

[Reported for the HERALD by Belle B. Robinson.]

## SERMON BY ELDER R. M. ELVIN,

DELIVERED AT

THE GENERAL CHURCH REUNION, LOGAN, IOWA, OCTOBER 1, 1892,

### Subject, THE GOSPEL UNCHANGEABLE.

IN the testimony of the Gospel as given by St. Mark in his sixteenth chapter, in the great commission to preach the gospel, he states to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." We are here trying to fulfill in spirit that which we find here in letter; and while we do not claim this as our authority for preaching, we believe the truth therein stated to these men who were to go and represent the work that Christ had inaugurated at that time; that the same gospel with the same power resulting to humanity, that the same salvation, is now intrusted to our care to present to those who are in need of divine help; and our labors among the people are that they may come to a better understanding of what their duties are, and what they may expect in the gospel.

It is true that at the present time in the world there is quite a variety of interpretations given to men who are seeking to know the right way of the Lord, and some of those who are quite inquisitive in trying to obtain the right answer, who have not been satisfied with the answer or definition given by one class of teachers, have compared that which they have received from one with that that they have received from another, and per consequence of this disagreement in that which was told them by these two parties, each claiming equal authority as teachers of the divine word, the inquirer has turned away and in many cases has become skeptical, and some have gone into what is called infidelity, believing that religion is but a scheme in which the few are benefited at the expense of the many.

If possible, we would like to have the light dawn upon the mind that the gospel of Jesus Christ is divine; that its source is God; that its working powers are operating for the redemption of man and, as a consequence, restoring man to the presence of his Father. This covers the entire scheme; but to-night

we can only call your attention to a few thoughts which will be amplified during this series of meetings.

In the first place, friends, unless we teach aright our teachings will be in vain; all men concede this, that unless we are found in harmony with that which the Master taught we do not represent him, but misrepresent him. If his ambassadors as chosen went out and taught as he taught, they properly represented the doctrine he represented; and the doctrine he presented to the people was not his own but he received it from his Father, thus proving directly that the gospel is God's gift to man, and that Jesus Christ came to the earth on his great mission that he might do his Father's will and become a propitiation for sin, take away the barrier, and restore his brethren to the presence of their Father. As early as the time when the apostle was preaching, he discovered that some of the teachers had already begun to pervert the gospel; that they were changing, taking from, and introducing matter that was not necessary as the duty of man that he might please his Father; and in consequence of this he makes a very plain statement, which you will find recorded in the first chapter of Galatians, wherein he instructs those of Galatia that they should know concerning the doctrine, for he, Paul, was distressed because some had turned away from the grace of Christ unto another gospel, "which" says he, "is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." He had discovered the attempt at a perversion of the gospel; and, be it understood, that it must have been those who held or claimed to believe the gospel who were perverting the gospel; they were the ones against whom came the admonition; those who had been taught. There is an attempt made to protect them against whatever of evil influence should follow by reason of their accepting a perversion of the gospel.

Now Paul lays down a very simple rule, and if followed out I do not see how it will be possible that an individual with the open Bible in his hand may be mistaken as to what should be taught, for he says of those individuals, that if they preach or teach not according to that which we have taught or preached they are to be condemned, accursed. And he makes it very strong; he says: "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Do not receive that which is presented to you, even if it should be presented by an angel from heaven, if he should come and preach contrary to that which Paul and his associate ministers had preached, and should he attempt to have the people step away from that which they had formerly been instructed in, and should add to or take from that form of doctrine, those principles that constitute the doctrine of Christ, changing them in the least; that these individuals should not be received, but should be condemned; their teachings should be set aside; they should not be received as the true ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is one witness.

