

# Defeatism in the Church

Its Nature, Danger and Cure

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Webster: A defeatist, one who desires or who admits or proclaims before the fact, the defeat of his own country, party, movement, or the like, on the ground that the continuation of a contest is impossible or impractical or that a greater ultimate good may redound to the country, party, etc., from defeat rather than victory.

The appearance and spread, the symptoms and inner cause, the damage it does to the work of the church, and its cure—these are the objects of our disquisition.

## I.

First, then, let us admit that this harmful and strange attitude in the heart of the Christians has attacked the church and its workers in diverse ways and on many fronts. It needs no demonstration to show how this malady has permeated the councils, and has influenced the decisions, the subsequent actions of church leaders and workers, to whom the Lord has committed His labor in the kingdom of God. Our straitened finances, our restricted activities on our mission fields, the timorous proposals for further cutting short and crippling the work of our higher schools and seminaries, tell the tale of defeatism amongst us plainly enough. Nor is it a question of a few among us, or a flock here and there, or our synod only, but we see this timid caution spread over nearly all the church bodies around us. As these counsels multiply and threaten to undermine the whole usefulness of the church, it seems imperative upon us to study the source, the effects, and the cure of this defeatism amongst us from our only "lamp for our feet," the word of God.

Intensely practical and up-to-date as the Scripture is, we shall find there a rich treasury of enlightenment in these dark days, of strength for our weakness, and of the "balm of Gilead" for our healing. From the wealth of example in holy Writ that fit our description of a defeatist we cull but a few. The Old Testament is especially rich in these examples.

There is Esau. Here is one who cares very little for the privilege of being one of the first-born in the household of God. "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" Gen. 25, 32. What good is the birthright to me, if I cannot live, satisfy my hunger? asks Esau. This birthright is not worth fighting and dying for, let it go, the needs of my body come first. The church of God with its promises of salvation, with its close fellowship with the Savior, is not first with him. His heart and love are not set above all on this church and its purposes and needs. Here is your true defeatist, who deems the loss of spiritual food of little consequence as over against the winning of a bodily competence.

A whole people, the chosen race of God, His visible church on earth at the time, the people of Israel, suffered greatly from defeatism. There was at the very beginning in Egypt, after they had hailed Moses as the God-given savior to lead them out of the house of bondage, a clear example of this. When the demands of Moses upon Pharaoh, to let the people go, was met by still greater burdens and sufferings, the officers of the children of Israel met Moses and Aaron with these words: "The Lord look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savor to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us." Exod. 5, 21. It was the burden of the cross that they thought too great a price to pay for their promised freedom. They would rather admit defeat of all their fondest hopes, and advise no more fighting against their masters, than carry the burden of more labor and no straw given to produce the same tale of bricks. They accuse God and His servants of asking the impossible from them. Their troubles overwhelmed them. The

cringing fear in their heart, put there by their heathen task-masters, was stronger than their faith in the promises of a mighty Lord God their Savior. It is the cry re-echoed today: How can we go on with our labors in the Lord's vineyard, when we have not the outward means? There may be men enough and to spare, but where shall we get the money to send them forth and support them? Under the tyranny of the present-day conditions we place the Lord's work of salvation through the gospel upon the same level with worldly unemployment and say: There are too many laborers and too few jobs.

The people of Israel confronted by the Red Sea and pursued by the hosts of Pharaoh cry out: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Exod. 14, 11-12. They were sore afraid. What was there to fear from a broken reed like Pharaoh? Had they not seen the defeat of his powerful resistance to the Lord by His almighty power in the ten plagues? It is all forgotten as the foemen with their chariots and the wide sea with its waves seem to hold them prisoners. It is the great dread and fear before the many obstacles besetting the course of God's people to His promised land, the eyes glued on our difficulties and not lifted up to the Lord, who is with us and whose word has never yet been broken, that is the very essence of defeatism.

Later on, after this people had seen, not only the deliverance from Pharaoh's hosts and the raging wave by the mighty arm of the Lord, but after they had repeatedly experienced His power to save, had tasted the bread from heaven, had drunk at the gushing rock, had in fact come to the very door of the promised land, had sent out the twelve spies to spy out the land, this same defeatism is rampant again. The story is told in Num. 13, 26ff. This "committee of twelve" as some one has well said, could not agree on its report. The majority advised against going up against the people of Canaan, as the Lord had so plainly told them to do, because of the insuperable difficulties in the way. And upon this majority report the people of God, the church, acted, giving no heed at all to the minority, Joshua and Caleb. True defeatists, the ten discouraged the people, "And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature." Num. 13, 32. Not going forward, but going back, they advocated. And go back they did, defeated by the lack of faith in their craven hearts, back unto death in the wilderness under the sentence of a justly angered Lord.

