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The Gospel of *Marah*.

A SERMON

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[Translated from the manuscript by A. C. WEDEKIND, D.D.]

[This sermon was preached *extempore*, in German, before the Evangelical Alliance, in Dr. Crosby's Church, New York. It made a profound impression. Now, after repeated solicitation, Dr. Christlieb has consented to write out, from his notes, the sermon in full. The manuscript has just been received in New York. The Doctor, in a letter to a friend in this city, says he spent his last Christmas holidays in its preparation, and he prays God's blessing to go with its publication. The copyright of *The Complete Preacher* covers this translation.—PUBLISHERS.]

Exodus xv.: 22-26, especially the last clause of 26th verse—"I am the Lord, thy healer."*

HERE, beneath the very shadows of Sinai, we have the gospel already in the Old Covenant, as truly comforting and supporting as anywhere in all the Bible. Well could the Lord in after ages say, "When Israel was a child I loved him; I led them with bands of love."—Hosea xi: 1-4. For here, at the very threshold of the wilderness, He meets them with the gracious assurance, *I am thy healer*.

How grandly was this gospel promise verified! At every step they took in their onward journey, the divine helps multiplied. The triumphant song over their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea had scarcely died away, and their first sad experience of life in the wilderness had hardly been realized, when the Lord heals the bitter waters of Marah. Thence He leads them to the palm grove and refreshing fountains of Elim; thence on to Sin, "where the people asked, and God brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven." With unseen hands He had stretched "the bands of love" throughout the wilderness, along which He guides them in

"The fiery, cloudy pillar;"

seeking to heal them of their youthful arrogance and stubborn-

*The English version reads: "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Luther's version, which DR. CHRISTLIEB follows, reads, "*Ich bin der Herr dein Arzt*"—I am the Lord, thy physician. To retain the beautiful unity of this most excellent sermon, the translator has adopted the substantive instead of the verbal form of St. James' version, which is also in consonance with the Hebrew text. The terms "healer," "helper," and "physician" are used as synonyms.—*Transl.*

The Church—The Office of Elder.

A SERMON.

By Rev. John Hall, D.D., IN THE FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
NEW YORK, MARCH 4TH, 1877.

'And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church.'—Acts of the Apostles xx: 17.

Also; *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."*—Acts of the Apostles xx: 28.

If there are any of you, dear friends, who are solicitous to make yourselves thoroughly acquainted with your Bibles, and make that book a frequent and abiding visitor in your thoughts, you can adopt no better plan than to take one particular section of it and study it thoroughly. Take, for instance, this epistle to the Ephesians, and you have a basis for your thoughts, and then address yourselves to the history of the church to which the letter was sent, and then make yourselves familiar with the circumstances under which it was written, and then give another reading of the epistle in the light of the history with which you have obtained acquaintance, and, finally, follow out any movements or traces that may appear in the succeeding history of the people to whom the letter was written, and you will find that it has an intelligent and connected aspect in your minds which it never can have while we content ourselves with a hurried and miscellaneous reading of the Word as a whole.

These remarks will apply especially to such portions of Scripture as this address to the Church of Christ at Ephesus. This Church had the closest connection, in all its history, with the Apostle Paul. He made, in the first instance, a brief and hurried visit to Ephesus; he would have been glad to remain, and the people would have been glad to have him stay, but there was occasion for him to go elsewhere. It became necessary for him to go, leaving the work, in part, in the hands of Aquila and Priscilla, to whose assistance, at a later time, there came Apollos, who rendered valuable aid in the instruction and help of the infant church in that place. You are all aware of the fact that the dominant worship in this great city of Ephesus was that of Diana. Here was the temple, known to Bible readers as the "Temple of Diana at Ephesus." The immense temple erected to this goddess must have been a most striking object before the minds, and continually under the eyes, of the residents of that place, and so it is not in the least degree wonderful that there should have been so many allusions in the epistle to the Temple at Ephesus.

