

## DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER WILLIAM C. DUNBAR,

DELIVERED

in the 20th Ward Meeting-house, on  
the Evening of Sunday, July 18th,  
1875.

REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

[The speaker read the first six verses of the sixth chapter of Hebrews; and commencing at the 14th verse of the second chapter of James, read to the end of the 22nd verse.]

MY brethren and sisters, I have taken upon myself the task of speaking to you this evening upon the subject of practical religion; but I know not whether I shall be able to discharge that task either to your satisfaction or my own. I have no studied discourse or speech to bring before you, neither have I anything new or strange to talk about; but the circumstances under which we are surrounded and in which we are placed have led my mind to reflect upon a great many things, and I thought that if the Spirit of God would give me its assistance I would make a few remarks this evening and present to you my reflections with regard to the circumstances I have referred to. Whether I shall talk ten minutes or half an hour I do not know, neither is it of much consequence; but as we do not like to keep our meetings very late these warm evenings I will not take up time by making apologies. A Latter-day Saint preacher has no particular occasion to be afraid or backward in standing before the Saints, because, according to his faith, he expects to be aided by the Spirit of God—that Spirit which brings all things to our remembrance, which takes of the deep things of God and shows them unto us, and even shows us things to come. We do not depend upon our own strength, and it is not merely for the sake of gratifying ourselves that we desire to speak to the people; but we do so because it is a duty incumbent upon us, and in the hope of assisting each other in running the race upon which we have started and in accomplishing the work which we have set out to accomplish, namely to build up the kingdom of God upon the earth; and, inasmuch as we undertook, some of us twenty, some thirty, and some forty, years ago, to follow Christ, after having endured persecution and scorn from a frowning world, and having been scoffed at and jeered by our friends and nearest relations, and having remained through it all members of the kingdom of God, that our labors, and our sufferings if we have had any, may not now be in vain, and that we may not be in the position of some referred to by the Apostle in the Scriptures which I have read to you to-night, of whom he says, after having once been made partakers of the good word of God and enlightened by the power of the Holy Ghost, if they fall away, it is almost impossible to renew them unto repentance.

I know that some have considered that if they are once in Christ, they are always in Christ, if they are once born of the water and of the Spirit there is no fear of backsliding, there is no danger at all of missing the mark of their high calling which is in Christ Jesus. But the language of the Apostle goes to show that it may be necessary for us again to lay the foundation of dead works—of faith towards God, of repentance, of baptism for the remission of sins and of other initiatory ordinances into the kingdom of God; and he even admits that there is a possibility of us going so far into darkness, and of departing so far from the principles of the gospel of Christ, and from the covenants which we have made that it is impossible to renew us again. Therefore, my brethren and sisters, after having obeyed the initiatory ordinances of the gospel, witnessing unto Christ, by repentance, and baptism for the remission of our sins, that we would take upon us his name and keep his commandments, it becomes a serious question with us, after twenty, thirty, or forty years' experience as members of this church, whether or not we have gone on unto perfection.

The reason I ask this question and why it is brought to my mind at the present time, is because there is a prospect of us again being called upon to repent of our sins, to be baptized for their remission, and

to again lay the foundation of dead works, of faith towards God and repentance and renewing our covenants with Him, and of making a fresh start in serving Him and keeping His commandments.

We, I mean the elders of Israel, who have been on missions to preach the gospel, have been in the habit of quoting to those whom we call Gentiles a portion of the Scripture which I read to you at the commencement of my remarks; and in calling upon them to repent of their sins and to be baptized for the remission of the same, we have endeavored to show to them that faith without works is dead; that no matter how much men or women may say they believe in Jesus; no matter how much they may say "Lord, Lord," it will do them no good unless they keep his commandments; and we have condemned the whole world upon this principle, and to illustrate it, we have paraphrased the language of the apostle, by saying—"If we see a brother or sister naked or destitute, and we say to them, 'be ye warmed,' or 'be ye filled,' and give them not the wherewithal to warm or to fill, what benefit is it to the hungry, naked or destitute person? None whatever. Hence the Apostle says that as the body without the spirit is dead so is faith without works, being alone."