But it may be said, this was and is a people that always resisted the Holy Spirit. What shall we then say to the case of Elijah, the prophet, mighty in deeds and zealous for the Lord. He had patiently borne the infliction of the drouth upon the land, had willingly emigrated to Zarephath to dwell with the widow, had returned and showed himself to his mighty arch-enemy, king Ahab, had come out victorious from a contest with the priests of Baal, whom he had slain, had heard the confession from the lips of his people: "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God," 1 Kings 18, 39. When next we behold him he is in full flight from Israel and its godless king, into Beer-sheba of Judah, and then into the wilderness—far away from his work and his people. He was weary unto death of his whole life and his life-work. "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." 1 Kings 19, 4. And at Horeb, whither the Lord sent him and came to him with the searching question, "What doest thou here Elijah?" note his despairing cry in answer: "I have been very jealous for the Lord of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." 1 Kings 19, 10. Elijah had effected a reform, as he thought. Now the church of God in Israel would again flourish. But instead he found himself under sentence of death by queen Jezebel. The people seemed apathetic. All his high efforts had been in vain—or so it seemed. He had suffered defeat and he accepted it. Things looked hopeless to him. Why strive any more in God's cause, when the obstacles were so great, the enemies so strong, the result so meagre? So we see that this insidious disease, defeatism, may easily overtake even the best and most courageous of fighters for the Lord.

One more example from the Old Testament. It is found in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 45. It is the case of Baruch, the son of Neriah, the writer who set down the prophecies of the Lord given to Jeremiah. Hear his complaint: "Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my

sighing, and I find no rest." Jer. 45, 3. Death and destruction were the burden of the Lord's words that Baruch had to write. The world was being turned upside down. How could a poor scribe of such hard sayings keep up his cheerful courage to go on. Israel heeded not the Lord's word, and the heathen knew not of it. Let us accept defeat, for nothing of any great moment can be accomplished any more. Obedience to the Lord in His work is useless. We shall hear later on how the Lord corrected and cured Baruch's defeatism.

In the New Testament Peter is a striking example of a defeatist. Here is a man thoroughly imbued with fervor for his Lord and His cause. He is the man of great pretensions, eager to confess his master before men, to obey His word of command to the uttermost, filled with a burning love for his Lord, ready to suffer all, yea, die with him. He would walk upon the water as his Master, upon His word. But how quickly does his daring and trust in the Lord turn to dastardly fear: "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." Matth. 14, 30. Fear of the great obstacles robbed Peter of his courage. How soon after his fine confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," does he not warn the Savior from entering upon his way of the cross, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." Matth. 16, v. 16 and 22. This is not the way to a great outward kingdom of God, to a world success of the Christ; it were better to give over at once, if this is to be the course of Christ's kingdom. It is the cross that Peter fears and does not understand.

No doubt Peter heard his Master utter that great parable of the talents. Did he take to heart that fine description of a defeatist given by the Lord of the church: "Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that thine is." Matth. 25, 24-25. This wicked and slothful servant is a perfect example of a defeatist in the work of the church. Why struggle and plan to win more for Christ, I have all that I need to be saved. No doubt Peter heard, but does that prevent him from denying his Lord and master for fear of a maid? Does this make him the courageous leader, who inspired his fellow disciples with firm faith, when they all were assembled behind locked doors for fear of the Jews? John 20, 19. Can resignation and acceptance of defeat be better described than in those few words of John 21, 2-3? All is lost, the Lord may be living, although it is hard to believe; we can be of no more service to Him, so let us go back to our old trade of fishermen. Is he not the same Peter whom St. Paul accuses of withdrawing from eating with the Christians from the Gentiles, "fearing them which were of the circumcision." Gal. 2, 12. What shall we say that even this same St. Paul, this doughty fighter and tireless worker for the Lord, must confess in his second letter to the Corinthians, ch. 7, 5: "For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."

These examples from Scripture may suffice to illustrate the spread and nature of what we have called defeatism.

