

# SERMONS

ON

IMPORTANT SUBJECTS;

BY THE

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LATE OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, AND CHAPLAIN TO  
THE RIGHT HON. THE COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON.

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,  
BY SAMUEL DREW, A. M.

AND A

DISSERTATION ON HIS CHARACTER, PREACHING, &c.  
BY THE REV. JOSEPH SMITH.

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## SERMON LX.

### SOUL PROSPERITY.

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

WHAT a horrid blunder has one of the famous, or rather infamous, deistical writers made, when he says, that the gospel cannot be of God, because there is no such thing as friendship mentioned in it. Surely if he ever read the gospel, “having eyes he saw not, having ears he heard not;” but I believe the chief reason is, his heart being waxen gross, he could not understand; for this is so far from being the case, that the world never yet saw such a specimen of steady and disinterested friendship, as was displayed in the life, example, and conduct of Jesus of Nazareth.

John, the writer of this epistle, had the honour of leaning on his bosom, and of being called, by way of emphasis, “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and that very disciple, which is very remarkable concerning him, though he was one of those whom the Lord himself named sons of thunder, Mark iv. 17, and was so suddenly, as bishop Hall observes, turned into a son of lightning, that he would have called down fire from heaven to consume his Master’s enemies; consequently, though he was of a naturally fiery temper, yet the change in his heart was so remarkable, that if a judgment may be formed by his writings, he seems as full of love, if not fuller, than any of his fellow-apostles. He learned pity and benevolence of the Father of mercies: and to show how Christian friendship is to be cultivated, he not only wrote letters to churches in general, even to those he never saw in the flesh, but private letters to particular saints, friends to whom he was attached, and wealthy rich friends, whom God had, by his Spirit, raised up to be helpers of the distressed. Happy would it be for us, if we could all learn that simplicity of heart which is displayed in these particular Words; happy if we could learn this one rule, never to write a letter without something of Jesus Christ in it; for, as Mr Henry observes, if we are to answer for idle words, much more for idle letters; and if God has given us our pens, especially if he has given us “the pen of a ready writer,” it will be happy if we can improve our literary correspondence for his glory and one another’s good. But what an unfashionable style, if compared to our modern ones, is that of the apostle to Gaius. The superscription “From the Elder, to the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth;” there is fine language for you! Many who call themselves Christ’s disciples would be ashamed to write so now. ‘I send this, and that, and the other; I send my compliments.’ Observe what he

styles himself, not as the pope;\* but he styles himself the elder. A judicious expositor is of opinion, that all the other apostles were dead, and only poor John left behind. I remember a remark of his, 'the taller we grow, the lower we shall stoop.' The apostle puts himself upon a level with the common elders of a church, that he might not seem to take state upon him, not to rule as a lion, but with a rod of love; "the elder to the well-beloved Gaius, whom I serve in the truth." This Gaius seems to be, in our modern language, what we call a gentleman, particularly remarkable for his hospitality, "Gaius mine host;" and this Gaius was well-beloved, not only beloved, but well-beloved; that is, one whom I greatly esteem and am fond of; but then he shows us likewise upon what this fondness is founded, "whom I love in the truth." There are a great many people in writing say, 'dear sir,' or 'good sir,' and subscribe 'your humble servant, sir;' and not one word of truth either in the beginning or end; but John and Gaius' love was in truth, not only in words, "but in deed and in truth;" as if he had said, my heart goes along with my hand while I am writing, and it gives me pleasure in such a correspondence as this, or "whom I love for the truth's sake," that is, whom I love for being particularly attached to the truth; and then our friendship has a proper foundation, when the love of God, and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, is the basis and bond of it. One would think this was enough now; the epistles originally were not divided into verses as now, that people may the better find out particular places, though perhaps not altogether so properly as they might. The apostle's saying beloved, is not needless tautology, but proves the strength of his affection; "I wish that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." Gaius, it seems, at this time felt a weak constitution, or a bad habit of body; this may show, that the most useful persons, the choicest favourites of heaven, must not expect to be without the common infirmities of the human frame; so far from this, that it is often found that a thousand useful Christians have weakly constitutions. That great and sweet singer of Israel, Dr. Watts, I remember, about two and thirty years ago told me that he had got no sleep for three months, but what was procured by the most exquisite art of the most eminent physicians; and, my dear hearers, none but those that have such habits of body can sympathize with those that are under them. When we are in high spirits we think people might do if they would, but when brought down ourselves we cannot; but notwithstanding his body was in this condition, his soul prospered so eminently, so very eminently, that the apostle could not think it a greater mercy, or the church a greater blessing, than that his bodily health might be as vigorous as the health of his soul. I remember

