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Volume XVII
Issue 406

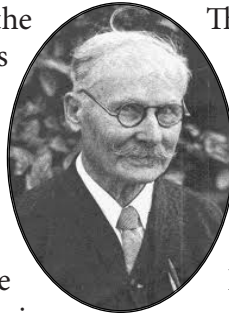
The Spirits in Prison

Part 1

by — A.E. Knoch

By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison (I Peter 3:19).

Much of the misunderstanding on the subject of the death state arises from the supposition that man is essentially spirit, and that the body is only a temporary imposition on the spirit. As a result, it is popularly inferred that consciousness [resides] in the spirit rather than in the soul. This view requires us to believe that the spirit which was imparted to Adam had a previous conscious life in God's presence, to which it returned at death. It demands that each one of Adam's descendants come consciously from the Divine presence and return consciously as they came.



The case of our Lord Himself, which has already been alluded to, ought to put this point beyond all question. He commended His spirit to His Father (Luke 23:46). How could He say, then, after His resurrection, that He had not yet ascended (John 20:17), if all the while His spirit had been consciously in the Father's presence, and had just *descended*?

A vast distinction, however, must be drawn between being a spirit and having one. In a figurative sense, if we wish to emphasize man's spiritual side, it would, in a sense, be just as right to call a man a "spirit" as it is to use the term "body," as is often done in English, or, when referring to sensation, to describe a man as a "soul," as is often done in the Scriptures.

This is the well-known figure "*Synechdoche*" or association, in which a part is put for the whole when that part pleads for prominence. It does not appear, however, that man is ever called a spirit even in this figurative fashion. A spirit has not flesh and bones, as our Lord had after His resurrection (Luke 24:39). A man may be obsessed or "possessed" by spirits, but nowhere is he spoken of as being a spirit himself. This fact will help us in the consideration of I Peter 3:18-20.

Seeing that Christ also, for our sakes, once died concerning sins, the just for the sake of the un-

(see *SPIRITS*, page 3647)

STEPHEN FELL ASLEEP

The very passages which are produced to prove this position are likewise evidence of its falsity. The one most frequently referred to is Acts 7:59. Yet Stephen did not go consciously into his Lord's presence, but, as the common text has it, he *fell asleep* (Acts 7:60, KJV). If we bow to the inspired account we dare not say that it was not Stephen who fell asleep, but merely his body. In line with all Scripture, sleep is associated with the whole man. It knows nothing of spirit-sleeping, or soul-sleeping or body-sleeping. All of these, at death, enter into a state which the Word of God compares to the repose of sleep.

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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**SPIRITS** (continued from front page)

just, that He may be leading us to God; being put to death, indeed, in flesh, yet vivified in spirit, in which, being gone to the spirits in the jail also, He heralds to those once stubborn, when the patience of God awaited in the days of Noah while the ark was being constructed, in which a few, that is eight souls were brought safely through water.

MESSENGERS

The spirits here spoken of are not the spirits of dead men, but they are messengers, spirit beings, commonly regarded as “angelic.” These are said to have been “stubborn” in the days of Noah. That was a time when the patience of God waited, for the irreverence of the ancient world had risen to heights where it was defiant to God, and really called for the deluge to end their insubjection to Him.

Noah became a herald of righteousness in the earth, heralding a judging by his building of the ark. Yet outside of the earth, there were beings charged with control, of whom we get brief glimpses in the Scriptures, yet who failed in their service.

By means of messengers, God carries out His many beneficial activities in the heavens and earth. Israel was inducted to the law on Sinai through messengers (Hebrews 2:2; Acts 7:53). Messengers or spirits (sometimes referred to as saints; compare Deuteronomy 33:2) also execute judging (Jude 15) and other duties.

In the period while Noah was constructing the ark, certain spirits, evidently charged with this judging, became stubborn, resisting the execution of God’s righteous judging of the earth; and instead they seem to have calumniated higher authorities. These “sinning messengers” were thrust into gloomy caverns and kept for chastening judging (II Peter 2:4-5).

Due to their stubbornness, it was necessary to guard Noah, for his salvation was involved because of the activity of the stubborn messengers. To these “spirits in jail (CV),” Christ heralds the triumph of His obedience; this is said of Christ with REFERENCE TO HIS RESURRECTION, in the words “being gone to the spirits in jail.”

Thus these spirits become aware of Him, and that messengers and authorities and powers are subjected to Him.

Before Christ could be *made* alive (vivified) in spirit He must have *died*. There is no possibility here of a *continuance* of life in any sense.