[At this point a lady, who was suddenly taken ill, was borne from the church, when the speaker said: "Brethren, with what solemnity ought we to hear the Word of the Lord, seeing with what startling suddenness our powers of hearing and understanding may be taken away."]

There seems to have been the strongest possible attachment between Paul, the Apostle, and the believers at Ephesus; his epistles are full of assertions of "abiding faith." There was no trouble to be got rid of, there was no sin to be reproved; and the result is, that he presents before them, in the most vivid way, the distinguishing glories of the great church, and seeing that their eyes must have been constantly resting upon that great architectural power—the Temple of Diana in their city—he makes many allusions, the obvious tendency of which is to turn the thoughts of his hearers from this to that nobler structure, of which Jesus Christ is the foundation, of which God is the builder, and of which all true, loving servants of God are living stones, constituting an integral part of it. Following this line of thought, he has occasion to speak in strongest terms of the safety of the Lord's people, and to give assurance that they shall be kept by Him who is interested in keeping the spiritual structure of which He has laid the foundation.

The epistle is about equally divided, the first-half being expended upon doctrinal statements, and the second half upon the Lord's people who have received the doctrines of the Lord Jesus Christ. Occasionally, in the epistle, we will see some allusion to the peculiar manner in which the church was founded. When Paul stayed a period of more than two years in the city of Ephesus, he had opportunity, for the first three months, to give instruction in the Temple of the Jews, and afterward, in the school of one Tyrannus, he instructed those who came about him. There was decided opposition of various kinds, which opposition God overruled—as in the case, for example, of one Sceva—the Lord vindicating the name of Christ in a great and wonderful manner. We are told that all in Asia heard the Word. There seems to have been a diminution in the devotion rendered to the goddess Diana to such an extent, that Demetrius was moved, by a consideration of his own interests, to enlist, in opposition to Paul, the artisans and mechanics. I do not know in all literature of any more graphic description of a popular tumult, of the play of popular feeling, than the one in the account of the riot—for such it was—that was raised against Paul in the city of Ephesus. In the narrative there is a very curious corroboration of its own authenticity. You remember how the town clerk, in a speech to the people, said to the rioters: Why, everybody knows, it is proverbial that the city of Ephesus is a worshipper of Diana. The word used in this place is "*νεωχόρον*," or "temple-keeper," which is the exact signification of the word. The city was a "*νεωχόρον*" of Diana, and a curious corroboration of the

statement is, that upon Ephesian coins, this very word "*νεωχορον*" is found as being descriptive of Ephesus.

To the elders an opportunity was given, apparently, to labor, thoroughly to organize the church at Ephesus; and in connection with this counsel to the elders at Ephesus, let me, to-day, call your attention to the elders of the church, and that organization, as it is shadowed forth to us in these historical notices.

THE CHURCH.

First of all, we have to say something about the church itself as a whole, and then about the organization and the officers that the Lord appoints for His church.

The word church in the Bible is used in various senses. There is the wide sense, in which the word church is employed to describe the whole body of the Lord's people. In this epistle to the Ephesians you have the word used in that sense more than once—"The church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all;" all that believed in the Saviour, and all that will believe in Him in all time. And earthly things will not come to an end, until the last man's soul that goes to make up that mystical, spiritual body, shall have been brought to a faith in Jesus Christ and eternal life. That is the widest sense in which we use the word church in the Bible. Then there is a narrower sense, in which it is used to describe a part of this great body. How frequently have Europeans, when they have been sailing into New York harbor, said to one another, "There is America," when the meaning was not that the whole of this continent lay before them, but that there was a part of the great continent upon which they were touching.

The church may mean the whole body of believers, from beginning to end, or it may mean a limited selection of the saved. "And called the elders of the church," that is, of the church he himself had founded at Ephesus, in that limited sense, as we see by the word "*ἐκκλησία*." It is a little like the Greek work for "elect," the word *ἐκλεκτός*, "*ἐκκλησία*," being from *ἐκκαλέα*, "to call out," and *ἐκλεκτός*, from *ἐκλέγω*, "one chosen;" but you can see that there is a difference between the two. There is a kind of call to all the men that pass by, and all the men that live in the neighborhood, and they who accept the call, and come in, are termed *ἐκκλησία*. How eagerly one wishes he could call all into these great churches, especially as one sees, on the Lord's day, hundreds of men and women walk by and refuse to come in.

