

No.  
154

**"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH  
ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."  
COL.3.1**

**THE SPIRITS IN PRISON.**

***An Address (revised)***

***At Aldgate,***

***13<sup>th</sup> April, 1920***

***by***

***PERCY W. HEWARD***

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THE SPIRITS IN PRISON.

An Address by Mr. P.W.Heward,  
At Aldgate, 13th April, 1920.

OUTLINE:

1. The Scope of 1 Peter.
  2. The Allusion to Genesis 6.
  3. The Nature of Man.
  4. After Death.
  5. The Need for Prayerful Accuracy in the Study of Scripture.
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We rejoice, beloved friends, in the fact that Scripture is perfectly arranged. Every epistle has its structure, standpoint, setting. The first Epistle of Peter was written to a scattered people. They were, as Chapter 1:6 puts it, in heaviness through many temptations. Such problems were very real to believers from among the circumcision, and it was to THESE that Peter was particularly a witness. Gal. 2:8 indicates this. Not that there was a separate Gospel For the circumcision and uncircumcision, but there were spheres of peculiar ministry, and Peter was particularly associated, not with Rome or the epistle to the Romans, or with Gentiles at all. but particularly with Israel, and epistles to those saved from this nation. Strangely men have perverted this teaching altogether. Let us remember that to believers from among the circumcision, the absence of an earthly temple, and the presence of earthly suffering, with the thought that they should not EXPECT an earthly center, was a strange problem. A strange problem in which they were drawn away from all the things of time and sense and visibility, to their hidden, but glorious Lord at the right ~~hand~~ hand of the Father. The recipients of this letter were commanded to live as strangers and pilgrims. They were to have their conversation honest AMONG the Gentiles, inasmuch as they were not Gentiles. I do not mean because of Jewish birth, but because of heavenly birth. Far from taking any position of governing, they were to recognize that the king and governors were over them. Their time on earth was to become a time of sojourning in fear. A child's fear of

grieving a Father Who has given such costly proof of love to him (verses 18-21). They were a people, it is true, but the people of God, without an earthly status or exaltation. They were to be willing for reproach on account of the Name of Christ. They were to realize according to 4:12 that a fiery trial was normally for saints, and that as 5:9 puts it, they were members of a suffering brotherhood: - the only brotherhood which Scripture recognizes for the present dispensation. In this suffering brotherhood they were to be willing that the God of all grace should conduct them along the path to eternal glory AFTER they had suffered awhile. There was a needs-be for their heaviness through manifold temptations.

Such is the standpoint of the epistle. It sets before us a despised and rejected minority living with the happy hope of seeing their Lord, conscious that the end of all things was at hand and meanwhile looking back with sorrow at their past life in which they wrought the will of the Gentiles, and looking upward to the Lord for grace to sanctify Him in their hearts, to be willing for witness and ready with a reason, whensoever they might be brought up before judges or others who falsely accused their good conversation in Christ. Popularity was not to be in front of them, earthly greatness was not to be sought. In the second chapter we find instruction for SERVANTS under froward masters. And this seems the special stress of the epistle. The believers are viewed as rejected and despised, but when they suffer for righteousness they are regarded as happy indeed. If we enter into this aspect we shall be clear as to the reference which the Holy Spirit gives to Noah. Manifestly God's servant Peter had various Scriptures in his mind. Isaiah 53 was very evidently the basis of his thoughts in the second chapter. Psalm 118, with the rejected Stone, was felt as a reality. The Lord Jesus was known as the Passover Lamb, His people being in (yet not of) worldly Egypt. Not only so. The words of the Lord Jesus appear to have been very much in Peter's mind. You re-

collect how that in the second chapter he alludes to the Lord's statement in Matthew 16 "On this Rock I will build My church", "Thou art a stone", and cutting at the root of all Romanistic theories, definitely declares with one of the ANTICIPATING answers of the Holy Spirit, that ALL believers are living stones in the one building. In like manner, Peter appears to have had in mind the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the days of Noah, - "As it was in the days of Noah", days of rejection, days of suffering. Such days are to be expected by God's people. To Noah it must have been a keen suffering that his witness was so lightly treated, (even as we are told Lot vexed his righteous soul: though there is a distinction, for Lot chose a wrong sphere). The second epistle, the second chapter, brings out the same thought. Hence it is evident that the apostle encouraged the believers with this precious thought, - Do not be surprised if you are rejected; it is better to suffer for well doing than for evil doing, because Christ hath suffered. It is well to be disapproved in this world. The days are days of Noah. Do you expect that many will believe? Do you expect that many will be impressed? or do you realize that the majority will turn against the Lord?