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\* Whether Universal Bishop, or Vicar of Christ, Supreme Head, Lord or Governor of the world, or a more blasphemous title, is uncertain, the writer not hearing distinctly the Latin words in which it was expressed.

the great colonel Gardiner, who had the honour of being killed in his country's cause, closes one of his last letters to me, with wishing I might enjoy a thriving soul in a healthy body; but this is peculiar to the followers of Jesus, they find the soul prospers most when the body is worst; and observe, he wishes him a prospering body above all things, that he might have joy and health with a prosperous soul; for if we have a good heart, and good health at the same, and our hearts are alive to God, we go on with a fresh gale. I observe, that the soul of man in general must be made a partaker of a divine life, before it can be said to prosper at all. The words of our text are particularly applicable to a renewed heart, to one that is really alive to God. When a tree is dead, we do not so much as expect leaves from it, nor to see any beauty at all in a plant or flower that we know is absolutely dead; and therefore the foundation of the apostle's wish lies here, that the soul of Gaius, and consequently the souls of all true believers, have life communicated to them from the Spirit of the living God. Such a life may God of his infinite mercy impart to each of us! and I think, if I am not mistaken, and I believe I may venture to say that I am not, that where the divine life is implanted by the Spirit of the living God, that life admits of decrease and increase, admits of dreadful decays, and also of some blessed revivings. The rays of the divine life being once implanted, it will grow up to eternal life; the new creation is just like the old, when God said, "Let there be light, and there was light," which never ceased since the universe was made, and the favourite creature man was born. Upon a survey of his own works, God pronounced "every thing good, and entered into his rest;" so it will be with all those who are made partakers of the divine nature. "The water that I shall give him, shall be a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

My brethren, from our first coming into the world, till our passing out of it to "the spirits of just men made perfect," all the Lord's children have found, some more, and others less, that they have had dreadful as well as blessed times, and all has been over-ruled to bring them nearer unto God: but I believe, I am sure, I speak to some this night, that if it were put to their choice, had rather know that their souls prospered, than to have ten thousand pounds left them: and it is supposed that we may not only know it ourselves, but that others may know it, "that their profiting (as Paul says) may appear to all." Because John says, "I wish above all things, that thy body may be in health, as thy soul prospers." O may all that converse with us see it in us! We may frequently sit under the gospel, but if we do not take a great deal of care, however orthodox we are, we shall fall into practical Antinomianism, and be contented that we were converted twenty or thirty years ago, and learn, as some Antinomians, "to live by faith." Thank God, say some, we met with God so many months ago, but are not at all solicitous whether they meet with him any more; and there is not a single

individual here that is savingly acquainted with Jesus Christ, but wishes his soul prospered more than his body.