Turning to the Second Epistle of St. John, we learn that he, moved by the same Spirit, is in exact harmony with that which prompted the Apostle Paul. He admonishes the church when he writes to it that they should beware of the spirits that were abroad in the world, and then he tells them that if any man should come unto them and "bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed;" and the reason that he thus enjoins upon the church that they should thus refuse to accept and follow the doctrines of those who should come and not teach in harmony with that which had been taught was, that if they are following in that doctrine, they have both the Father and the Son; and the witness of God and the witness of Christ is the ministration of the Holy Spirit, that makes alive the word, and bears testimony to the individual that the word is Spirit and it is life; it is God's truth; and in the absence of the ministration of the Holy Spirit, the letter is dead, and it killeth, and there is no source of spiritual life in it. God has protected his own word in sending it to the earth. He has provided that wherever that word is preached in its truth, wherever that word is preached by his divine authority, he will bear evidence of the truthfulness of that word by sending his Holy Spirit; and thus the statement of the Son of God is that the individual thus receiving the Father and the Son has the promise that they will come and sup with that disciple; he shall have communion, he shall have communication; he shall have divine knowledge as to the correctness and truthfulness of the doctrine as it is presented and received by him.

After the Master went away and his disciples had fallen asleep, we find that this corruption of the doctrine that had already manifested itself during the lifetime of this special witness of the truth, that it became more widely spread, and the church fell into darkness, and ultimately into division; and

into the consequence of that darkness and these divisions. And, by the way, the church was admonished of these divisions; the Apostle Paul had said to them, "Mark them which cause divisions." Division is not the source of Spirit-communication from heaven; it may be spirit-communication from beneath, but Spirit-communication that comes from on high unifies, enlightens; makes the disciples one wherever they are found; makes them one, no matter in what language or in what part of the globe they learn that truth; and for that reason the apostle admonishes the church in his day that they should mark those who cause divisions. Divisions have come; they have multiplied, until man at the present time is beset upon every hand with individuals who come with the Bible, and as they come they present their ideas, their opinion of what is necessary and what is non-essential.

I was talking with a man this morning on the train. He was reciting how an individual came to Alexander Campbell and began to tell him what he thought of religion. He said: "You teach so and so," and Mr. Campbell said, "No, we do not; it is not in the Bible;" and he repeated quite a number of things that might be called theology of the present time, but not scriptural teachings, and in each case Mr. Campbell stated that it was not so taught in the Bible; such teachings were not found there. It was possible that others who were teaching differently from Mr. Campbell might have taught that, or something like it, and this individual had learned of it, and had accused every other teacher of teaching the same thing. Finally this man says to Mr. Campbell, "How about apostles and prophets being in the church at the present time? the New Testament certainly teaches that?" Mr. Campbell answered: "There is no room for them." As every other interrogation had been presented to him he had stated that it was not taught in the Bible, but when he came to present to him a principle of the organic body of Christ that was found in the times of Christ,—apostles and prophets in the church—and inquired why Mr. Campbell was not now teaching that, his answer was, "There is no room for them." No room in the Church of Christ for that which God hath given a place there? Who has narrowed down the foundation planks of God's gift to man and made it so circumscribed in its character that the very organic form, that given to man by which he might be perfected and brought back in the presence of his Creator, that there was no room found in the church for these principles? Let those who are interested, and are troubled, and are responsible for such an answer, settle that with themselves, and with their Bible, and with those who may make inquiry of them; but for the church that is represented from this stand, let us say to you, that it is one of the strong reasons why we should call upon the people of this present time that they should open their Bibles, and if they discover that the God of heaven has set in the church certain officers, and educated these as apostles and prophets, that the church today is large enough to entertain and retain

that which God has placed therein; and we do not believe it is man's province that he shall decide that what God has placed there he can dispense with.

In this thought of preaching the gospel, there are several important reasons why we should be engaged in it; and let me first say to you that my understanding of the Latter Day Saints preaching the gospel is this; that they are under divine appointment, and held responsible by the Almighty that in their preaching they shall not go beyond the commission that Jesus Christ gave; nor shall they hesitate nor falter in presenting to humanity any commandment or principle that God has given to the church. They are equally responsible that they shall teach the whole truth, and keep back no part. Another thought; in our understanding of this preaching of the gospel that humanity stands to-night in need of, the same means of redemption are necessary now that it stood in need of when the Savior was the teacher, or when his disciples were the teachers. Humanity to-day is in need of the same means of grace to help them up into light as those people away back in the days of Christ.

