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Religious.

SOUL PROSPERITY.

(NOTES OF A SERMON BY C. H. SPURGEON.)

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."—3 John 2.

What a change the gospel made in John. He was one who could call fire from heaven on opposers, but now, having received the Holy Ghost, how full of love he is! He had been often with his Master, he had leaned on his bosom, and, like men who have lain upon beds of spices, he had the perfume of delight upon him. I do not say that grace will work so visibly in all—for some retain their natural temperament, only it is turned in a new channel—but sometimes the change is remarkably evident: the morose become cheerful; the gay, serious; the revengeful, loving. John, having experienced a change, we see love in him at all times, he is the mirror of love. Whether he receives penitent Peter, or writes to the churches, all is love.

A man's private letters often let you into the secrets of his heart. Read Rutherford's letters, and you see the man at once; or those of Kirke White, or Newton. A man's writing desk should be used to make his biography. Here we have one of John's private letters to Gaius, and it is a letter just like him: it has the portmark of charity on it; it is scented with love. Note, he calls himself simply "the elder." Great men can afford to stoop. He uses no proud title: humility is ever the sweet companion of love. In this letter he wishes Gaius every blessing, and commences with an earnest desire for his better health. Gaius, it would seem, was ill; like many of the Lord's favourites, he was sickly in body. Some of God's choicest plants are kept earthed up by troubles, but, blessed be his name, it whitens them and prepares them for his use. John desired that his friend might recover; and we are allowed, with submission to the Lord's will, to pray for our own health and that of our friends.

Health is an invaluable mercy, and, like every other, never properly valued till it is lost. But we notice that John puts soul prosperity side by side with it. Man has two parts: the one corporeal and earthy, the other immaterial and spiritual. How foolish is the man who thinks of his body and forgets his soul; prizes the vessel and despises the treasure; repairs the house, but allows the tenant to languish; keeps the garment whole, but neglects the wearer.

First, we will examine the words of our text more carefully; secondly, describe the symptoms of ill health of soul; thirdly, mention the means of recovery; fourthly, a practical exhortation.

I. THE TEXT.

"I wish," says John to his "beloved" brother. But the word wish is not strong enough to express the force of the original: the Greek word is generally interpreted, as the margin has it, "to pray." Prayer is a wish sanctified. A wish is but a chariot: prayer yokes couriers to it. Good wishes are bullocks: prayers are stamped money. Wishes are seeds: prayers are flowers. Let us plant our wishes in the garden of devotion, that they may blossom into fruit. "Above all things." Not that John desired bodily health above all things for his friend, but the phrase means "in all respects." Our wishes for temporal things should never get into the throne, but keep on the footstool. "That thou mayest prosper." This is one mercy he prays for, namely, prosperity. We may ask it for our friends, and especially if, like Gaius, they spend their substance in promoting the interests of religion. Some seem to suppose that religion makes men haters of their kind—no such thing: I can most sincerely pray for you all that you may prosper, and have what you require of worldly goods. "And be in health." This second mercy requires no remark: it is a necessary ingredient in the cup if we are to enjoy prosperity. But, my friends, I am startled at the closing thought. I am sure Gaius was a wonderful man—very unlike some of you. Why, look again: can you believe it? John wishes to have his spiritual health made the standard of his natural prosperity. Suppose I were to kneel down in my pulpit and ask

God to make your bodies, in point of health, just like your souls. Suppose he should grant the petition. Half of you would drop down dead, for you have no spiritual life at all; you are dead in sin: this chapel would be a charnel house of corruption and death. Then as for those of you who have spiritual life, I would be afraid to pray this prayer for you. Many of you would begin to shake with cold, and I am afraid some of you would be in a decline, if not in rapid consumption. Shall I pray the prayer? then some of you would become weak in the knee, your hand would be palsied, and your eyes dim. How many would have their hearts affected? and I fear none of us would be entirely free from sickness. Oh! bless God that the body is not the index of the soul. But still, if the picture be horrible if we cannot endure a large house of sick bodies, what must an hospital of sick and dead souls be; if we could only see within! The spiritual anatomist ought, however, to look beneath the surface, and penetrate between the joints and marrow of the soul. May God help us to deal honestly with ourselves. And this brings us to—