You will please to recollect that this language was addressed, not to the Gentiles, or to the sectarians then in existence, not to the Scribes and Pharisees, but to those who were called Saints; and the Apostle seemed to take special pains to make them understand that it did not matter how long their prayers were; that it did not matter how much they cried "Lord, Lord" unless they kept his commandments; and so also, it was of no consequence how great their faith was unless their works corresponded.

I take this language of the ancient Apostle and apply it to us, for it is just as applicable to, and just as necessary to be understood by, us as by the Saints of ancient days, that faith without works is dead. No matter, my brethren and sisters, what may be our profession; no matter whether we are what is termed "big" men or "little" men, whether we are high priests or deacons, apostles or bishops' counselors, professions of religion are mere shams unless accompanied by works that correspond, and having the name of Saints only will never exalt us in celestial glory, for which we have set out. It is not the mere reading of the commandments of God, or his sayings, in Sunday school, chapel, or any particular place, neither is it the singing of hymns in praise of the Redeemer that will save us in his kingdom, but it is keeping his commandments in all sincerity, and the observance of his ordinances, or in other words, nothing short of practical religion will do that. This was the lesson sought to be conveyed by the apostle to the Saints in ancient days, and it is a lesson just as necessary to be learned by the Saints of latter days. It is a poor kind of religion that will induce people to honor and venerate the words of men who have been dead between eighteen and nineteen hundred years, when at the same time they will pass by with contempt the sayings, counsels and commandments of living men whom they acknowledge as the servants of God.

How often have I heard Latter-day Saints say that when, in their youth, they read in the Bible about the apostolic church with all its privileges, ordinances and blessings, how they wished they had lived in the day when living apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers were on the earth, little realizing that their lot would be cast in a day and dispensation when God would again set up his church and kingdom, with the same blessings, ordinances and offices as in ancient days! But shall we, brethren and sisters, allow ourselves to drink into the spirit that existed anciently among the Scribes and Pharisees who, while they built monuments and sepulchers to the names of Moses and the prophets, slandered, derided, persecuted and crucified the servants of God living amongst them? Shall it be said of us who are called Latter-day Saints, and who have taken upon us the name of Jesus Christ, that we neglect, forget and treat with contempt, the sayings, commandments, and counsels of those whom God has raised up in these last days? God forbid that it should be the case! But that rather, inasmuch as we have made the covenants and engagements that we have made, that we shall pray for our leaders, and ask God to inspire them, and reveal unto them his mind and his will, that they may not be permitted to bring about merely their own will and their own desires, but that they shall be constrained, by the revelations of heaven and the inspiration of the Almighty, to seek to accomplish his will, and his

designs and purposes upon the earth; and that when we have thus prayed, we shall not be so inconsistent as to deny our own prayers and refuse to acknowledge and to practise the principles that we profess.

Do we remember the time when we went down into the waters of baptism? I do; there is something pleasant to reflect upon in connection with that event. Can we remember the joyous feelings that inspired us when we first heard a servant of God bear testimony to the restoration of the gospel in these latter days, and when conviction seized our minds that that testimony was true? Can we now imagine the happiness we experienced when God brought to our understandings the fact that he had restored his gospel in its fulness? I can see men here this evening with whom I sat in the year 1840 and listened to the testimony of Elder Orson Pratt when he came from his home in a distant land to preach the Gospel in Scotland. He was a stranger in a strange land, and the finger of scorn was pointed, and dirt was thrown, at him, and the scoffers nicknamed him the "Mormon Angel." Can we ever forget the sweet words then uttered, and the happiness brought to our minds by the reflection that, after having lived in darkness for years, having in vain sought to know God, with the Bible a blank book because we could not understand it, in a moment, almost in the twinkling of an eye, all old things passed away and became new, our minds were expanded so that we could see and understand, and we felt that God was speaking to us? And do we remember that we went forth repenting of our sins? Yes. What did we understand by repenting of our sins? A putting of them away, a forsaking of all evil, and a constant cleaving to that which was good.