Some one might suggest to me that the world is much more enlightened now than it was then, and that they have a better understanding generally speaking; that they are in a higher state of civilization, and are better prepared and do not need the same simplicity and fundamental principles as was taught then; and while you may think this, if you have not already given utterance thereto, let me first suggest to you to consider very calmly and prayerfully a statement that I find in divine writ, and that is this: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." I will admit that so far as humanity is concerned, in what is called education the race to-day may stand almost on the pinnacle of the mountains of intelligence, and that they may have powers by which they may discover the canals on Mars, and it may be that they are capable of seeing the four colored suns that float around some of the vast globes in the heavens; they may be able to weigh the worlds in the balance, they may be capable of analyzing all that this world is composed of, they may be able to discover the entire composition that goes to make up this organization that is before you, except the spirit that is within; but there is no power by which man has ever been capable of analyzing the spiritual force that is in the intellectual man; and notwithstanding his successful achievements in the research for knowledge and spreading it abroad, the word of God is as true to-night as when the race was steeped in the deepest darkness and ignorance. Man by his wisdom knows not God, but there is a necessity that he shall know him; the word itself makes that very plain. Turn to the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel and the third verse, and there we read: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Right there is the utterance of the Son of God, presenting to the race the grand fundamental truth that it is eternal life for humanity to know the Father and the Son, and standing right in

our pathway is that quotation that man by his wisdom knoweth not God, and we stop.

There is no necessity for me to appeal to my brethren, or to the world at large, and ask them with this statement before us, "How shall I know God? how shall I surmount the difficulty that lies in the way that I may inherit eternal life, the consummation of the gospel preached to man? How may I attain to that highest and grandest gift that God proposes to bestow upon me, the gift of eternal life, when I read that to know him is eternal life, and that man by his own wisdom knoweth not God?" If appealing to these my brethren in a religious sense and not in the sense of their worldly wisdom, they will answer me at once in harmony with that which is written; that I may know the Father, I may know the Son, in the manner and by the means that God hath appointed; and at once when they tell me that God has appointed means and the manner in which I may become acquainted with the Father, I inquire, What are the means? and each one of these my brethren would ask me to turn to the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians and reading the third verse I would there discover this: "That no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." And I am led to this conclusion, that if by the possession of the gift of the Holy Ghost I am capable of learning the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the corner stone of the temple of the living God into which we as lively stones may be placed through the gift of God's appointment, I at once make inquiry as to how that is, and the answer must come to me that it is by the means of the gospel. Then it is very necessary that the gospel shall be preached.

I now ask you to think if all the varied forms of presentation that are in the world to-day could bring about this same result? How could they bring unity and not division? If they could unite in the truth, that unity would crystallize into one body and into the observance of every ordinance by which we are the body of Christ; It would wipe out the lines of demarkation, and instead of men being called denominational names they would be called by the name of the Son of God; they would stand as the children of the living God; they would have that unity of spirit by which in every land and in every clime they would be able to meet a brother and a friend; yea, more than that, no matter if they were not able to communicate by their language one with the other, they would possess that Spirit in such degree that there would be a unity of spirit, even if they could not communicate by their natural gifts.

But instead of that, we have organizations springing up and increasing all over the broad earth. Now I ask that you turn to the Old Testament and in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah beginning with the thirty-first verse we learn that there is a time coming in which the God of heaven is to make a new covenant, and when that new covenant is made with man it is to be written in his heart, it is to be placed within his inward parts; he is to become conscious of that truth outside and independent of the powers of man

to demonstrate to his fellow man the truthfulness of any principle of science or education; there shall be back of the instructions that shall come in conforming with the new covenant such an influence that it will take the truths thereof and put them into the very heart of the disciple that will receive it, and that disciple that has it thus enstamped within his very soul by that peculiar power that God shall bring to bear upon him, shall be made alive in that covenant and shall have that truth in his heart; and from the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and on those lips will be found the testimony that God is true and that Jesus Christ is the Savior of that individual.