Ἐκκλησία, then, means those who are called. In the narrower sense, it means those who accept the local and peculiar call, and identify themselves with a particular congregation. This church we describe under two forms—the visible church, and the invisible; the adjectives themselves describing exactly

the idea that we associate with the words. By the visible church, we mean all those who profess and call themselves Christians; and by the invisible, all those who have truly and with the whole heart believed in the Lord Jesus. This distinction is well founded. There are men who accept the external call, and there are those who accept the inner call, which is given to the heart, mind, and conscience, and are believers. There are men who accept the external call, but who will not receive the word into their hearts. There are members of the church invisible, and of the church visible. It is part of the policy of the Church of Rome to deny that there is any such distinction as this; it is the part of Protestantism to maintain that there is. The Church of Rome claims, by an inexorable logic, that any one who partakes of her sacraments becomes a member of the invisible church. This is denied on the part of Protestants, who take such revelations as the Lord makes concerning His church. The Bible describes the church as a barn-floor, with chaff and wheat mixed together, in due time to be separated, and the chaff to be burned up. She is likened to a net, in the hands of the fisherman, with good fish and bad in it, the worthless to be cast away and the good to be kept. She is likened to the field of the husbandmen, with wheat and also with tares, in due time the tares to be gathered into bundles and burned. The apostle declares her to be like a great house, with "vessels to honor, and vessels to dishonor." We cannot reconcile these statements with any declaration, that asserts that the visible church is the same as the invisible. This distinction it is important that we should keep in mind. You need not be told that the fact that you are Presbyterians does not prove that you are members of the invisible church. That is a matter before God, and between Him and your conscience, and you only know when you are joined to the Saviour by a living faith, and dwelt in by the Holy Spirit.

There is the church militant, so called from the Latin word for soldier; and the church triumphant, those who have gone home, and are wearing their crowns before the Lord. We must not forget that we are here in the church militant. If there be difficulties and hardships to be endured, if there be sacrifices to be made, let us bear in mind that that springs out of our position as members of the church militant, and we have no more reason to be surprised by such things, than the soldier when called to the field, and exposed to danger. Blessed be God's name that He aids us in His militant church, and gives us full pardon, that we may fight the good fight.

As regards the church militant, it is nowhere alleged that she is infallible. Protestantism denies such infallibility of the church, and denies it upon the authority of the divine word. Romanism, by the same inexorable logic, is compelled to assert this

infallibility. God has given us this infallible guidance in the Bible, but the Church of Rome has put that Book out of the hands of her people, and now she is compelled to meet the demand of man, and make everything of her traditions and interceedings and forms, thereby glorifying herself as a great corporation. Infallibility is predicated of the Bible. Its holy oracles cannot lie, but the church, in any particular age, may err and make mistakes, and history is full of the record of just such mistakes.

It is asserted in the Bible, that the church is indestructible, not meaning the Church of Corinth, or the Church of Rome, or the Church of Laodicea, but meaning the church in the widest sense. The mystical body of Christ cannot perish from the earth. There is a statement made by the Lord, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock (*πετρα*) I have built my church." It does not say, upon this "*πετρος*." Rome makes the "*πετρος*" and the "*πετρα*" the same thing, and makes the "*πετρος*" the foundation of the church. Where must the church have been when Peter fell? Should we ask Peter himself, if he believed himself to be the foundation, you hear him contradict this as he speaks to the Jews. So when he writes his first epistle, in the first chapter and fourth verse: "To whom coming *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ." By Peter's own inspired statements, every sort of ground is taken away from the people to believe that he sets himself up to be the poor miserable foundation upon which the church is built. Christ is that foundation, in His true Messiahship.