The great question is, how shall I know that my soul prospers? I have been told that there is such a thing as knowing this, and that I can be conscious of it myself, and others too. It may not be misspending an hour, to lay down some marks whereby we may know whether our souls prosper or no. If there be any of you of an Antinomian turn of mind, (I do not know there are any of you,) I do not know but you will be of the same mind as the man that came to me in Leadenhall twenty-five years ago: Sir, says he, you preached upon the marks of the new birth. Marks, says I; yes, sir: O thank God, says he, I am above marks, I do not mind marks at all!—and you may be assured persons are upon the brink of Antinomianism, that say, Away with your legal preaching. I wonder they do not say, as they go along the streets, Away with your dials, away with your dials, we do not want marks, we know what it is o'clock without any. If the marks upon the soul of a believer are like a sun-dial, they are marks to prove that we are upon the right foundation: if the sun does not shine on the sun-dial, there is no knowing what o'clock it is; but let it shine, and instantaneously you know the time of the day; this is not known when it is cloudy; and who dare to say but that a child of God, for want of the Sun of righteousness shining upon his heart, may write bitter things against himself? A good man may have the vapours; as one Mr. Brown had, that wrote a book of good hymns, who was so vapourish, that nobody could make him believe he had a soul at all. Let the sun shine, the believer can see whether the sun is in the meridian, at the sixth, ninth, or twelfth hour. O that there might be great searching of heart. I have been looking up to God for direction: I hope the preaching of this may be to awaken some, to call back some backsliders, to awaken some sinners that do not care whether their souls prosper or no. I do not mean the Tabernacle comers, or the Foundry comers, or the church, or dissenters, but I speak to all of you, of whatever denomination you are; God of his infinite mercy give you his Spirit.

You that are believers, come, let us have that common name among us all; if we have got it, we go off well. If you want to know whether your souls prosper, that is, whether they are healthy; you know what a person means when he wishes your body to prosper; let me ask you how it is between you and God, with respect to secret prayer? Good Mr. Banyan says, if we are prayerless, we are Christless. None of God's people, says he, come into the world still-born. Good Mr Burkitt (whose commentary has gone through five or six-and-twenty editions; and yet I think if he were now alive, and to preach once or twice a day, they would cry, Away with his commentary, and preaching, and all) speaks to the same purpose. "Come into the world still-born!" what language is that in a preacher's

mouth! but it will do for those that like to use marks and signs. "I will pour out a Spirit of grace and supplication," says the Lord; and I will venture to say, if the Spirit of grace resides in the heart, the Spirit of supplication will not be wanting. Persons under their first love dare not go without God; they go to God, not as the formalist does, not for fear of going to hell, or being damned. It is a mercy anything drives to prayer; and a person under the spirit of bondage, that has been just brought to the liberty of the sons of God, goes freely to his heavenly Father, under the discoveries and constraints of divine love. Come, I will appeal to yourselves; did not you, like a dear fond mother, if the child, the beloved child, made but the least noise in the world, O says the mother, the dear child cries, I must go and hush it: so, time was when many hearkened to the call of God, and could no more keep from the presence of God in secret, than a fond mother from the presence of her dear child. Now, if your souls do prosper, this connexion between you and God will be kept up: I do not say that you will always have the same fervour as when you first set out; I do not say you will always be carried up into the third heavens; the animal spirits possibly will not admit of such solace; but you should inquire with yourselves, whether you would be easy to be out of God's company? Steal from behind your counter, and go and converse with God. Sir Thomas Abney, who was observable for keeping up constant prayer in his family, being asked how he kept up prayer that night he was sworn in lord mayor? Very well, says he, I got the company into my room, and entertained them, and when the time came, I told them I must leave them a little, while I went and prayed with my family, and returned again. God grant we may have many such lord mayors. If our souls prosper, the same principle will reign in us, and make us conscientiously attend on the means of grace. It is a most dreadful mark of an enthusiastic turn of mind, when persons think they are so high in grace, that they thank God they have no need of ordinances. Our being the children of God, is so far from being the cause of our wanting no ordinances, that, properly speaking, the ordinances are intended for the nourishing of the children of God; not only for awaking the soul at first, but for feeding the soul afterwards. If the same nourishment the child receives before, feeds it after it is born; and as the manna never failed, but the children of Israel partook of it daily while in the wilderness, till they came to Canaan, so we shall want our daily bread, we shall want the God of grace and mercy to convey his divine life into our hearts, till we get into the heavenly Canaan. There faith will be turned into vision, and then we shall not want ordinances; and let people say what they will, if our souls prosper we shall be glad of ordinances, we shall love the place where God dwells; we shall not say, "such a one preaches, and I will not go," but if we are among them we shall be glad of a good plain country dish, as well as a fine garnished dessert; and if our

