

GAIUS, A PROSPEROUS SOUL

Principles on Christian Prosperity

taken from

3 John



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“Beloved, I pray above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth,” 3 John 2.

This particular epistle has no special teaching or doctrinal statement of any kind. It is the outpouring of the Christian love the old apostle had to a brother about whom we know nothing except that John, the beloved, loved him in the Truth, an ordinary believer in the Truth. It is literally “to prosper, thou mayest prosper.” This is a prayer (EUCHOMAI), for it is a prayer rather than a mere wish, since a Christian turns all his wishes into prayers, and this prayer in the original is even more emphatic and beautiful than it is in our version.

“Beloved, I pray that in all things thou to prosper mayest prosper, and be in health, even as prospers thy soul.” That slight change in the position of the clause is at once felt to be an improvement. We can scarcely suppose an apostle praying for anybody, “above all things,” PERI (concerning), that he might get on in the world. But the wish that Gaius may prosper outward to all things, as his soul prospers, is eminently worthy of John. He sets these two types of prosperity over against one another.

FIRST, NOTE WHAT MAKES A PROSPEROUS SOUL?

That question might be answered in a great variety of ways, but I will answer it by confining myself to this epistle, and seeing what we can find out about the man to whom it was addressed.

3 John 3, “I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren, came and testified of the Truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the Truth.” There is the starting point of **the true health of the soul**. That soul, and only that soul, is prosperous in which, what the apostle calls here, “the Truth,” is lodged and rooted, and “by the Truth.” He means of course, the whole great revelation of God in

Jesus Christ, and eminently Jesus Christ Himself who is the embodied Truth. “I am the Truth.” “Thy Word is Truth.”

Whether we take the phrase as meaning the bidding of Jesus Christ in the soul, or whether we take it as meaning more simply the incorporation into the very substance of the being, of the motives and principles that lie in the Gospel, comes to pretty much the same thing: the Truth of salvation, and the Truth of the Word as Christians. “Walk in Truth,” is the Christian way of life. Here we have the Living Word and the Written Word.

The one thing that makes a man’s soul healthy, is to get Jesus Christ, the Word, into it. That acts like an amulet that banishes all diseases and corruptions. That is like the preserving salt which, rubbed into perishable substance, arrests corruption and makes food sweet and savory, i.e., salt, light.

It is the engrafted Word that is able to save the soul, and howsoever many other things may contribute to the inner well being and prosperity of a man, such as intellectual acquirements, refined tastes, the gratification of pure affections, the fulfillment of innocent and legitimate hopes, and the like, the one thing that makes the soul prosperous is to have Jesus Christ, in His Word, deeply planted and inseparably enshrined in its personality and being... “Rooted and grounded in the Word.”

How is that enshrining to be brought about? Well, we all know it a great deal better than we practice it. The prosperous soul is the soul that has opened itself in docile obedience for the entrance of the quickening and cleansing Word, i.e., “Doers of the Word.” And just as a flower will open its calyx in the sunshine, and being opened by the sunshine, playing upon its elastic filaments, will because it is opened, receive into itself the sun that opened it and so grow. “Grow in GRACE by the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

In like manner, that soul that displays itself at the touch of Christ's hand, and welcomes Him into the inner chambers and shrine of its being, will find that where He comes, He brings warmth and fragrance and growth and all blessing. That's Christ at home in our hearts, fellowship with Christ.

THE PROSPEROUS SOUL IS THE CHRIST-INHABITED SOUL.

By willing reception, by patient waiting, by the study of God's Word, by the endeavor to bring ourselves more and more under the influence of the Truth, as it is in Jesus Christ, does that Truth that makes prosperity take up its abode within us.

But this epistle gives us another of the characteristics of the truly prosperous and healthy soul. "Thy brethren came and testified of the Truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the Truth." The apostle is not afraid of a confusion of metaphors which shocks sticklers for rhetorical propriety. The Truth is, first of all, regarded as being in the man, and then it is regarded as being a road on which, and within the limits of which he walks, of an atmosphere in which he moves (Divine norms and standards).

