

As Thy Soul Prospereth

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

Summary:

John's prayer for Gaius demonstrates that believers can ask God for temporal blessings like prosperity and health, while always acknowledging that the well-being of the soul is the highest priority. Gaius's spiritual growth served as the benchmark for the outward blessings John hoped for him. Material success can be risky if it surpasses spiritual growth, similar to how a ship with excessive sail and little ballast becomes unstable. Therefore, Christians should reflect on their desires, prioritize seeking God's kingdom, and ask only for what they can safely handle.

Outline:

1. Prayer for temporal blessings

- It is lawful to seek health and outward provision from God.

2. The soul is the greater concern

- Spiritual life must be secured before temporal prosperity can be safely enjoyed.

3. The measure of outward prosperity

- John desires Gaius's circumstances to prosper only as his soul prospers.

4. The danger of unbalanced success

- Outward abundance without growing grace may become a snare and destroy its possessor.

5. The regulation of Christian desire

- Believers should seek God's kingdom first and request only what they can faithfully bear.

Text

It has been assumed that Gaius had a weak and sickly constitution. This is likely; however, it does not necessarily mean that John wanted him to remain or become more ill, as he might have desired both the preservation and improvement of his health.

Nonetheless, his language indicates that it is acceptable for us to pray for worldly blessings, especially health, which he considers the most valuable and essential. Yet, is outward prosperity— or even health itself—the greatest good that John desires his friend to have above everything else?

Some interpret it as, “I wish above all persons,” while others see it as, “I wish in all respects,” indicating that thou mayest prosper and be in health. There is no need for criticism here; Gaius already possessed grace and a high degree of it. Once this essential grace was secured, the most important thing was for him to have health to enjoy and develop it—just as his soul prospered.

John also considers his soul's prosperity as the primary basis and guide for his prayers for other matters. This would be a dangerous principle for many, as answered prayers based on this rule could lead to their downfall.

Yes, if they succeed in worldly matters as they do in spiritual ones, they would become the most miserable and contemptible people on earth, since they are unfamiliar with true riches.

However, this appears to be the only reliable rule. Unless religion advances alongside our outer good, our safety and well-being could be at risk. We feel unafraid when we observe Christians thriving in life, provided they are also increasing in grace.

The danger arises when there is an excess of sail and insufficient ballast. It is truly dire to witness those who are overly concerned with worldly affairs thriving; to see those with a taste for earthly pride enjoying wealth and splendour; and to observe indulged individuals who cannot restrain their desires.

If our abundance and delicacies do not cause us moral concerns, and we can indulge without fear, then our tables may turn into traps, transforming what was meant for our benefit into a snare. The success of fools leads to their downfall; similarly, prosperity for the unwise harms them.

Therefore, let us consider our desires carefully. Let us align them with piety. Our priority should be to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness.

Let us demand no more from others than we can handle—continually praying for our friends and ourselves, that we may succeed and be in good health, just as our souls prosper.

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