## II.

We may learn from them that the real inwardness of this state of mind and heart is fear, despair or lack of faith. It may arise from a disregard of the gospel as in the case of Esau. It is generally found when great difficulties and dangers beset the church. Forgetting not merely the past benefits of the Lord, the defeatist has turned his eyes away from that Lord, mighty to save, sees the obstacles in the way of our duty imposed upon us by the Lord of the church, deems them insurmountable and gives up the battle for the Lord. Fear is a most enervating emotion. It is destructive of all sober judgment, of all well-directed action. It is the very heart of worry and care. In its essence it is lack of faith in the Lord and His promises.

This fear magnifies the ogres in the way. It is afraid to suffer for the Lord's sake. It inwardly reproaches the Lord for his leading us into so many difficulties. Not trusting the Lord's word, it dares not do the Master's will. It despairs of success because of the fewness of our number, as witness Elijah: "I, even I only am left."

One peculiarity of this despair and doubting of success, when simply obeying the Lord's commands, is that it afflicts those most active in His work. Moses gave way to it when he smote the rock at the waters of

Meribah with the words full of doubt, Num. 20, 10: "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?", or rather, according to the original, From this rock shall we bring water to you? It was this great man of God's one and only lapse from firm faith, yet enough to keep him from entering the promised land. Zealous and most active workers for the Lord, who incessantly labored for His cause, like Elijah, Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch, were not immune. The apostle Peter, only too eager and willing to do his Master's bidding, has his moments of deep doubt in and despair of his Master.

This weakness of faith attacks us all, because it is so deeply engrained in our sinful nature. So it is not in the spirit of blame that we discuss defeatism, but for the purpose of showing its symptoms, be warned of the damage it does to the body of Christ, His church, and take steps for its cure. We, whose "heart trembles for the ark of God", like Eli sitting in the gate, 1 Sam. 4, 13, conscious of our sins and weaknesses, are easily beset by the fear which is defeatism, that we deem all further fighting for the Lord useless, or at least restrict our efforts. When such weakness of faith is not immediately resisted but allowed to take full possession of our heart, it is but a result of losing sight of the gospel of salvation, which "in the Lord punishes by making us live in fear and trembling. It shall be with us as the Lord God threatened unto Israel: "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments ... I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror ... and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it ... and ye shall flee when none pursueth you." Levit. 26, 14-17.

For our warning and instruction were these things written, that our "first love be renewed and we repent and do the first works." Rev. 2, 4-5.

### III.

Defeatism is out of place in the church. And this for three reasons. First, the direction over the church; secondly, the very purpose of the church; and finally, the wonderful power of the church.

The church of God is under the direction and rule of its great king Jesus Christ. It is He that has founded it upon the rock of His confession, who has bought it dearly with His blood, who is its sole supreme dictator. This needs no further proof, but is only too often forgotten. We who have been laboring in the Lord's vineyard so long, not only speak of it as "our church," but we are very apt to look upon ourselves as the masters of the church. We believe that this church is in our hands, that its labors, successes, direction are our doings.

But it is not our church in any sense of the word, except that it is our place of labor. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the owner and planter of the vineyard, it is He that calls laborers into His vineyard, He sends His laborers to any part of His vineyard that He pleases, He sets them to work and He distributes the reward. And all this from pure grace and mercy. Witness the expression "**I send**" in so many Scripture passages where the messengers of God are appointed to their tasks. Thus to Moses: "I will send thee unto Pharaoh," Exod. 3, 10; to Isaiah: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Is. 6, 8; to Jeremiah: "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee," Jer. 1, 7; and Jeremiah himself: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city," Jer. 26, 12. The Son of God was sent by the Father into the world to prepare His kingdom and to rule over it. Thus He again sends His apostles, teachers, prophets. So in Matth. 10, 5: "These twelve Jesus sent forth"; "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," Ibid. v. 16; and again: "I will send them prophets and apostles," Luke 11, 49. In His authority as the Lord and Master of the church He commissions His disciples: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," John 20, 21. This is all summed up in that grand commission issued to His disciples everywhere, for all times, under all conditions, which we find in the last chapter of Matthew: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."

This leaves us with but one thing to do, and that is to obey. Obedience this gracious Lord and Master demands of us, that will He have. Ours not to reason, to debate, to doubt, to fear, to await more suitable time and opportunities. We have but one thing to do: Go, as ye are sent; Do, as ye are told. That is why defeatism has no place in the church of God.