The incongruity is no real incongruity, but it strikingly brings out the great and blessed fact of the Gospel that the man who has the GRACE of God, the Truth as it is in Jesus Christ, within him, thereby finds that there is prepared for him a path within the limits of that Truth in which he can safely walk. **There will be progress if there be prosperity.** "Thy Word was a light into my feet."

The prosperous spirit is the active and advancing spirit, not content merely with sitting and saying "I have the Truth in my soul." Not just taking in the Word, but applying it. "Thy Word have I treasured in my soul that I may not sin against Thee." Recognizing that Truth is the law of his life, and prescribes for him a course of conduct, walking in the Truth, walking in the Spirit, worthy of your vocation, walk in love.

The prosperous soul is the soul that confines its activity within the fence which, the Truth as it is in Jesus, who is the pattern, and the motive, and the law, and the power, has laid down for us, and within those limits makes daily and hourly advance to a more entire conformity with the example of the Lord. Blessed is the Lord. Happiness breeds happiness.

THE PROSPEROUS SOUL IS THE SOUL THAT WALKS.

Not that sits idle. For action is the end of thought, and the purpose of the Truth, is to make men gracious and not merely wise, a soul that acts and advances, yet never passing out of the atmosphere is the Truth, nor going beyond the principles and motives that are laid down there.

This is having the Truth by means of taking it in daily and walking in it, using it as a norm or standard of life. Living and walking in the Divine Viewpoint. This is the Christian putting on the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, their loins girded with the Truth, and their feet shod with the Gospel of peace.

There is a third characteristic in this epistle, which we may also take for an illustration of the apostle's idea. For he says, 3 John 5, "Beloved thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren and to strangers." Now "faithfully" is not used here in the sense of righteously discharging all obligation and fulfilling one's stewardship, but it means something deeper than that. The root idea, is "whatever thou doest thou doest as a work of Christian faith," or to put it into other words, the prosperous soul is the soul whose activity is all based upon that one great Truth, made its own by faith, that Jesus Christ lives it, and so is all the result of trust in Him.

Faith in Christ is the mother tincture out of which every virtue can be compounded, according to the liquid which you add to it. The basis of all, the stock from which all the best is really made, is the act of faith in Jesus Christ. "The just shall live by faith."

And so the prosperous soul is the soul that has the Truth in it, and walks in the Truth which it has, and does everything because it trusts in the living God and in Jesus Christ, His Son. This is derived from faith in the Word, and applying it, i.e., wisdom.

Now is that your notion of the ideal of human nature, of the true and noble prosperity of an immortal spirit? Unless it is, you have yet to learn the loftiest elevation and the fairest beauty that are possible for men. **The prosperous soul filled with Jesus Christ, and walking with Christ by its side,** and drawing laws and motives, pattern and power from Him, is the soul that truly has fulfilled its ideal, and is journeying on the right road. For that is the literal meaning of the word that is rendered here, "prosper," journeying on the right road to the true goal of human nature.

Secondly, look at the wished for correspondence between this soul prosperity and outward prosperity. "Beloved," says John, "I wish above all things, or rather, I wish that in regard to all things, thou mayest prosper and be in health as the soul prospereth." **How would you like that standard applied to your worldly prosperity? Would you like not to get on any better in business than you do in Christianity?** Would you be content that your limbs should be no more healthy than your soul, or that you should be making no more advances in worldly happiness and material prosperity than you are in the Divine life? Would you be content to have your worldly prosperity doled out to you out of the same spoon, of the same dimensions, with which you are content to receive your spiritual prosperity?

"AS THY SOUL PROSPERS."

That is the guide line, that is the scale, that is the measuring stick, that is the norm or standard. "As thy soul prospers," that would mean a very Lenten diet for a good many of us, and a very near approach to insolvency for some commercial men, their scale of values. How does your soul pros-

per? Are you considered a baby, young man, or father? Check it out, beloved.