It is no where asserted in the Bible that the church shall always have a visible and imposing appearance to men. The Church of Rome is driven by her inexorable logic to assert perpetual visibility. They will say, "Where was your church before the Reformation? The Church of Christ is always visible, therefore, your church cannot be true." Where is the assurance that the church shall always be visible? That she shall always exist, is one thing; that she shall always be *conspicuous*, is another. Christ is the sun and the church is the moon, and like the moon, she has her periods of obscurity and her periods of shining. She had her periods of obscurity when even the keen eye of the prophet could not see her; but Christ has His invisible church. The Lord had His real church, though not visible. Permanent visibility is no where claimed for her; but her imperishable nature is guaranteed by her living union with the Lord Jesus. He is the head of the body of the church; "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." The head directs the body, and Jesus Christ directs and

regulates the movements of His mystical body. He is the head of authority. He is the head of control. He is the head of supply. All fullness is made to dwell in Him for the benefit of those who are brought into the mystical union with Him as the members of His body. I do not need to tell you how this statement has been travestied upon. A body with two heads is held to be a monster. Any making a human being in the nominal succession of the Apostle Peter, the head of the Church of Christ, is not founded on the Bible. If it be said that Jesus is absent, and this is His viceregent, that does not accord with the promise that He shall never be absent from His church—"Lo! I am with you always." That which is weak might need a deputy—a viceregent—but he who is strong needs no deputy. It is the tendency of the Church of Rome to displace the true church of Jesus Christ, and exalt in its room, covered with claims to its dignity and honor, a corrupt, degraded, and degrading human corporation.

Jesus Christ is to be looked to for guidance and direction in the management of the affairs of the church. Churches, as parts of the great church, are more or less true, in the degree in which they teach true doctrine, in which they maintain pure worship, and in which holiness marks the character of the people. True doctrine, scripturalness of worship, holiness of life, the measure in which these three things are found in any community, in that measure does it approach to the body of Christ. Churches are more or less pure as they are marked by these features. If a traveler passed over this country, and should have occasion to describe what he had seen to his friend in Europe, he would say that, "There are certain of the older cities that are very American." He might say that "There are other places that are much less American—some German, some Bohemian, some Irish, some French," etc. They are all part and parcel of the great American community, but they all differ in their characteristics. And it is so with the great church of the Lord Jesus. The more there is declaration of Bible truth, the more there is scripturalness of worship; the more there is holiness in the members, the more true is the church, the more does she conform herself to the ideal—to the mystical body, of which Christ is the head. And the aim of every church ought to be to reach this purity in the teaching of the doctrine, in the maintenance of worship, and in the personal consecration of the individual members. So much it seems proper to say upon the general subject of the church of the Lord Jesus in the world.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

For several reasons I desire to say something upon the organization of the church. We have that organization dis-

tinctly pointed out in the two texts that have been read. For the space of two years the Apostle Paul had labored at Ephesus, and an adequate organization had been given to the church, under which she could perpetuate herself. Paul meant that the church should have a true, organic health; that she should have power to continue her work and her influence for good. We learn from the words in the address which he makes, that there were elders in this church; that there was a plurality of elders. The evidence from church history is conclusive as to the smallness of the congregations at that time. Indeed, one average congregation in this city would be nearly as large as the whole number then, and yet, later, when Paul comes to speak to this plurality of elders, he says: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers* [ἐπίσκοποι—bishops], to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood." The ἐπίσκοποι—elders—are bishops. That used to be regarded as a Presbyterian heresy, and it is a very gratifying thing to know that such is no longer the case, and in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, in the note by Dr. Plumptre, you will find an explanation of these words, and you will see with what fairness and candor the subject is treated. The Greek word for elder, or presbyter, "πρεσβυτερος," means one and the same person, without any distinction whatever between them. Now, the ground that we have uniformly taken—historically taken—is that the apostolic church government involved, at its very beginning, the substantial identity of the bishop and the elder, and that a plurality of such bishops and elders is to be in each church, and upon this body rests the responsibility of shepherding all the flock—"Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Our object ought to be to have apostolic doctrine, and our object ought to be to approximate to apostolic organization, apostolic government, apostolic usage. It is very well to notice that directions are given for the maintenance of these elders of the church. Then this is a natural arrangement; it comes down from patriarchal times. An elder meant one who had character and gravity and experience of years. It was so over all oriental countries. The Hebrew people naturally continued that arrangement. God's way is to take natural arrangements and give them spiritual direction. In the Jewish nation, as early as the days of Moses, the elders were a recognized, governing, counciling body. When synagogues were erected over the land, each synagogue had its elders; so, when the followers of Christ were driven out of their synagogue, they set up a Christian synagogue, and they carried into the Christian synagogue the same arrangement, only bringing into it the inspiration of the Christian life.