The second reason why there is no room for a defeatist in Christ's church, is because His church is founded on earth to be a fighting church, an *ecclesia militans*. The message of the true church of Christ is the

gospel of salvation. This gospel is not only beyond the grasp of pure human reason since the fall, but it is for that very reason hated, despised, and opposed by the sinful world and by the old Adam. The church has to fight, indeed with no other weapon than the word of God, more especially the gospel. It has to fight to plant its small beginnings, to maintain itself against mighty enemies, the world, the flesh, the devil; to extend its borders and to perpetuate its existence. It is a bitter, a never-ending battle. There is no rest here, no easy times need be looked for. It is the very nature of the church, its characteristic feature, that it is an active church, a fighting church. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth," says the Master, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword." Matth. 10, 34. Always shall "the heathen rage, the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord, and against his anointed." But always it shall be: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." Ps. 2. Thus he who would rest on his arms, who is weary of the strife, who advises a truce with the enemy, is out of place in Christ's church. When our church fights no more, when it does not aggressively strive to extend its lines, it is then a dying church. It dies from dry rot within, and from palsy without. Unfaithful to its trust, disobedient to its Master, inept in the use of the sword of the Spirit, satisfied with its restricted lines, it soon loses not only the strength to maintain itself, but the Lord will remove from it the very weapons of its warfare, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A third and final reason why a defeatist cannot be at home in the church, is that Christ's church is a victorious church. Victory over its enemies, success in overcoming all obstacles, is inherent in the church. Our king and Savior, Jesus Christ was victorious over all His enemies. Sin, death and hell hath He trod under foot. His kingdom shall not be otherwise than victorious. It is: "Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Ps. 110, 2. The sceptre and rod of His rule may be only the despised gospel of salvation, but even so it shall be irresistible. "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." Ps. 45, 23. And again, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Is. 55, 11. God's kingdom shall persist on earth and it shall grow. For the King Himself is with us in His word and sacrament. There is room here for neither slacker nor obstructionist advising defeat.

For the harm done by the defeatist within the church to the work of the Lord is great. This weariness of spirit nearly prevented the escape of Israel out of its bondage, it hindered their joyful journey to Canaan, it stopped them at the very threshold of the promised land, and entailed untold suffering and death upon them. This weakness to which Moses gave way only momentarily, kept him from entering the land that he so ardently desired to see. Had not the Lord nipped it in the bud in Elijah the prophet, it would have seriously interfered with the Lord's work in Israel. Had Baruch persisted in it, the writing and promulgation of Jeremiah's prophecies would have been seriously hampered. Peter's hasty temper and easily kindled enthusiasm, followed by his being just as easily plunged into despairing fear, caused him untold misery and woe, nor did it further the plans of his Lord's salvation. The harm done to the people of God by disobedience to the express commands of God in not fearlessly proceeding against the enemies of the Lord, but rather giving way to their fears, choosing the easy way of submitting to their love of ease, is well stated in the 106th Psalm, v. 32-36: "They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips. They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them: But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them."

This passage is very instructive on the great harm done to the people of God by defeatism. It is characterized as a sin, the sin of disobedience, a sin which angered the Lord. The state of mind is this: We can do no more, we have done enough, we can find no rest, as Baruch complains, the needs and wants of the church are so never-ending, the pleas for more funds are so persistent, the debts are constantly growing, the mission fields consume so much man-power and money, that we are ready to take a long rest, to give way where we cannot help it, to give up what we cannot hold. This sin of ignoring the Lord's command to fearlessly go forth on our mission of preaching the gospel and gaining souls for the Lord's kingdom, of filling His house, bears most bitter fruit. First and foremost, it provokes the anger of the Lord, and how shall we answer Him? In the

second place, it provokes the spirit of the Lord's servants, His prophets, leaders, pastors, preachers and professors at the schools to "speak unadvisedly with their lips," to lose courage, to begin to doubt, as their self-sacrificing life of labor is made heavier by the lack of support, morally and financially, from their flock. It throws the burden of carrying on the work that the Lord has committed to the whole people on their shoulders alone, so that these proved and faithful servants like Moses, Elijah, Baruch are ready to sink under their load.

