

1 Peter 3:18-20 (William John Hocking, Editor) 211611

The Believer's Monthly Magazine: Volume 3, Correspondence. (3:18-20)

W.M.— How should we understand 1 Peter 3:18-20? Who were the spirits in prison? Did Christ Himself preach to them? And when? The text itself affords its own interpretation, if the connection of the phrases is carefully attended to. The passage runs: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins.... being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison." The following verse explains who these spirits are, viz., the spirits of those who perished in the days of Noah through the overflowing of the world that then was by water. They are reserved in prison unto the day of judgement, when they will receive their punishment (2 Peter 2:9). The antediluvians did not perish without warning, for Christ Himself preached to them by the Spirit (Gen. 6:3). Noah of course was the preacher (Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5), but he preached by the Spirit of Christ Who was in him (1 Peter 1:10; 2 Peter 1:21). verse 20 helps to make it clear when the preaching was. For it states that they were "disobedient.... while the ark was a preparing." In other words, they rejected the word of righteousness spoken to them by Noah while they were yet alive. Compare this use of disobedient or disbelieving (Acts 19:9; 26:19; Rom. 2:8; 10:21; Heb. 11:31; 1 Peter 2:7, 8; 3:1; 4:17). Carefully examine the passages referred to; and see a similar expression of Christ preaching, but not in bodily presence (Eph. 2:17). He preached peace to the Gentiles who were far off. This of course was by the Holy Spirit through His servants after His resurrection.

J.B.P.— Are the "sons" in Job 1:6 and Galatians 4:5, 6 the same persons? No. The "sons of God" spoken of in Job are said to have shouted for joy when the world was created (Job 38:7). Hence none of the human race can be referred to, and without doubt they are the angels (compare Luke 20:36). In Galatians 4:5, 6 the sons of God are those who have faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). You must not allow yourself to be misled by the common fallacy of supposing that the same term always means the same thing wherever used. You must examine the context. Thus a person may speak of his "boys," and he may mean either (1) his own family, or (2) his Sunday School class, or (3) his office boys, as the case may be. Please explain how eternal life can be a reward (Rom. 2:7) as well as a gift (Rom. 6:23). Both texts are of course true. And Romans 2:7 does not state that life is given as a reward, but that it is rendered in connection with "patient continuance in well-doing." A boy who receives a shilling may have it as a donation or as wages. The former text does not say whether eternal life is rendered as wages or as a gift; but Romans 6:23 shows it is given freely, not earned. It may be added that eternal life is sometimes regarded in its future fullness, which of course cannot yet be known (Rom. 2:7; 1 Tim. 6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Jude 21). Those who will enter into it by-and-by are these who walk in holiness (Rom. 6:16-22) and do good (John 5:29). But eternal life being a present possession (see John's writings) as well as a future prospect, such good works are the fruit of the eternal life we already have. So that while well-doing results in eternal life, well-doing is also the result of eternal life. Show whether the Old Testament saints belong to the body of Christ. Such general questions as these can hardly receive sufficient reply in the limited space at our disposal. Notice that the body of Christ is formed by the baptism of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:13), Who descended at Pentecost according to the Lord's promise (Acts 1:5). This body is called a "new man" (Eph. 2:15), so that it did not exist before that date, and therefore not in Old Testament times. The distinction between Jew and Gentile was rigidly kept up of old; but there is no such distinction now (Gal. 3:28), showing there has been an entire change. The Lord showed there would be a marked distinction between John the Baptist and the least in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 7:28). John speaks of himself as the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29), and as such will probably be one of those (distinct from the bride) called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

G.K.— Are the general assembly and the church of the firstborn two companies (Heb. 12:22, 23)? Yes: the angels and the members of the body of Christ. The different companies are introduced by the word "and." Thus: Ye are come

	-1	unto mount Zion,
and	-2	unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,
and	-3	to an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly,
and	-4	[to the] church of the firstborn,
and	-5	to God, the judge of all,
and	-6	to the spirits of just men made perfect,
and	-7	to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant,
and	-8	to the blood of sprinkling.

J.— Is it reverent or honoring to address the Lord Jesus Christ as, Dear Lord, Dear Master, etc.? "Dear" as an epithet does not imply honor or reverence; it is sometimes intended to imply affection for the Lord on the part of the speaker. "Lord" is itself a title of reverence which the

Spirit teaches us to apply to Jesus (1 Cor. 12:3). In addressing the Lord it is of the greatest moment to take care that we mean what we say. It is possible to be very free in the use of endearing terms, such as, "dear Lord, beloved Lord," and the like, while the heart remains cold and indifferent.

W.T.— I should like a little help on what is meant by the "great house" (2 Tim. 2:20). The great house is Christendom, including all who take the place of being Christians. It therefore contains vessels both to honor and dishonor, in distinction from the house of God, the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15), which contains no foreign element. The obedient man is called to purge himself from the vessels to dishonor, i.e., those who have "erred from the faith." Also on John 1:9. "That was the true light-which coming into the world, lighteth every man." This rendering is reckoned by competent scholars to be more correct. Christ came into the world as the "light of men" and of every man, just as the sun in the heavens shines for all. He is not said to be the life of every man. Do not mistake light and life.

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