I have traveled hundreds and thousands of miles preaching this gospel, and many hundreds I have baptized, and under all the varied circumstances through which I have passed while so engaged, I have ever realized the truth of the saying of the Savior in regard to those who refused to embrace the gospel in his day—"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" for generally speaking the class of people who then embraced the gospel, myself amongst the number, were those who, through poverty, had greater temptations to do evil than the rich and the great had to contend with. They were those who found it a continual struggle to live, to obtain bread and a sufficiency of the bare necessities, and who through the untoward circumstances in which they were placed—though I do not regard that as an excuse for doing evil—fell into vices and evil habits of various kinds, such for instance as drunkenness, swearing, and immorality. But when the gospel came I have seen men who led such lives as this turn right round, and in twenty-four hours forsake these evils, and go down into the waters of baptism determined never to return to the practice thereof. Have they kept their covenants? I have known men and women who, before baptism, have been perhaps a town talk because of their discreditable practices, keep the covenants made in the waters of baptism, for ten, fifteen or twenty years, during the whole of that time conducting themselves as models of propriety, so far as morality, honesty and uprightness were concerned. Yet at the time they were baptized people who knew them have said—"Well, if they are the kind of people that make Mormons, I don't think much of Mormonism." Such sayings, as I have already remarked, only convinced me of the truth of the saying of Jesus—"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." But some who saw the change in the lives of many who obeyed the gospel were amazed, and not a few of them were thus led to investigate and ultimately to obey the principles of "Mormonism."

Well, how were these sudden changes effected? Were they the result merely of the strength of will of those who obeyed the gospel? No; but after having repented and been baptized for the remission of their sins, they received the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the power of which they were quickened, and they were enabled to conquer their passions, and to overcome their weaknesses and frailties, and they continued in well doing for years and years, so much so that it would have been considered a very strange thing for a member of a branch of the church in the old country to get drunk. And did you ever, in your travels and labors among the churches in Great Britain hear a Latter-day Saint take the name of God in vain? I never did. Was it because the people had no temptations in the midst of Babylon that they were able to live their religion and serve God so faithfully? Why, they were surrounded with everything that could entice or decoy, with every influence and power that could lead astray and corrupt the mind. Influences of this character were numberless on every hand, around, above and beneath them, and yet, by the power of Jacob's God, and the influence of the gospel they were enabled to serve the Lord and keep His commandments.

By and by the voice came to us that we were to gather out, and that passage from the Revelations of St. John was sounded in our ears in which the people of God are commanded to gather from Babylon, lest they be partakers of her sins and her plagues. Why was this command given? That we might gather to a place where we could serve God more perfectly. We came here to these mountains, away from Babylon, away from the corruptions, evil influences and examples which abound there, that here, in the tops of the mountains, by ourselves, we might, in the language of the apostles, go on to perfection; that we should not require to lay again the foundation of dead works—of faith and of repentance, but that we should go on to perfection. Says the prophet—"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord's house and to the house of the God of Jacob." For what? "That we may

learn his laws." In our scattered condition we obeyed the first principles of the gospel, which was about all we could do in an isolated capacity, then the word came—"Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths."