In the third place, this sin of defeatism, this readiness to give up, has most dire consequences upon the flock itself. Because Israel would not obey the Lord and drive out the heathens, Israel itself could not prosper. Israel was subdued by the heathen, not merely politically, but in their religion, as they learned to worship the heathen idols. Let no one believe that restricting our work, drawing back from our fields, seeking rest from gathering the means to carry on our work, will result in peace and prosperity to the church. That is reckoning without our enemies and the enemies of the Lord God. These do not rest. Led by the arch enemy, the devil, their main objective is always to destroy the people of God. Attacks from without are not nearly as dangerous as the weakening from within. This weakening from within is accomplished by introducing doubt in the power of our weapons, the word of the Spirit, thus hindering the aggressive fighting by the church. Then follows the introduction of errors in doctrine and the stealing of our faith. The process is simple. Beginning at our schools, the broad and solid founding in the saving knowledge given to our children is gradually abandoned. Then our higher schools cannot be supplied with pupils already well grounded in the faith. These colleges and seminaries of ours cannot then give the proper training to the future leaders of the church, its pastors, teachers, professors; as we observe in the inadequate training of the sectarian preachers. This lack of well trained men will make itself felt in all the work of the church. The present thoughtless complaint of overproduction will not then be heard, for we may then have an oversupply of undertrained men. May we never forget that it is a gracious gift of the Lord God to the church, that we have in their different offices pastors, teachers, professors. 1 Cor. 12, 28: "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." And Eph. 4, 11: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, etc." The wise and gracious Lord of His church knows better than we how many such gifts we need. If we make not use of these gifts in men, we shall deserve to be abandoned by the Lord God to false creeds and the loss of the gospel.

Thus defeatism defeats the carrying out of the will of the church's Master; it enervates its strength so that it cannot attain the church's purpose; it destroys the faith in the power and achievements of our Lord in His gospel over all His enemies.

#### IV.

And now for the cure. For the Lord God in His mercy has well supplied us with the remedy against this evil of defeatism. As defeatism is in its essence nothing more than weakness of faith or lack of faith, the cure lies in the strengthening of this faith. Everything in the kingdom of God, as far as we are concerned, depends upon faith. But our faith is kindled and kept alive by the word of God alone. It is the gospel of salvation that is the very breath of life for faith. Like a wise surgeon the Lord is often obliged to remove certain tumors and poisons by a swift application of the knife of the law in correction and reproof, before He can apply the healing of His glorious promises in the gospel. Thus to Moses at the Red Sea: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Exod. 14, 15. You have no right to fear. Go ye but forward, do as I the Lord God your Savior command you. Then follows His glorious promise of help in their present trouble. Dry-shod shall ye go through the waters, but your foes shall be swallowed up by them. "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honor upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen." He would not be the Lord God, not be the real Savior, He would be untrue to His name and to His honor, were He not to fight for His own. Thus, temporarily at least, this depression of spirit of God's chosen people was cured. The remedy had to be applied again and again.

Elijah's temporary lapse into defeatism was soon cured. The Lord's procedure was the same. "What doest thou here Elijah?" 1 Kings 19, 9. It was like a trumpet blast in the ears of the despondent prophet to arouse him from his spiritual torpor, to show him the fatal lengths to which his weakness had brought him. As his answer well shows, Elijah recognized this pertinent question of His Lord for what it was: A call to his neglected duty. The Lord must lay bare the wound with the knife of the law. Then, and then only does the Lord show this fiery prophet, that it is not our zeal, our high hopes for God's kingdom, our readiness to blame and condemn, but the "still small voice" of God's healing love and mercy, that has power to save, for the Lord is in neither strong wind, nor earthquake, nor fire. The still small voice assured Elijah that the Lord's work must go on: "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness," v. 15, and that this work is always blessed with success: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." v. 18. Thus is the great servant of God cured of his defeatism, and the Lord's work goes on, as it must.

And Baruch? See how neatly the great Physician lays his hand upon Baruch's real complaint. He had complained: "Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." Jerem. 45, 3. Baruch confesses to no fear, is not cognizant of a weakness of faith. The Lord goes straight to the point: "Behold, that which **I have built** will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou **great things** for thyself? seek them not." v. 4 ff. So that was it. Baruch had great plans for his people. He wanted them to be great and strong and mighty, so that they would be highly respectable and honorable in the sight of the world. And all this in the midst of a general wrack and ruin round about, wrought by the Lord Himself in righteous wrath and indignation against a people that had turned away from God. After this sharp incision to remove the inflated tumor of a false pride, does the Lord apply His wonderful healing word of comforting promise: "But thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest." v. 5. How many faithful servants of the Lord have not been uplifted from the slough of despond by these marvelously sweet words of comfort and security!