What evidence is there that only the body and soul were affected and that the spirit continued in consciousness? The spirit of mankind has no soul, or consciousness, apart from the body (Genesis 2:7). It was not until resurrection that He was loosed from the pangs of death (Acts 2:24). If this passage had read “*preserved* alive” or suggested that His spirit was not unconscious when He was put to death, then there would be some ground for denying that death involves the whole man.

The peculiar phrases “*put to death ... in flesh*” and “*vivified in spirit*” are in closest harmony with the context. The apostle of the Circumcision is encouraging his brethren by the example of Christ. Physical force was being used against them even as it had been used against their Lord. His enemies could reach His flesh and put Him to death in that way. But He was not raised from the dead into the same condition as before. He was “*made alive*” or vivified beyond the power of death. His body was such as defied death. They could not kill Him again because the spirit so energized His body that it was immune to the effects of physical force. He became a life-giving (vivifying) Spirit (I Corinthians 15:45).

This passage, then, deals with the vivification, ascension and exaltation of Christ, and the heralding of His accession to power to the “*spirits in the jail*,” who are under His jurisdiction, and not to some dim, uncertain experience *before* He was vivified.

Spirit beings may have consciousness, but *human* spirits under normal conditions have none apart from the body. At death they become as they had been before they were united to the body. Consciousness, in humankind, lies in the living soul.

ECCLESIASTES EXONERATED

In studying a given truth it is of vital importance that we first discover the portions of Scripture which ►

deal directly with the subject in hand, which are written with the distinct purpose of elucidating it.

On the subject of the resurrection, for instance, we shall most concern ourselves with the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. Perhaps the only book which makes a distinct point of the conditions of life and of death is the book of Ecclesiastes. The state of mankind during death is vital to its argument.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no deed, nor scheme, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the unseen, whither thou goest (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

The death state is here described in unequivocal terms, and is made an incentive for earnest living.

We view with much apprehension the efforts which are being made to discredit the book of Ecclesiastes. In the name of everyone who loves God's written Word, we protest. It has been compared with the book of Job. Job confessed that he had uttered words too wonderful for him, which he knew not, and Jehovah said to his three friends,

Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right (Job 42:7).

Yet the writer of Ecclesiastes insists that, in wisdom, he excelled all that were before him in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:16). The utterances of such a man, versed in the law of God as well as in the experience of wisdom, even if not inspired (which we will never admit) weigh a thousand times as much as all the detractions of his modern objectors.

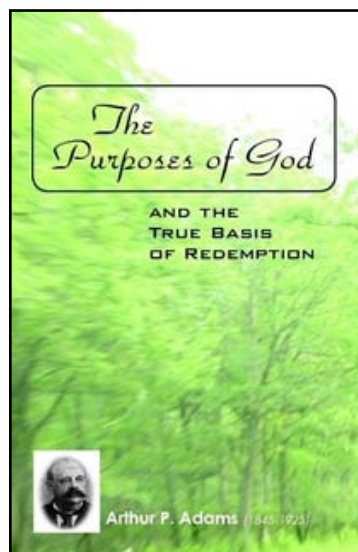
If the state of the dead is one of conscious bliss or agony, his arguments are fallacious and his teaching is radically wrong. And if he is wrong on this subject, what faith can we put in any part of his writings? It is the part of inspiration to warn us that much of the book of Job contains error;¹ but we are never told that Ecclesiastes is not right. Quite the contrary, we are emphatically told that,

That which was written was upright, even words of truth (Ecclesiastes 12:10).

We will concur in this conclusion if we compare the statements in Ecclesiastes with other portions of the Scriptures. He says,

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it (12:7).

1. Editor: As in the erroneous statements of Job's friends.



This is a compilation of some of Arthur P. Adams' smaller works that first appeared in his periodical *The Spirit of the Word* in 1885. Adams suffered greatly for the truths presented here. The riches found within these pages deserve to be preserved for future generations. Even though Adams wrote over one hundred years ago, in many ways his writings are just as fresh as if they had been written today.

This is THE TRUE BASIS OF REDEMPTION – God our Creator, responsible for His Own creation, and every attribute of His being pledged to its successful completion. God is able, and He will. The creature may rest secure on that basis – the all sufficient ground and full assurance of his deliverance and final triumph in the redemption of Jesus Christ. – A.P. Adams

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That the “*dust*” or soil returns to the soil is taught by several other writers (Genesis 3:19; Psalm 104:29; 146:4). The “*Preacher*,” or rather Assembler, is quite correct unless Moses and David are wrong too.

That the spirit returns to God Who gave it is evident, for our Lord Himself committed His spirit to God (Luke 23:46) and thus set His seal on Ecclesiastes’ statement. To argue from this that He was *consciously* in God’s presence while dead is unwarranted, for our Lord stated explicitly several days later that He had *not* ascended to His Father.

