

To Prosper and be in health

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

We can learn from this that it is acceptable for us to pray for temporal blessings—and that, among all temporal blessings, health is the most valuable and necessary.

But is outward prosperity the chief good? What does he mean by “above all things”? Gaius had already received grace, and a high degree of it. This “above all” then is that he should have health to enjoy it —“even as his soul prospered.”

But especially notice how John makes his soul’s prosperity the standard and rule for his prayer for other things. For many, this prayer would ruin them, for their souls do not prosper. If they were to prosper in temporal things as they do in spiritual, they would become the poorest on earth; for they are strangers to anything like true riches. If their bodies were as healthful as their souls, they would need a hospital: they would be blind, for they have no spiritual understanding, and deaf, for they never hear the voice of God. They would be dead, for the Spirit of the living God is not in them.

We must remember, however, that unless our spiritual life develops alongside our outward good, our outward prosperity becomes a danger to our spiritual life. We are not afraid when we see Christians succeeding in life, as long as they are growing in grace at the same time.

But the danger is that there is too much temporal prosperity and not enough grace to stabilise them—so much sail and so little ballast. What can be more awful than to see those whose minds are too much on earthly things? They continually prosper, but they lack the fruit of the Spirit in temperance, and continually grow in pride.

If our prosperity does not awaken moral hesitations, and if we can feast ourselves without fear, then our prosperity has become a snare, and that which was intended for our good has become a

trap, for the prosperity of fools destroys them.

Let us therefore examine our wishes. Let us regulate them with grace. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Let us ask for no more of temporal things than we can bear—ever praying for our friends and ourselves, that we may prosper and be in health even as our souls prosper.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 8, Morning), first published in 1854.