And thus is Peter healed. It is: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Matth. 14, 31. It is always first, O ye of little faith, fear not, before we hear the sweet assurance: Peace be unto you; first the rebuke and then the comforting words. It is thus that St. Paul is made whole in all his afflictions, even the buffetings of Satan: "My grace is sufficient to thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12, 9.

If we are to be healed from the prevalent weariness of spirit, that has gripped so many of us during these latter days of sore trials, we must submit to the wise ministrations of our great Healer Jesus the Christ. From the rich storehouse of His word He will gladly supply all that we need for our cure. We must submit to rebuke, His pointing out to us the sin of doubt and misbelief in His promises. Why are ye fearful, ye Lutheran Christians? Have I not revealed to you more fully than to others the gospel of salvation? Have I not given you so richly of teachers in the past, enlightened by my Spirit, so that they delivered to you the truths of salvation in brightest clearness? Have not I blessed your labors in this new land of opportunity, so that ye have become a mighty army? Has the arm of the Lord become shortened now, so that He cannot help us any more? Are not the same weapons for the Lord's warfare in your hands, that won so many battles for your forefathers? Is it not, that if ye lack now, it is because ye have lost your confidence in those weapons and in me, the Lord God? Let us hold still while the Lord wields His scalpel.

Truly, what can we answer? We know from Scripture that difficulties and perplexities such as these that beset us now were not merely the lot of all our brethren at all times, but that they are part and parcel of our calling, the outstanding characteristic of the church, as decreed by its Master. All the men of God from Adam to Jesus Christ bear witness to that. The true church is always *ecclesia pressa*, fighting under difficulties from within and without—but always fighting. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16, 33. We know from the examples in Scripture that so many of our troubles are caused by ourselves. We have not heeded the Lord's warning cries, we have loved the world, we have gloried in our own strength, we have been too self-confident, we have looked to the outward glory of the church and neglected its inner upbuilding. We have undertaken large ventures because we had plenty of money and the times were good, instead of expecting everything from the Lord and His gospel. We say it to our shame and in

contrite humiliation. But again, we know from the Scriptures, that even so, even though we be at fault, the Lord in His great goodness and truth and mercy has turned these very sins of ours into crosses for our spiritual discipline. Thus would He train us to look to Him and to Him only for guidance and help. He would bring us to repentance, so that He might bless us the more. The cure of our depression of spirit, our weariness, hopelessness, in short of our defeatism, can be wrought by the Lord only. But the remedy from the Lord is in our hands.

What is that remedy? It is the Word of God. "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4, 12. It is the "sword of the Spirit," Eph. 6, 17. We need to look to it that our "feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," v. 15. We need to understand more fully what St. Paul meant, when he so confidently asserts: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Rom. 1, 16. In short we need a more thorough appreciation of the gospel.

What is that appreciation? It is a dear and thorough understanding of the gospel, resulting in a lively faith and confidence in this gospel. A hearty perception of the wonderful nature of this revelation of God's immeasurable love, His immense grace. We need to be filled with that soul-filling wonder and astonishment at the supreme fact revealed in this word of mercy, that stupendous fact beyond all our grasp, even in but a small part, that God could so love this world, so loathsome to Him on account of its sin, that He gave His best and dearest, His only-begotten Son for us, that we might be saved from His wrath. We need a fuller understanding of the fact, that this gospel is the only message of salvation that the world has, that nothing else can save the world. We need to be imbued with a fuller sense of the power of the gospel. By the preaching of this word alone St. Paul filled all Asia with the knowledge of salvation. It is due to this imperishable gospel that the church of Christ has persisted to this day, in spite of all the efforts of her enemies to subdue it. The power of this gospel is the greatest power on earth today, as it always was, and always shall be. Thrones and principalities, kingdoms and republics have passed away, but this word still stands. Philosophies and all the worldly wisdom of men have arisen, have held proud sway, and have been cast aside like an old garment, but this wisdom of God has not changed one iota, and is just as new, just as up-to-date, just as adapted to the needs of men, just as powerful to kindle faith and win souls for Christ, as when it was proclaimed to Adam and Eve. That is what we need to realize. All the shifting powers of this present-day world, its isms and ologies, its evolutions and religions, its test tubes and microscopes, shall be superseded, become antiquated, and be cast aside, when this gospel shall still be the only saving power for men. The threatening attitude of these human powers, that are standing in the way of the true church and its gospel, can not really obstruct the march of the kingdom of God. We have in our hands in the gospel a power, that neither world, hell, nor the devil can withstand. It is in truth invincible. This gospel has power to heal all our diseases. Preached in truth and purity, it is a weapon of defense and offense against all foes. Let us rely on it solely and let us use it rightly.