I turn to Matthew, chapter twenty-four, and in the fourteenth verse I find that the Son of God in answering his disciples when they had come to him privately and had inquired of him for certain signs of very momentous occurrences that should come to man, stated that one of the signs of the last days would be that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come;" the end of wickedness, the end of the perverting of truth, when the darkness shall be lifted from the earth and the light of God shall spread over the entire earth as the waters cover the channel of the great deep; that is when this gospel has been preached as a witness.

Now if that gospel in its purity, with all its power, with all its quickening influences, with all its communications and gifts that were in the time of Christ and the apostles, had been preached right along day after day, year after year, from the time it was established by Christ and his compeers up to the present time, then there would be no place for the Latter Day Saints; they would have no mission here in the earth, for there would not be a necessity for their standing before the people; there would not be a place that they could occupy among their brethren, for that work would already be accomplished by others who are zealously engaged in that which they believe to be God's service. But by reason of the gospel being perverted, the Latter Day Saint steps upon the platform, opens his Bible, and begins to preach the gospel just as it was preached in the times of Christ and the apostles. And some tell us it is something new. In one sense they are correct, because it is new to them; they have not heard it before in that manner; it is new to them because they have not been so instructed by their teachers,—for this reason it is new to them; but it is not new to God; it is not new to the Bible; it should not be new to those who are daily engaged in searching the Scriptures with the idea that in them they shall find the truth and that the truth shall make them free. It should not be new to them, but it should be to them the everlasting gospel; it should be to them the power of God unto salvation that takes away the scales from the eyes, and by a higher power than that which man possesses. It takes the man out of the darkness, out of the miry clay of sectism, and places his feet solidly upon the rock of eternal truth which

testifies of both the Father and the Son and brings to that individual that Spirit by which Jesus promised that if he be lifted up from the earth he would draw all men unto him, because God would confirm the truth to each disciple; for it is God's business, not man's, to confirm to each disciple his inheritance in the gospel; and that inheritance is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that is that which accompanies the preaching of the gospel.

We have one more quotation that we ask you to consider; that is the one found in the book of Revelation, very frequently quoted by Latter Day Saints; and if you will please note, perhaps the majority of the speakers may have reference to it before we leave the camp grounds: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to him," etc. The glory that man owes his Father in heaven is that he should do as his great exemplar did; that is, do the Father's will. Christ declared, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." If I am in harmony with that which Christ presented, I shall be found doing the works that Christ was doing; that is, I shall be found doing the Father's will; and when I shall do the Father's will, I shall then be doing what Jesus Christ did; and that which resulted to him will result to me because that God is "no respecter of persons," and whosoever shall work righteousness shall be "accepted with him."

Now the Savior taught while he was here, —and we teach likewise,—that whosoever would do the Father's will should know for himself that the doctrine was true. Let me make this so plain that we cannot misunderstand it. Mr. Brown in the congregation is not a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints. This gentleman is desirous to know the truth. We take the Bible in our hands and we commence preaching to him concerning that which we believe to be the doctrine, taking it step by step, and successively presenting one principle upon another from the simple question of faith in God until he shall come to where works at his hands are required; and when this individual is thus taught and is ready to comply with each instruction given him, we then make the statement to him very plainly that this is the doctrine of the Father and that we are but the messengers who bring that report to him. If he will do as this doctrine enjoins upon him, he shall know for himself whether we are teaching the truth, or whether we are teaching of our own volition, or on our own authority. The man puts the matter to a test. I did so when the doctrine was preached to me. It attracted my attention, and believing what was testified to me, I discovered no way by which I was able to learn whether they had told me the truth or told me an untruth unless I should go and demonstrate for myself by doing the works that they had pointed out and thus learning that these works would bring about a certain result. I went, and going down into the waters of bap-

tism, I came out with no satisfaction, and also upon receiving the imposition of the hands of the elders was disappointed, in a certain sense, as to the result, because I supposed that right there and then my intellect would be so convinced and enlightened that I should be enabled to know all about the gospel, and know both the Father and the Son; and when I did not receive it I was in a quandary; I did not know how or what to do.