We pass next to notice the allusions which bring Genesis 6 into our mind. Genesis 6 is well known, but its solemnity is not sufficiently realized. In verse 3 we read, "The Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not always strive (or judge) among men, for that he also is flesh". Observe these words "My Spirit shall not judge among man". You remember how in Hebrews 11 we are told that, By faith Noah, being warned of God, concerning things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, through which he CONDEMNED the world. Thus we have the contrast - salvation and condemnation. There was the judging among men until last of all there came the condemnation of men. "Through which he condemned the world". But why do I link the statement "My spirit" with "Noah"?

1 Peter 1:11 tells us that the Spirit of CHRIST was in the prophets. We have not the usual word "The Spirit of God", - a special expression is used for a special purpose, and in 2 Peter 2:5 we read that Noah was a PREACHER of righteousness (same word in 1 Peter 3:19), connecting the five passages. "My Spirit shall not JUDGE among men...yet his DAYS shall be 120 years". "Noah built an ark to JUDGE COMPLETELY THE world. But first "the longsuffering of God waited in the DAYS of Noah". Let us observe also a reminder of Matt. 24. In the days of Noah the longsuffering waited, and we read that Christ went and preached in the Spirit. Christ preached in the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ in the prophets PREACHED. Noah was a PREACHER of Righteousness. Surely we must connect all these passages. They will give us a key to interpretation later. Further, in Gen. 6 God records how He would destroy all flesh (I refer to verse 7) wherein was the SPIRIT of life. If the end of all FLESH came before Him, and He destroyed men from the earth, it is plain that the flesh wherein the SPIRIT of life was, was so laid low that the SPIRITS of such should become SPIRITS in prison. God does not say "I will annihilate". He will destroy men with regard to the earth. Notice the Divine statement of Gen. 6:7, "I will destroy men whom I have created FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH". Man remains existing in the center of the earth, but "I WILL DESTROY FROM THE FACE OF THE EARTH". Note verse 17, "To destroy all flesh wherein is the spirit of life FROM UNDER HEAVEN". Here is a clear statement. Not only so, verse 13 may read "Behold, I will destroy them WITH THE EARTH", - not annihilation. Man, therefore, is destroyed. The end of all flesh comes before God, but the spirit of life, ~~was~~ rendered "breath of life" in verse 17, that must return to God's custody, and of that we shall see more in the epistle.

We pass now to ponder the nature of man. "I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless" is a statement concerning

BELIEVERS. If anyone brings it forward to argue concerning the natural man, there is a misuse of Scripture. It is equally plain that John 3 declares "That which hath been born of the Spirit is spirit", and our translators have erroneously. I think, added a word in Jude 19 "These are they who separate themselves, soulish, NOT HAVING SPIRIT". The soulish man is distinct from the living spirit in 1 Cor. 15. But it may be said, Do you mean to deny that men have a spirit? Is there not a spirit in man? Stay one moment. We all know the passage, "Answer a fool according to his folly" and "Answer not a fool according to his folly", showing that every word must be taken in its context. We can find expressions which are used in one Scripture with a meaning EXPLAINED BY THE SURROUNDING VERSES, and a different meaning in another Scripture. In the sense in which John 3 speaks we CANNOT say the ungodly have spirit. That which hath been born of the Spirit is spirit, and when God speaks of destroying a soul in hell, he does not say "Spirit, soul and body", but "Soul and body". A natural man is thus described - "Soul and body". I know there was an exception with our beloved Lord. We read of Him that He through an ETERNAL Spirit offered Himself without spot to God. There we have His Deity. He made naked His SOUL for death. He also bare our sins in His own BODY. But even this rather argues in favor of the interpretation before given; because you will observe not only was He the Sinless One, but that He did not need to be born of the Spirit, as we do. Where His Spirit is described we read, "An Eternal Spirit", alluding particularly to His Deity. Hence humanity may be described as soul and body; and we have the expression "Flesh and blood", remembering that the soul and the blood are definitely linked in the earlier Scriptures. But we do NOT commonly speak of flesh and soul, though flesh and blood is a Scriptural expression. If, however, the word "flesh" ~~is used in another meaning~~ is used, the word "spirit" is used therewith in another meaning. Nor is this strange, since the word "spirit" can be used for the wind, and also for the Spirit of