The right use of this gospel is to study it, patiently, humbly, prayerfully, persistently. We must allow it to speak not merely to our eyes, in our ears, through our lips, but to our heart, so that our faith in Him who is our Peace may be firmly anchored in that word: He who alone can cure us from all our sins, including defeatism, is the Lord God; the means of that cure is the word of God. This word of God holds before our eyes the exhortations to faith, the comforting promises for faith to lay hold on, the outstanding examples of faith for us to follow. So rich is this word of God in His Bible, that we despair to bring before you even a select number of passages. From cover to cover this written revelation from heaven is filled with these exhortations, promises, examples. Let us content ourselves for our present purpose to cursorily glance at the twelfth chapter of the Hebrews.

The writer of this epistle had cited many outstanding examples of faith from the Old Testament, after he had given his fine definition of faith in v. 1, ch. 11: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. He portrays these faithful of the former times as witnesses to our faith, surrounding us as a cloud. The subject of this whole 12th chapter is the duty of faithfulness to Christ. The things surrounding



us are but impeding us in the performance of that duty, as a weight clogging our steps. It is the sin of losing sight of Christ. V. 1.

Therefore we are to look to Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith." For as Jesus has begun this faith in us, it is He alone that can so order, govern and give direction to our fight of faith, that it be finished, crowned, with glorious victory. v. 2. Him we are to consider, "lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." v. 3. Christ's example of patiently enduring the cross, despising the shame, to be "set down at the right hand of the throne of God," is to be the inspiring example for us, and His powerful strength is to be our help in reaching the goal of glory.

Our trials and difficulties are many and great. Granted. Yet are they not as heavy or hard as they might be. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." v. 4. Life and limb have not yet been jeopardized in our struggle for the gospel. There has been no real martyrdom. Of our monies for the church we have not given to the extent of hurting our fortunes. We have given, but rarely sacrificed in so giving. We gave of our abundance. We lacked neither food nor clothing through our giving to the church. We labored hard in the vineyard, but we have not risked our lives in the work. We have not counted every thing for dross, so that we might win Christ and for Christ. Indeed we complain much, but without reason. We have forgotten that these straitened circumstances of ours are a chastening from the Lord. v. 5-11. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as children." v. 5. We have only too often overlooked the fact, that being children of God, we must endure His chastening rod, that this chastening may seem a scourge to us, but yet it is only a proof of His love and of our sonship. In the prosecution of our labors for the Lord we must bear the cross for His sake, as He bore His from the Father for us. It is for our correction. We have indeed deserved it by our remissness in doing His work, and in our over-confidence in ourselves, When money was plentiful and times were what we foolishly called good. But the Lord's chastening now is not for our despair in His mercy or goodness. It is for "our profit, that we might be partakers of holiness." Not as an angry judge does the Lord visit us, but as a loving Father. Thus are we humbled in our own conceit, thus are we made dependent on Him alone, thus do we learn to call on Him more earnestly, thus are we drawn to Him more closely.

From all these examples of faith, from all these exhortations to faith, from all these promises for faith, let us be cured from all lack and weakness of faith, and thus from our defeatism. "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." V. 12-13. Instead of losing courage or discouraging one another, let us rather take courage to go on fearlessly in the Lord's work, so that the weary and the feeble and the lame amongst us be not left in that condition, but healed. Is it not written: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." Mal. 4, 2.

The effects of this healing from the Lord will appear in our church councils where we deliberate upon the mode of procedure in carrying on the work of the Lord. It will be a guiding light to our feet on the way, a strength to run the prescribed course. Let none fear that such encouragement tends to make us light-headed, reckless and overconfident in our decisions, without sober judgment as to the how and where and how far we are to go on our course to preach the gospel. Looking to the Lord only for help and strength will make us sober, vigilant, willing and strong to do what the Lord has so plainly set before us as our duty. Being cured from fear we shall be all the more faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and to His kingdom. Let us but act upon the plea of Hosea, ch. 6, 1: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." May the Lord give us grace to believe His gracious promise, as if it were an answer to our prayer, Isaiah 57, 18-19: "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him."