But, one thing that had been taught to me from my childhood, was prayer. In the trial and darkness that came after this laying on of hands, I prayed earnestly, and, perhaps some week or ten days afterwards, when in the congregation of Latter Day Saints, that which we call the Holy Spirit came and rested upon me. A brother arose and spoke. I understood very well what he was saying: he was a very plain spoken man, calm in his disposition; and turning around and pointing directly to me, he gave me instruction in the gift of tongues. Though not knowing what he said, I felt that which I never felt before; and when he sat down another rising said he would give the interpretation, and turning directly and pointing to me he began to talk as I understood him, and there came a double force of that feeling that I was a stranger to, like fire shut up in my bones, and I desired to cry out in the joy of my soul because I discovered something I had not experienced before. I soon learned that this was the overshadowing power of that Holy Spirit, and by that Spirit I was capable of understanding that there was light, there was truth, there was power; there was glory in the word of God that had been preached and presented to these individuals, and thus I received a witness. That witness not only came then, but it came from time to time. It has taken truths that no human being had any knowledge of, no one but God and myself, and these truths have been made apparent and spoken in public.

I thus learn that in the preaching of the gospel it is just as Paul expressed it when writing to the Romans, "It is the power of God unto salvation." "As it is written, the just shall live by faith;" not by the faith that they receive first, but from time to time, from hour to hour, as the occasion demands that that faith may come to them. It is a living, moving principle that, when received into the heart, though clouds may lower and darkness completely surround the path, when human power is unable to help us and extricate us from the seeming destruction and darkness and death, by going to God in the influence and by the Spirit of that faith that

is begotten of the gospel,—which faith is the foundation principle of the gospel, the God of heaven breaks away the clouds and his Spirit whispers peace to the individual, even in the hour of darkness, in sickness, and in death. It is that which will take away the sting of death, that which will make the trials through which they pass sweet, and will take away the sharpness and thorns of the crown that we have to bear. It is that which will make the pathway of life smooth, so that the words of Christ are true: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." His yoke is easy and his burden is light when the Spirit attends, but in the absence of the Spirit, then the yoke will gall, then the burden will become too heavy for us to endure; then we will seek for some avenue of escape that we may lay down the load and refuse to longer discharge our duties. But with the Spirit the heavy burdens become light, darkness and clouds have their silver lining, and the preaching of the gospel brings satisfaction and peace.

I appeal to each member of the church here to-night if this is not true, no matter whether he came into the church yesterday, or whether like this aged brother who testified that he had for more than fifty years been made glad and rejoiced. I could not help noticing him to-day as he stood and told how glad he was in the gospel; and as that Spirit of gladness came over him I discovered that it vibrated through his whole frame; he felt it in his whole being, the joy in which he gave the trembling utterance to you to-day that he was glad he was here in the gospel.

Now I appeal to all, whether young or aged in this warfare, Did you ever hear a gospel sermon preached, no matter how weak, if the Spirit of God attended it, but what it made you rejoice? It made you glad; it was that power which came and bore witness, even in the weakness of that means which was used in the presentation, that back of that, outside of the weakness that humanity is heir to, you recognized the power in the preaching of the word that gave a satisfaction to your soul that nothing else could give. Thus in the simple breathings of the child who confesses his God, or in the words of the aged one that come broken and feeble to us, we recognize that Spirit of peace, that Spirit of power that attends the preaching of the word. I thank you kindly for the attention given, and trust that you may recognize that in the preaching of the gospel is the hope of eternal life pledged by the Father, to whose will give ear and render obedience.