The spirit is not the seat of human consciousness. That is seated in the soul. Peter tells us that His (Christ’s) soul was in the unseen until the resurrection (Acts 2:31). So that the return of the spirit to God, which the Assembler affirms, does not contradict his own statements as to the state of the dead. The writer of Ecclesiastes knew that the spirit “*goes up on high*” (Ecclesiastes 3:21 [cf. YLT]), but he also knew that this does not demand consciousness.

Why is there such an effort to prevent the “*laity*” from learning that animals as well as men have souls (Genesis 1:21, 24)?

[W]hy did our translators give us “*they all have one breath*” (Ecclesiastes 3:19), and a few lines further on translate the same word “*spirit*” twice? In spite of the fact that these things are hidden from us, we know from other portions of the Scriptures that man and beast have the *same* spirit (Genesis 6:17; 7:22).

So, too, Ecclesiastes’ conclusive statement that “*there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in*

sheol [the unseen]” is amply substantiated by other Scriptures. It is not merely a question of ruling out Ecclesiastes, but we are to discard David, too, when he says,

His spirit goeth forth, he returneth to his soil; in that very day his thoughts perish (Psalm 146:4).

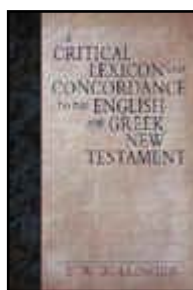
This is not a question of debate: it is a question of faith.

We want God’s Word and nothing else, but we want all of it. ■

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by — Phillip Garrison

For yet ye are fleshly, for where there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not fleshly, and in the manner of men do walk? For when one may say, "I, indeed, am of Paul;" and another, "I - of Apollos;" are ye not fleshly? Who, then, is Paul, and who Apollos, but ministrants through whom ye did believe, and to each as the Lord gave? (I Corinthians 3:3-5).

According to the *Global Christian Database*, which is maintained by the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are currently 9,000 Christian denominations and sub-denominations worldwide. That is an astounding number! It should also help to provide a numerical indicator of sorts as to how far Christianity has departed from the Scriptures. After all, denominational distinctions exist due to opposing doctrinal beliefs.



What was Paul's opinion of these sects and divisions within the Body of Christ? It is clear that he believed them to be a sign of carnality, being led by the flesh rather than the spirit. Keep in mind as well, that, at least initially, people did not seem to have doctrinal differences, but would only identify with either Paul or Apollos as to who helped establish them in Christ. Since Apollos was a direct student of Paul and worked closely with him, it is extremely unlikely that there was any difference in their message of the gospel.

In the Apostle Paul's early ministry, he saw the beginnings of these denominations. He heard among the believers in Corinth, that some were saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos." Sounds familiar doesn't it? "I am a Pentecostal." "I am a Baptist."

And I call upon you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the same thing ye may all say, and there may not be divisions among you, and ye may be perfected in the same mind, and in the same judgment (I Corinthians 1:10).

For, even as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also [is] the Christ, for also in one Spirit we all to one body were baptized, whether Jews or Greeks, whether servants or freemen, and all into one Spirit were made to drink, for also the body is not one member, but many (I Corinthians 12:12-14).

So we, the many, one body are in Christ, and members each one of one another (Romans 12:5).

I wonder that ye are so quickly removed from Him Who did call you in the grace of Christ to another good news; that is not another, except there be certain who are troubling you, and wishing to pervert the good news of the Christ; but even if we or a messenger out of heaven may proclaim good news to you different from what we did proclaim to you -- anathema let him be! as we have said before, and now say again, If any one to you may proclaim good news different from what ye did receive -- anathema let him be! (Galatians 1:6-9).

So, where did the train jump the track? It appears from Scripture that deviation and division truly began in Galatia. Paul had been teaching *his* gospel (Galatians 1:11-12; Romans 16:25) (of pure grace and justification by faith which was revealed to him by the risen and glorified Lord) to the nations, which was his commission. However, in Galatia, Jewish believers came to the uncircumcision believers (believers in Paul's gospel), attacking them for their liberty in

Christ. Some in Galatia began to fall under the curse of the law in observances, law-keeping, etc., which caused Paul to fear for them (Galatians 4:11) that they had believed feignedly.

*For the flesh doth desire contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit contrary to the flesh, and these are opposed one to another, that the things that ye may will – these ye may not do; and if by the Spirit ye are led, ye are not under law. And manifest also are the works of the flesh, which are: Adultery, whoredom, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strifes, emulations, wraths, rivalries, dissensions, **sects**, envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revellings, and such like, of which I tell you before, as I also said before, that those doing such things the reign of God shall not inherit (Galatians 5:17-21).*

So, how bad could it possibly be? Look at the above list and notice what is nestled (I set in bold) in the midst of idolatry, adultery, murders, etc. **Sects**. Is a denomination, which is created due to divisions, dissensions, factions, etc. not something to be avoided?