I now come back to the inquiry with which I started—Have we who have embraced this work gone on to perfection? After having come here have we improved, that is in the simple principles of morality? I will not speak of anything particularly great or miraculous, but will simply ask the question—Have we improved in the common principles of morality, sobriety, honesty, truthfulness, brotherly kindness, charity, and all those principles which even the sincere sectarian practices, and which the infidel, who believes in no God, no Bible, no hereafter, practises if he be a good member of society? Have we improved in being honest with one another, not seeking to take advantage of each other's circumstances, but being straightforward in our deal, honest when we work for one another, truthful in all our relations with each other, not backbiting or slandering or cherishing animosity one towards the other, but cultivating that love and affection which the gospel produces? Have we, since the time we landed here, increased in all these good principles, or have we retrograded? This is an important question. I will not begin to enumerate or particularize, for that is unnecessary, but I think that none are so blind that they cannot see that an improvement is necessary. An improvement in whom? It is quite common for preachers to say to their hearers—"Go ye," and "do ye;" but among the Latter-day Saints who are they who have need to improve? Shall I answer this question according to my view of the matter? I believe I will. I am afraid it is with the people as with the priest, as with the buyer so with the seller, as with the giver of usury so with the taker of usury, as with the lender so with the borrower. I am afraid, though there may be a great many exceptions, that we are a poor crowd to start throwing stones. You can see at a glance the importance of this thing, from the fact that, right in our midst to day, there are not a few who years ago made the same covenants that we made, who are fighting against God and against that work to the truth of which they have many times borne testimony in the midst of the Saints. They have borne testimony that God, by his Spirit, bore witness to their spirit, that this work was true; that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that he by revelation and commandment from heaven, reorganized the church of God upon the earth with apostles, prophets, gifts, graces, &c., as in ancient days; and yet, to-day, we see some who, after having borne this testimony, are fighting against these principles, and striving with all their power to tear down what it has taken so many thousands so many years to build up. Hence it seems to me, without saying that it particularly applies to the class of persons I have just named, that there is a possibility of us arriving at such a depth of darkness, and rebellion against the principles of the gospel and the Spirit of God that we will fall away so far that it is impossible to renew us again; that we might repent and be baptized ten thousand times, and it would be of no consequence; that we might have hands laid upon us as many times as we pleased, and it would be no use, because, having fallen to such a depth of darkness, God, in this world at any rate, can not do anything to bring us back. It would be well then, if any of us are on the brink of this precipice, to consider and ask ourselves these questions—Are we living practically our religion? Are we living in all things, as far as in our power lies, according to its precepts? Or are we going back, like the dog to its vomit, or the hog that is washed to its wallowing in the mire?

The testimony of the Spirit through the servants of God, is that we have not progressed as fast as we ought to have done, and that a great many of us, if not all, have been going backward in some degree. Some have said that it is impossible to stand still, and that the standard principle is a pusillanimous one, so much so that we read in the book of Revelations of a people who were neither hot nor cold, and the Lord threatened to spew them out of his mouth. But some maintain that we must either go forward or backward; if that be true, and we have not been going forward, we may as well admit that we have been going backward. I have heard brethren refer to the good times they had, and to the love and zeal that existed among the Saints when first they embraced the gospel. Why was it? If we received blessings then it was upon the condition of obedience. We showed our faith by our works, hence the Almighty was bound to respond, because he can not lie. We went forth in the sincerity and humility of our hearts, and we embraced the gospel, and the heavens were no longer brass, but they were opened and showered down blessings upon us. If we have complaints to make to-day, and say that there is not as much love and charity, and as many dreams and visions and manifestations of the power of God among the Saints as fifteen or twenty years ago, what is the reason? Has God changed? Has His word failed? No, the reason is obvious, self-evident, and it is that we have not gone on to perfection; but instead of that we have become stolid and negligent, and, almost as a people we may say, in the language of the Church of England ritual, which I heard repeated in a meeting the other day—"We have left undone the things we ought to have done, and have done those things which we ought not to have done." Whether this language can be applied to us with strict propriety or not, the time has surely come when it is necessary for us to retrace our steps, and, if we have not become so cold that the Spirit of God