II. SYMPTOMS OF ILL HEALTH. These are many: I shall not have time to mention the most prominent.

Lukewarmness. This is mentioned by our Lord to Laodicea as a very dangerous symptom. A man lukewarm in business or politics will make but little way, but a man lukewarm in religion is worst of all. Do we not see this often the case? The place may be full or empty, what cares this man? Sinners may be converted or not, he does not mind, or, at any rate, he never bestirs himself to win souls himself. His prayers at the prayer meeting, if he ever comes, are as cold as marble; his words seem to have been packed in ice. His neighbors he cares more about than Cain, who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Or perhaps he is a man of a little better stamp—he does give, he likes to see the cause go on; but still he is not heart and soul in it. As for the truth, he does not care whether his minister be heterodox or orthodox; he does not trouble himself much; he is cold: he leaves his heart in his shop, puts his soul in his cash box, and brings us the empty chrysalis of what ought to have been a heart. This is bad. If the man be a true son of God he will be healed before death overtake him, but be careful—it may be he is a mere professor.

2. A narrow mind. This is from a common. While some run into one extreme, and think no one doctrine truer than another, and are latitudinarians, others run to the other pole, and call all men reprobates but their own little selves and the sect they belong to. Be sure that if you do not love the brethren something is out of order. If you kill all who cannot say Shibboleth, you will have to put many of the Lord's little ones to death. I love baptism and the doctrines of grace, but I do not wish to look with a frown on all who differ from me. Cheever talks of putting his things into a spring box, and then putting the key inside and shutting it. So some men try to put all truth, and the key too, into their own heads; but if you have a chest as large as St. Paul's, you will not know how to put all truth in it. Love the brethren, love ALL the brethren, but if not, be sure all is not healthy within.

3. A bad appetite—by which I mean a want of desire for the word. Some say, "I cannot bear;" they go elsewhere while the place is crowded; they hear a little while, but soon the rolling stone has another turn, and they cannot hear again, while some good souls think it marrow and fatness. Let the minister utter one opinion they cannot agree with, they could not enjoy the sermon. Ah, you require some bark from the tree of affliction, or a draught of Jeremiah's wormwood! You think it wisdom, but it is a disease—you are out of order.

4. A forsaken closet. This is the cause as well as the chief symptom of all ills to the soul. Oh! if the beam out of the wall testify against thee; if the mouldy air tells that thou hast seldom opened the door; if few angels ascend the ladder to heaven—then thou art sick indeed. Boast not of thy activity and zeal, I tell thee thou art sick if thy closet be unvisited. O critic, turn thine eye on thyself! thou hast often dragged the church like a bull to the altar, and driven thy knife into

her flesh: stay thy fury; turn it on thyself.—Thou lovest to lash Christendom as if she were a colossal culprit, and thou redest off thoughtfully after thoughtfully of her quivering flesh; now, spare her moans, till thou hast purged thine own beams: let thy reformatory begin at home, and that thou mayest be recovered, hear the

III. MEANS OF RECOVERY.

I speak not now of the means God uses, though he is the great Physician. I know he cuts away the suckers, and prunes the superfluous branches from trees of his garden, but I speak of a regimen we may use ourselves. May the Lord help you to practise it.

1. Seek good food. Hear a gospel preacher and search the Bible. Many diseases arise from insufficient or unwholesome food. Live on the finest of the wheat: eat ye that which is good.

2. Breathe freely. Let not prayer be restrained. Inhale the air of heaven by fervent supplication, and breathe it out again in grateful songs. Open the closet of prayer; climb up to the throne and live.

3. Exercise thyself unto godliness. Labour for God. Fold not thine hands in apathy, but be up and doing while it is called to-day. This will circulate thy blood, and warm thee if cold.

4. If these things fail, I will give you a good old prescription, and as it must be in Latin it shall be "*carnis et sanguinis Christi*," taken several times a day in a draught of the tears of repentance. Those who have tried this declare that it cannot fail: it is health to the spirit and marrow to the bones.

God the Holy Ghost helping you to practise the rules of the heavenly Physician, you will soon become fat and flourishing in the courts of the Lord. Turn to the old book called the Bible, and see what is the path of rectitude, for be sure that is the way of safety.

IV. I would conclude, if the Lord enable me, with an exhortation.

O my brother Christian, is it a small matter to be weak and feeble? Amid all thy contests thou wilt need all the vigor thou canst gain. Wilt thou let thy heart be untended, thine infirmities unregarded? Surely no. Wilt thou not go to Calvary with weeping, and cry to him who giveth more grace.