Paul preached the total and complete sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross. However, the nature of man is to attempt to have a hand in his salvation. A.E. Knoch said the following in an issue of *Unsearchable Riches* magazine:

Some preach law outright, some regeneration, some the spirit's work, some baptism, some repentance – but none of these are **good** news; indeed, **there is no good news apart from Christ**.

Let it be our precious privilege to preach Christ crucified to those who know Him not; and to those who know Him, Christ glorified. Let Christ be first and Christ be last and Christ fill all between. Let us not look back and vaunt ourselves with, "**I** prayed, **I** repented, **I** was baptized, and **I** –," but let us rather shout with the Apostle "**no longer I, but CHRIST!**" If I had a hand in my salvation it must needs contain a flaw, for I find failure fills everything I do. But if Christ **alone** deserves the crown, then all like Him is perfect and immutable.

Let it not be! and let God become true, and every man false, according as it hath been

written, "*That Thou mayest be declared righteous in Thy words, and mayest overcome in Thy being judged*" (Romans 3:4).

Unsearchable Riches, Vol. 10, p. 275.

The Body of Christ is *the only church (ecclesia)* sanctioned by God. All others are man-made. You can virtually trace every denomination back to the following of a man rather than the Word of God. We should avoid man-made creeds and doctrinal statements, instead to rely on the Scriptures. Now, however; the very reverse is the rule rather than the exception.

*Thou hast known this, that **they did turn from me – all those in Asia**, of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (II Timothy 1:15).*

For there shall be a season when the sound teaching they will not suffer, but according to their own desires to themselves they shall heap up teachers – itching in the hearing (II Timothy 4:3).

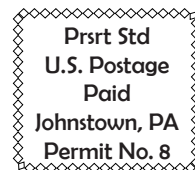
*Let not any one deceive you in any manner, because – if **the falling away** may not come first, and the man of sin be revealed – the son of the destruction (II Thessalonians 2:3).*

Where does all of this leave us? I believe it leaves a small body of believers who adhere to the true gospel. God chose these individuals before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). By the time Paul wrote his last letter, II Timothy, the apostasy (falling away) which he warned against was in full operation, and now that apostasy is systematized. "*They have a form of righteousness, yet deny the power thereof*" (II Timothy 3:5) by promoting false doctrines such as "free will" which puts the responsibility of salvation on the sinner rather than the Savior. They heap up around them teachers who tickle their ears. The prosperity/name it-claim it "gospel" comes to mind. They have "pastor search committees" who will hire a "leader" who will tell them what they want to hear and who will be asked to leave by the elders/deacons/board of the church if he begins to tell them what they *don't* want to hear.

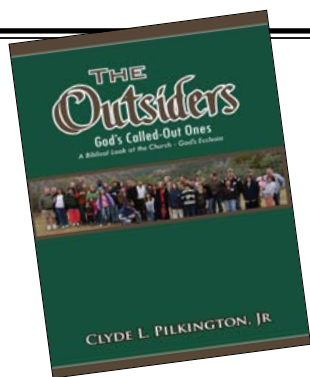
Finally, logic would tell us this: Recognizing that, by definition, denominations exist due to doctrinal differences of belief, obviously **all** of these denominations **cannot** be right. However, they **can all** be wrong. ■

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The Outsiders: God's Called-Out Ones – A Biblical Look at the Church – God's Ecclesia

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In 1995, after sixteen years of being in the “pastorate” the author walked away. He left the “religious system” by resigning from the very “church” and “ministry” he had formed. In many ways this work is a testament to these actions. This testimony was thirty years in the making – the results of a spiritual journey that the author found to be common to other saints scattered throughout the world and across history. This is an opportunity to explain why some who love the Lord no longer “go to church.” It does not seek to persuade others to do something different; but rather to be simply who and what they already are “in Him.” This is an uncovering of the truth of the church, and an encouragement for the members of His Body to enjoy the position and standing “in Christ” that they already possess, realizing that they are truly “complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10), that He alone is their Life (Colossians 3:4), and that His Life is full of freedom (Galatians 5:1).

The Outsiders was very encouraging. Thanks for your thoughts and study on the true Body of Christ and the lonely road we travel at times. – **MO**

I thank God for *The Outsiders*. I couldn't put it down. Read it all in one sitting. – **PA**

The Outsiders has something different about it. Upon finishing it an awareness has taken hold of my mind and spirit – a “knowing” that I have been afforded a special measure of His grace in just being allowed to be exposed to the truth contained within. – **KS**

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