can not warm us up, when we must, without any excitement, spasmodic jerks or wildfire of any kind, either be Latter-day Saints or take the other course. The time has come for us to calmly and quietly examine ourselves individually, and not take up our time altogether with our neighbors, for that advice given by the Savior, that a person must take the beam out of his own eye before he can see to take the mote out of the neighbor's, is as applicable to the generation now living as it was to the one to which Jesus was speaking when he gave utterance to it, for no matter how perfect we may consider ourselves, a careful examination of our own lives and characters will reveal to us the fact that there is something in which we can improve, and in which we can serve God more faithfully. There is an old Scotch saying that every one has his "Bubbly Jock," but that some have bigger "wobbles" than others. That is a curious old proverb, but if you understand it you see in a moment that it is correct. In Scotland we call turkeys "Bubbly Jocks;" they all have long "wobbles," but some are longer than others, hence the saying that "every one has his bubbly jock," but some have bigger "wobbles" than others." We do not all get drunk, and the drunk man is a very unfortunate one, because his foible, which is perhaps his only one, is seen by everybody as he reels home on the street, for he can not walk straight, his legs will double up, and he seems to be possessed of the singular notion that he must get as near the ground as possible. The man who gives way to cursing and swearing is perhaps heard by others sometimes; but how many things that are wrong can he be guilty of that others never see? There is such a thing as being a hypocrite, and he who is guilty of hypocrisy, though a vile and contemptible sinner, may manage to conceal his sin from most people. I suppose that Scotland is about as holy a country as there is on the globe, that is professedly; but I have seen a man there brush his boy for brushing his boots on a Sunday morning, and come home at night drunk and then read to his children the longest chapter in Isaiah. "Come bairns, get down the Bible," and the Bible is brought and he puts on his spectacles and reads, or tries to read, and then kneels down to pray, drunk. I remember a circumstance which occurred in the Liverpool conference, of an elder named Davis being brought up before the Conference, because he shaved on a Sunday morning; and the people tiffled and tattled, and lied about and slandered that man behind his back, and committed a thousand times more sin by so doing than the man committed in shaving himself on Sunday morning. I might mention a great many things to show to you that it is not always the man who does not drink who can throw stones at the man who does. But the offense of the drunkard is public, and we look upon it with very great disgust. A man can lie, steal and swear and still retain his senses; but when a man gets drunk he is worse than a beast, for he places his agency in the hands of the devil, and he may make him take a knife and cut the throat of his best friend, and yet know nothing about it; and when brought to judgment for that crime the drunkard pleads non-accountability because he was drunk. A great many say that the drunkard only injures himself; but I deny that, and say that the father of a family who gets drunk not only injures himself, but also his wife and children. He brings a bad name upon them, and he often brings them to poverty and beggary. And you never yet saw a drunkard who was not a liar, for he will declare that he has only had one glass when he has perhaps had fifteen.

You may ask—"Is there any harm in taking a glass of beer?" I say no, if you can stop at the one glass; but I say that the man who must take a second glass in consequence of having taken the first ought not to take the first; and while it may be perfectly right to take one glass of beer, it certainly is not right to keep on drinking. There may be circumstances when it would be necessary to take a glass of whisky or brandy, but it is not necessary to keep on doing so. There are circumstances under which it is necessary to take a dose of salts and senna, but it would not do to keep on taking doses of salts and senna. An intellectual animal knows when to begin, and when to leave off. We profess to be at the top of the ladder intellectually, and we tell our wives that we are the lords of creation, and pretty lords of creation they see us sometimes, hence, my brethren and sisters, there may be a great many wrongs, known only to ourselves, which we can forsake, and so help on the reformation.

Says one—"It is not a reformation, or repentance of my sins that I am afraid of." Well, what are you afraid of? "I am afraid of the United Order; if it were not for the United Order I would willingly repent and be baptized." Just let me refresh your mind you, here, my brethren and sisters, that repentance must go before baptism. To simply be baptized in water, just to obey a commandment or to please somebody will be of very little consequence to you or to me. There must be reflection and there must be labor. We must labor with ourselves, and make up our minds that, by the aid of the Spirit of God, we will do better, be more faithful in doing God's will in the future than we have been in the past. Says one—"I am willing for the authorities of the church to control me and to have all the authority they want in spiritual things; but I am not willing that they should rule and dictate in temporal things." If, my brethren and sisters, the authority of the priesthood were to stop simply with spiritual things, the system with which we are connected would cease to be the Kingdom of God and the true gospel of Jesus Christ, because the gospel in its fulness not only cures spiritual salvation but temporal salvation also. In the old country people go round to the house of the poor with