction, but always gives man ample time and opportunity to repent (2 Peter 3:9). Their guilt was heightened by the fact they had time to change and did not. Noah continuously called on them to repent, but they did not. They did not refuse just a single, isolated call to repent, but numerous calls. They sinned in spite of the long ministry of Noah and died impenitent. While this verse and others assures us of God's longsuffering toward sinners, it also assures us that some day God's patience will end in punishment upon the unbelieving and disobedient.

Tell Him So

If you hear a kind word spoken
Of some worthy soul you know,
It may fill his heart with sunshine
If you only tell him so.

If a deed, however humble,
Helps you on your way to go,
Seek the one whose hand has helped you,
Seek him out and tell him so.

If your heart is touched and tender
Toward a sinner, lost and low,
It might help him to do better
If you only tell him so.

Oh, my sisters; oh, my brothers,
As o'er life's rough path you go,
If God's love has saved and kept you,
Do not fail to tell men so.

SAVED "BY GRACE" (What God Has Done)	"THROUGH FAITH" (What Man Must Do)	"NOT OF WORKS" (The Black List)
<p>God saves us (Rom. 8:33)</p> <p>Jesus saves (Matt. 1:21)</p> <p>Justified by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11)</p> <p>Life of Christ (Rom. 5:10)</p> <p>Name of Christ (Acts 4:12)</p> <p>Death of Christ (Rom. 5:10)</p> <p>Blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7)</p> <p>Grace of God (Eph. 2:5, 8)</p> <p>Love of God (John 3:16)</p> <p>Mercy of God (Titus 3:5)</p> <p>The truth (Prov. 16:6)</p> <p>The gospel (Rom. 1:16)</p> <p>The Word of God (Jas. 1:21)</p> <p>Words of the gospel (Acts 11:14; 15:7)</p> <p>The doctrine of Christ (1 Tim. 4:16)</p>	<p>"Obedience of Faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26)</p> <p>"Yourselves" (Acts 2:40)</p> <p>The church (1 Tim. 4:16)</p> <p>"Through faith" (Eph. 2:8)</p> <p>Repentance (Acts 2:38)</p> <p>Confession (Rom. 10:10)</p> <p>Baptism (1 Pet. 3:21)</p> <p>"The washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26)</p> <p>"The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5)</p> <p>By works (Jas. 2:24)</p> <p>"Believe" (John 6:29)</p> <p>Obedience (Heb. 5:9)</p> <p>Works taught by grace. (Titus 2:11, 12)</p> <p>(Phil. 2:13; Acts 10:35)</p>	<p>Salvation is not of these:</p> <p>"Not of works": (Eph. 2:9)</p> <p>Works of the law of Moses (Gal. 2:16; 5:4; John 1:17)</p> <p>Boastful works (Lk. 17:10; Acts 17:25; Job 22:2, 3)</p> <p>Works of merit (Titus 3:5)</p> <p>Works of iniquity (Matt. 7:22, 23)</p> <p>Works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)</p> <p>Not of doctrines of men (Matt. 15:8, 9; 2 John 9)</p> <p>Not by saying, "Lord, Lord"—Prayer (Matt. 7:21)</p> <p>"Not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7)</p> <p>Not by imaginations and opinions (2 Cor. 10:4, 5)</p> <p>"Not of yourselves" (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Jer. 10:23)</p> <p>Not of your ancestry (Matt. 3:8, 9)</p> <p>Nor will of man (John 1:13)</p> <p>Not by bread alone (Matt. 4:4)</p> <p>"Not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24)</p> <p>Not by morality alone (Cornelius for example—Acts 10:2, 22; 11:14)</p>