God, and for the new life as well. Hence it is not remarkable that we have a further signification. Scripture is not written for triflers, but for those who are willing to spend time to follow each word IN ITS CONTEXT. Hence we read of Pharaoh's SPIRIT being troubled, and man is described in Genesis as flesh wherein is the spirit of life. In John we do not read "flesh wherein is the spirit of life. In John we do not read "flesh and soul" or "spirit and body", but "flesh and spirit" OR "soul and body"; but NOT "spirit, soul AND BODY", EXCEPT we are speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, with an allusion to His Deity, or of those who are a new creation born from above, and related to Him in the covenant of grace. The term "soul" is used to have reference to the individual man including the unseen responsible personality. "The soul that sinneth it shall die". I am quite aware there is a little difficulty in the earlier chapters of Genesis. There we read, "And the Lord God formed man (chap. 2:7) of the dust of the ground, and breathed in his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul". Yet here we do not have the ordinary word "breath", but a special word, which seems, if I mistake not, ONLY used for man as distinct from the animal creation. The word "spirit" is not so localized. We have the spirit of the beast, but the word "breath" HERE used is a stronger word which is employed to describe man's peculiar position of accountability and relationship to God. I do not mean the NEW relationship which we have in Christ Jesus, but relationship as an accountable creature who will be punished severely if there is a breaking of the Divine law. Hence we have no evidence that man was tripartite at the first. 1 Cor. 15 seems against the idea, and the human thought of the word "tripartite" is usually associated with a suggestion that man is a reflex of God, and that he contains in Himself a reminder of the trinity of God. I need hardly say that such teaching is often associated with the glorification of man, and with the denial of his fallen condition,

and with very faulty views of the wondrous Triune Unity of our glorious God, which can in no way be made parallel with body, soul and spirit, but is far deeper and ~~is~~ far more wondrous and beyond all human parallels. I take it, therefore, that we must set aside the tripartite nature of man as an unproved theory, and accepting that man is body and soul, or flesh and spirit, we shall realize that if flesh is laid low the spirit remains to be dealt with. If the body is dealt with in the grave, the soul is dealt with in Sheol, until in resurrection soul and body are dealt with in Gehenna, - SO exact is the Scripture language.

"After death" is a solemn subject. It is important that we should notice Hebrews 9:28, - "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment". Luke 16 shows a consciousness after death, and 2 Peter 2:9 seems literally to imply that "The Lord knoweth how to...reserve the ungodly unto the day of judgment BEING punished". Undoubtedly for the ungodly ~~unconsciousness~~ there is a remorse after death, but beyond this there is a BEING punished. Do not misunderstand me. Degrees of reward are for saints in resurrection, and many arrangements for degrees of punishment are, as the Lord Jesus said, appointed for the ungodly at the day of judgment. But believers, though not yet receiving degrees of reward, have a conscious restfulness in paradise, and ungodly ones, though not yet receiving the appointed degrees of judgment, have an unrestful agony in Sheol. Thus Scripture seems to be definite. Nor is there any Scripture which would involve the thought of an unconsciousness after death, or that man ceases to exist. I was noticing recently how even one of the strongest expressions of Scripture does not imply annihilation, "Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be, AND LET THEM KNOW that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth" (Psalm 59:13) Here we see, and the context illustrates the fact, how there is no thought of annihilation even in the strong language there employed.

We pass now, beloved friends, having our material collected, to the interpretation of 1 Peter 3. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Righteous-One for the unrighteous ones, that He might bring us to God, being put to death as to flesh, and being made alive with reference to Spirit". In connection with His wonderful eternal Spirit He was made alive, He was declared righteous in Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16). "In which Spirit (not BY WHICH, but IN which Spirit) also (here is a distinct statement), to the imprisoned spirits having gone, He preached to disobedient ones once - WHEN the longsuffering of God kept on expecting in the days of Noah when the ark was a preparing". Observe therefore He preached to those who were in a state of disobedience WHEN the longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, WHEN the ark was a preparing. The spirits in prison are described as disobedient ones, and the longsuffering of God is said to have waited during that period, the period of His preaching. The argument seems to be very definite. He was put to death in flesh, but made alive as to Spirit, - not that His eternal Spirit was made alive, but in relation to that He was made alive, i.e. was raised from the dead. He had an eternal Spirit, and in connection with this, He, the Glorious One, was made alive, in which Spirit also He preached to disobedient ones formerly. Here then we have brought before us that it is a good thing for believers to suffer because Christ hath suffered. It is a good thing for us to be willing for rejection because Christ was rejected, even when He went and preached in Noah. "In which also to the spirits in prison He preached". At first this seems a problem, but it is in accord with Scriptural language thus to speak. And it is in accord with ~~Scriptural~~ out language also. We say "Queen Victoria was born in 1819". Does any one reply "That is not true, Princess Victoria was then born". If we are ready to argue thus, we misuse language. We say of a married person