There in a sharp test in these words. I imagine that Gaius, to whom this letter was written, was very likely in humble circumstances, and not improbably in enfeebled health. John was probably wishing for him more than he had, when he wished him to get on so well in the world as he did in his spiritual life and desired that his soul might prosper as much as his body. It would be a bad thing for some of us if the same standard of proportion was applied to us.

Now another consideration is suggested by this correspondence, and that is that it is always a disastrous thing for Christians when outward prosperity gets ahead of inward prosperity. It is the ruin of a good many so-called Christians. When a man gets on in the world, he begins too often to decline in the Truth. He spends more time making money than he does treasuring the Word. "Where a man's mind is there is his treasure also." It is difficult for us to carry a full cup without spilling it.

The worst thing that happens to many Christians is that they fret and fume, and work themselves into a fever, and live careful days and sleepless nights in order to secure, and that is outward prosperity. The best thing is that the soul should be more prosperous than the body, and the worst adversity is the outward prosperity that ruins or harms the inward life. **Poor in body, rich in soul, not rich in body and poor in soul.** "Being poor, I see your poverty and yet you have everything."

Third, note the superiority of the inward prosperity. There is no overrestrained spiritualism here. John has set us an example that we need not be afraid to follow. If he that leaned upon Christ, and had drunk in more of the Spirit of the Lord than any of the 12, was not afraid to pray for this Christian, Gaius, that he might have worldly goods and health, we need not doubt that for ourselves and for those that are dear to us. It is perfectly legitimate and right that we should desire and pray for both things.

There is no unnatural, artificial, hypocritical pretense of despising the present and outward in the words here.

Although the apostle does not put the two things side by side, he does not fall into the error of casting contempt upon either. He is a true disciple of the Lord who said, “Your father knoweth that ye have need of these things.” If your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things, then you may be quite sure that you will get them. It is a lie to pretend that you do not want them when you do.

Then that being admitted, look how the higher towers above the legitimate lower. It will always be the care that if a man “Seeks first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness,” there will be, in his simple devotion to the Truth and walking within the limits that it prescribes, and making all his life an act of faith, a direct tendency in a great many directions to secure the best possible use, and the largest possible enjoyment from the things that are seen and temporal.

Godliness hath promise of the life which now is. The first Psalm which perhaps may have been in the apostle’s mind, here contains a truth that was not exhausted in the Old Testament days, because “The man whose heart is set on the Law of God, and who meditates upon the Law day and night, all that he doeth shall prosper.”

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law doth he meditate day and night, and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

Joshua said, if we “mediate in the Word day and night, neither turning to the right hand, or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.”

There is in godliness a distinct and constant tendency to make the best of both worlds. **But the best is not made of the present world unless we subordinate it and feel distinctly its insignificance in comparison with the future, which is also the of present, and unseen world.** And even when, as is often the case, the devout and inwardly prosperous soul is compassed about with sorrows that never can be stanchd, with griefs through which anything but an immortal life would bleed itself away or with poverty and want and anxiety arising from causes which no personal devotion can ever touch or affect, even then if the soul prospers it has the power, the magic power, of converting poison into good, and sorrow into a means of growth.

And they whose spirits are joined to Jesus Christ, and whose souls ever move in harmony with the Lord, and therefore are prosperous souls, will find that there is nothing in this world that is really adverse to them, for “All things work together for good to them that love God.” Since he who loves God thinks nothing bad that helps him to love him better, since he who loves God finds occasion for living and trusting Him more in every variety and vicissitude of earthly fortune.

Therefore, if we follow the directions that the apostle gives us as to how to secure the prosperity of our souls, God is faithful and He will measure to us prosperity in regard to outward things, by the proportion which our faith in Him bears to His faithfulness. The more we love Him, the more certainly will all things be our servants. If we can say we are Christ’s, then all things are ours. The prosperous soul gives capacity for the details of life. Walk in Truth!

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