souls prosper, we shall be fond of the messengers as well as the message: we shall admire as much to hear a good ram's-horn, such as blowed down the walls of Jericho, as a fine silver trumpet. So, in all the ordinances of the Lord, that of the Lord's-supper for example; if the soul does not attend thereon, it is an evidence that it does not prosper. It is a wonder, if that soul has not done something to make it afraid to meet God at his table. "Adam, where art thou?" says the eternal Logos to his fallen creature; and every time we miss, whether we think of it or no, the Redeemer puts it down; but if our souls prosper, how shall we run to the table of the Lord, and be glad to come often to the commemoration of his death!

I will venture to affirm farther, that if your souls prosper, you will grow downwards. What is that? Why, you will grow in the knowledge of yourselves. I heard, when I was at Lisbon, that some people there began at the top of the house first. It is odd kind of preaching that will do for the Papists, resting merely in externals. The knowledge of ourselves is the first thing God implants. "Lord, let me know myself," was a prayer that one of the fathers put up for sixteen years together; and if you have high thoughts of yourselves, you may know you are light-headed, you forget what poor silly creatures you are. As our souls prosper, we shall be more and more sensible, not only of the outside, but of the inside; we first battle with the outward man, but as we advance in the divine life, we have nearer views of the chambers of imagery that are in our hearts; and one day after another we shall find more and more abominations there, and consequently we shall see more of the glory of Jesus Christ, the wonders of that Immanuel, who daily delivers us from this body of sin and death; and I mention this, because there is nothing more common, especially with young Christians. I used formerly to have at least a hundred or two hundred in a day, who would come and say, O dear, I am so and so, I met with God; ah, that is quite well: a week after they would come and say, O, sir, it is all delusion, there was nothing in it; what is the matter? O never was such a wretch as I am, I never thought I had such a wicked heart. Oh! God cannot love me; now, sir, all my fervour, and all that I felt, is gone. And what then? Does a tree never grow, but when it grows upward. Some trees I fancy grow downward; and the deeper you grow in the knowledge of yourself, the deeper you grow in the knowledge of God and his grace, that discovers the corruptions of your hearts. Do not you find that aged men look back upon some former states? I know some people cannot look back to see how many sins they have been guilty of; but if grace help us to a sight of our inherent corruptions, it will make us weary of it, and lead us to the blood of Christ, to cleanse us from it; consequently, if your souls prosper, the more you will fall in love with the glorious Redeemer, and with his righteousness. I never knew a person in my life that diligently used the word, and other means,

but as they improved in grace, saw more and more the necessity of depending upon a better righteousness than their own. Generally, when we first set out, we have got better hearts than heads; but if we grow in the divine life, our heads will grow as well as our hearts; and the Spirit of God leads out of abominable self, and causes us to flee more and more to that glorious and complete righteousness that Jesus Christ wrought out.—The more your souls prosper, the more you will see of the freeness and distinguishing nature of God's grace, that all is of grace. We are all naturally free-willers, and generally young ones say, O we have found the Messiah, of whom Moses and the prophets spake; which is right, except that word *we* have found; for the believer a little after learns, that the Messiah had found him. I mention this, because we ought not to make persons offenders for a word; we should bear with young Christians, and not knock a young child's brains out, because he cannot speak in blank verse.