And now, sinner, a word with thee. I also am a man as thou art; suffer me to address thee lovingly. Thou art dead—I insult thee not—thou art dead in sin, and thou knowest it not; but the dead are ever senseless. Thou art dead, and dost thou think there will be corpses in heaven? In Egypt we are told they sometimes eat a skeleton at a feast, to remind the guests of death; but there shall be none such in heaven. It is the land of life. Thou canst not enter there: thou wilt be cast out as worthless carrion, to be fed on by the worm that never dies. Yet hear me. There is life in Christ: there is balm in Gilead. May God help thee now to seek it of him who gives freely to all applicants. Help, O Lord.

THE FIRST BAPTIST.

THE NAME.

Baptists have seldom if ever been permitted to name themselves.

The first Baptist did not so name himself. He was not so named by his parents. The prophets who foretold his coming did not say that he should be known as a Baptist. The angel who appeared to his parents intimated nothing of the kind. Jehovah who "sent him to preach and to baptize" gave him his mission and his baptism but not the name. The name was given to him by the people who heard him preach and saw him baptize.

Had he sprinkled his converts they would not have called him a Baptist.

The common people know and they always have known that those who sprinkle do not baptize according to the Scriptures, and that those who are sprinkled are not baptized. Hence from the days of John the Baptist until now, no one who has sprinkled his converts has been called a Baptist.

When the people had all come to know and so speak of John as "the Baptist," then, and not until then did Jesus and the Evangelists speak of him as "John the Baptist." They were not particular as to the name so long as

the faith and the practice were right. When they could go with the people and not surrender the faith or leave "the way of righteousness" they would do so. The same has always been true of Baptists.

As the first Baptist was named by others, so was his Master and so have been his successors. They called the Master a "Galilean," a "Nazarene," a "devil," and having called the Master of the house Beelzebub they have not been disposed to call by softer names, those of his baptized household.

But as no name or names made Jesus the one that he was, and no changing of his name could in any way change him or make him other than what he was, and as the name Baptist had nothing to do with making John the one that he was, and no changing of his name would have changed him or made his preaching and his baptism other than what they were, so the name Baptist has had nothing to do with making the churches of baptized believers and their ministers, the people that they are.

For eighteen centuries they have had no power at all except as it has been given them from above.

Helpless in the hands of their enemies, pursued and punished by ecclesiastical and civil powers, and by these united, they have had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments. They have wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, known by such names as in derision their enemies were disposed to give them. In the estimation of their enemies, they all came out of Nazareth from whence no good thing could come.—"And an immersion in fire was a fit baptism for the whole of them."

The cities and places where they have lived; the mountains and valleys to which they have fled, the names of their leaders, the declarations of their faith, and their devotion to the Ordinances as delivered to them, have furnished to their enemies as many different names with which to brand them. To all of which they have submitted, but all of which has failed to change either their faith or their baptism. They exist now, as they did in the days of the Apostles, in congregations or churches of baptized believers worshipping and working together in the Lord, receiving into their membership and fellowship only such as believe and are baptized.

Whenever these churches of baptized believers have lived and worshipped, and by whatever name they may have been known, they have at all times and in all places had the "One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism."

In their first existence as "a people" made ready and "prepared for the Lord," they were known as "John's disciples." The same persons, were they now living with John the Baptist for their minister, would be called Baptists. When Jesus came and received them as a people prepared for him, they were known as his disciples. Afterwards they were called Christians after the name of their Master, Christ, but all this time they were the same baptized believers.

They were not different persons or a different people because known by different names. Nor have the names given to their successors changed them.

There has never been a time when a remnant of this people have not remained in the faith, who have not bowed the knee to the Baal of Infant Baptism. And never was the number greater than at the present time. In Church History they are little known, as their enemies have often burned up and destroyed their records.

But they are not "without beginning of days."

They have Scripture record in which they antedate all existing church organizations, the Roman Catholic included, and they should be preferred by all "for they were before them."—Macedonian.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION.—"The happiest conversation," says Dr. Johnson, "is that of which nothing is distinctly remembered but a general effect of pleasing impression."

Whether God chose you to labor or suffer, you have no reason to complain; especially if he is leading you to glory.