When Titus was sent to churches where there were Gentiles, and where his duties were substantially those of organization, instructions were given him for the ordaining of elders; in only such cases was there any need to give instructions, among the Jews the custom being understood. This ancient custom is taken and applied to the Christian Church, and constituted an organization, under which great congregations have shown a healthy Christian life.

When from the people themselves rulers or governors are chosen, they are chosen on the ground of intelligence, of experience, of gravity, and of gravity connected only with years, and on the ground of being well tried; accordingly, the apostle gives directions as to who should be such bishops. They should be pure in their domestic relations, men of one wife each. They should be vigilant and sober. They should be competent to give instructions—"apt to teach." They should "have a good report among them that are without." They should be men of self-denial—"not given to much wine." They should be men given to ruling their own house, so that the Church of Christ may be built up and established. These officers—bishops and deacons—we hold to be the only officers recognized in the church. Paul, when he sent his epistle to the Philippians, addressed it "To the church at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." If the Pope of Rome should address a letter to his church in America, directed "To the church in America, with the bishops and deacons," the Romanists would say, "What? No notice of the cardinals! What! no notice of the deans, the archdeacons, and the rest! No notice of the whole body of priests; no notice of the whole body of preachers." The thing is absurd upon the face of it. Yet, when the Apostle Paul wrote to the whole church, with the bishops and deacons, he included everybody in the church, the bishops and deacons covering all the officers that he recognized in the church. I stand here as a minister upon the same level precisely with my brother elders in the management of this church. The difference between them and me is, that where the gift of teaching is recognized in the church, the elder that has that gift is recognized as laboring in the word and doctrine, and so discriminated from his brother elder, whose distinction is simply to rule with other elders. There were times when it was proper to give maintenance to all the bishops in the Christian church. When men collect together, and make their appeals to the public, it is customary to choose their president and to associate with him a body of directors or trustees, or whatever you may please to call it. There is an analogy therein to a healthy Apostolic Christian church, and the elders associated in the government of the church with the minister may be supposed to bring with them a

knowledge of human nature, a knowledge of individual life, of practical experience and Christian character, and as having sympathy with the people to whom they belong, and from whose ranks they are chosen; and to be, at the same time, in sympathy with the minister, whose purpose really is one with themselves.

Such, brethren, is the basis upon which we rest the organization of this great church, and I do feel that there is cause for thankfulness to God Almighty on the part of you, its members, for the Christian elders given to you in times past. I am able to speak of what they have been before my time from frequent perusal of the letters of my predecessors, and for substantial aid and encouragement, I shall be bound to make corresponding acknowledgement regarding the elders with whom I have had the privilege of co-operating. I came into this city an utter and entire stranger, with little knowledge of American life. That more mistakes have not been made by me is to be accounted for only by the circumstance, that I have had the frank and confidential counsel, encouragement, and sympathy of the elders chosen among you to rule over you in the Lord. I cannot speak too highly of their intelligent Christian worth, their earnest personal piety, their deep interest in your spiritual welfare. You ought to appreciate and honor them that have thus been set over you in the Lord.

May God grant that, by pure doctrine and spiritual worship, and apostolic usage and government, we may be all of us, minister and ruling elders and people, rendered holy in life, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit in abundance to the glory of the Divine Name.