that Mrs. So and So was born in such and such a year. There is no difficulty. Ordinary language adopts this mode of speaking. Does Scripture write in the same language? Undoubtedly. Abraham is described in the Later Scriptures as doing different things which he did when he was Abram, yet we find the lengthened term "Abraham" employed. Why? Because he was called by the name he had afterwards. These are rather remarkable illustrations of this principle in a number of different, though related, ways. We see the converse of it in John 9. They say unto the BLIND MAN again, What sayest thou of Him that He hath opened thine eyes? Here is exactly the converse. They say to the blind man, He hath opened thine eyes. But who is there who would misunderstand or misrepresent such a passage? Surely none. The Lord in Luke 24 is said to have come to the eleven. The eleven WERE undoubtedly gathered together. Thomas was NOT then with them. We know this from John's Gospel. Judas could not be there. It is evident to me that Matthias was the eleventh. Observe Scripture does not say the eleven APOSTLES because the Holy Spirit does not count Matthias in the same way as the other apostles. Hence we have the strikingly abrupt term "The eleven". But Matthias was not then COUNTED among them. Again, the Lord Jesus died that THE CHILDREN OF GOD who were scattered abroad might be gathered together in one. They were children of God in the purpose of Him Who calleth the things that are not as though they are. Another example of this strange mode of speaking, as at first it seems, in a different sphere, is evident in 1 Thess. 4, "WE which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord". That passage is strictly true. The most remarkable example of all is 1 Peter 4, "The Gospel was preached to those who are dead". I say the most remarkable because this is in the context of 1 Peter 3. Many people have wrongly linked together 1 Peter 3 and 1 Peter 4. It is quite right to link them together as appointed CONTRASTS. The word "preached" is quite different there, and means the Gospel as a message of good tidings was preached,

and whereas those in 1 Peter 3 are judged by God, those in 1 Peter 4 are judged ACCORDING TO MEN in the flesh, and whereas those are spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3, we have those who live according to God in the spirit in 1 Peter 4. Observe the entire contrast. The Gospel was preached to those who were dead.. When they were dead? Surely not. It was preached to them as living men on the earth, it was preached to them THAT they might be judged according to men in the flesh, i.e. judged by man's law-courts, "And put to death". Then they must have been alive on earth when they were judged, they must have been alive when the Gospel was preached to them, but they are called "the dead" because they had died ~~in~~ since. They are characterized by the name which describes their condition when the epistle was written. They had fallen asleep, they had suffered for their Lord, they had been rejected and become martyrs. "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged", - it brought them to man's law-court, but they lived according to God in the Spirit. Here then we have the definite contrast with the third chapter. In the third chapter there is the proclamation to those who are disobedient. They rejected the proclamation, and they became spirits in prison. In chapter 4 there is not the bare proclamation, but the GOSPEL preached to those who accepted it, and, therefore, when they fell asleep they became the reverse of spirits in prison, even those who lived according to God in the Spirit. Thus we have the longsuffering of God in Chapter 3, and man's despising of it, as in Rom. 2, but we have the mighty grace of God laying hold of poor, guilty sinners in chapter 4, whereby there are a great number whom no man can number who are brought near to God by the blood of His dear Son.

To sum up, therefore, Christ in His eternal Spirit preached in Noah a preacher of righteousness. He preached WHEN the longsuffering of God waited in those days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing. His message was despised, and those who despised that are not spirits in pri-

son. The TIME MARK is given by the Holy Spirit. The passage tells us WHEN Christ preached. There is only one further difficulty - "He WENT and preached". This SEEKS to us contrasted with "He CAME and preached peace" of Eph. 2. "WENT" looks like a reference to another world. We see a contrast with the 22nd verse. "He has gone into heaven". The same term is employed. This seems at first to suggest that He went down to the under world. But does it? As USUAL the Holy Spirit has provided another passage to deal with every difficulty. We may not always FIND it, but it is always there, and 2 Peter 2 referring to Noah, a herald of righteousness, tells us in the same context that God at that time spared not the OLD world. The OLD world is thus distinguished with the world that now is, and appropriately therefore, as God destroyed men WITH THE EARTH (Gen. 6:13), God describes the destroyed ~~earth~~ (Yet not ANNIHILATED. The present earth is the first, Rev. 21:1) before Noah by the word "Go" and not by the word "come". Thus the very difficulty supports the interpretation, and gives us the key to the striking use of the word "destroy" in the sixth chapter of Genesis. Oh that our hearts may be exercised to praise God for the consistency of His truth, and to make known the glorious Gospel whether men hear or forbear, that He may in all things be glorified.

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