Let it not be forgotten also, that the more your souls prosper, the more you will get above the world. You cannot think that I mean you should be negligent about the things of this life. Nothing tries my temper more, than to see any about me idle; an idle person tempts the devil to tempt him. In the state of paradise, Adam and Eve were to dress the garden, and not to be idle there; after the fall, they were to till the ground: but if anybody says that the Methodists teach to be idle, they injure them. We tell people to rise and be at their work early and late, that they may redeem time to attend the word. If all that speak against the Methodists were as diligent, it would be better for their wives and families. What, do you think a true Methodist will be idle? No, he will be busy with his hands, he knows time is precious, and therefore he will work hard that he may have to give to them that need, and at the same time he will live above the world; and you know the earth is under your feet, so is the world. When he goes to sleep, he will say, I care not whether I wake more. I can look back, and tell you of hundreds and hundreds that once seemed alive to God, and have been drawn away with a little filthy, nasty dirt. How many places are there empty here, that have been filled with persons that once were zealous in their attendance! As a person the other day, to whose having a place it was objected, that he was a Methodist; No, says he, I have not been a Methodist these two years.—I do not, for my part, wish people joy when they get money; only take care it does not get into, and put your eyes out; if your money increase, let your zeal for good works increase. Perhaps some stranger will say, I thought you were against good works. I tell you the truth, I am against good works, (do not run away before I have finished my sentence;) we are against good works being put in the room of Christ, as the ground of our acceptance; but we look upon it, if we have a right faith, our faith will work by love. Ever since I was a boy, I remember to have heard a story of a poor indigent beg-

gar, who asked a clergyman to give him his alms, which being refused, he said, Will you please, sir, to give me your blessing? Says he, God bless you. O, replied the beggar, you would not give me that, if it were worth anything. There are many who will talk very friendly to you, but if they suppose you are come for anything, they will run away as from a pickpocket; whereas, if our souls prospered, we should “count it more blessed to give than to receive.” When we rise from our beds, this would be our question to ourselves, What can I do for God today? What can I do for the poor? Have I two, or five, or ten talents? God help me to do for the poor as much as if I knew I were to live only this day.

In a word, if your souls prosper, my dear hearers, you will grow in love. There are some good souls, but very narrow souls; they are so afraid of loving people that differ from them, that it makes me uneasy to see it. Party spirits creep in among Christians, and whereas it was formerly said, “See how these Christians love one another!” now it may be said, “See how these Christians hate one another!” I declare from the bottom of my heart, that I am more and more convinced that the principles I have preached are the word of God. Pray what do you do at ’Change; is there such a thing as a Presbyterian, or Independent, or Church-walk, there? Is there any chambers there for the Presbyterians, and Independents, and church-men, to deal in? People may boast of their wildfire zeal for God, till they cannot bear the sight of a person that differs from them. The apostle commends Gaius for his catholic love, for his love to strangers. That was a glorious saying of a good woman in Scotland, “Come in, (says she,) ye blessed of the Lord;” I have a house that will hold a hundred, and a heart that will hold ten thousand. God give us such a heart; “he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God.” I could mention twenty marks, and so go on wire-drawing till nine or ten o’clock; but it is best to deal with our souls as with our bodies, to eat but little at a time. It is so with preaching; though I do not proceed any farther in my discourse, God bless what has been said.

But is there a child of God here that can go away without a drooping heart? I do not speak that you may think me humble: I love sincerity, inward and outward, and hate guile. When I think what God has done to me, how often he has pruned me, and dug and dunged about me, and when I think how little I have done for God, it makes me weep if possible tears of blood; it makes me cry, “O my leanness, my leanness,” as I expressed myself with my friend today. This makes me long, if my strength of body would permit, to begin to be earnest for my Lord. What say you, my dear friends, have all of you got the same temper? Have you made the progress you ought to have done? O London! London! highly favoured London! what would some people give for thy privileges! What would the people I was called to preach to but this day sevensnight? A good, a right honourable

lady, about three-and-twenty miles off, has brought the gospel there. The people that I preached to, longed and thirsted after the same message; they said, they thought they never heard the truth before. You have the manna poured out round the camp, and I am afraid you are calling it light bread; at least, I am afraid you have had a bad digestion. Consider of it, and for Jesus Christ's sake tremble for fear "God should remove his candlestick from among you." Labourers are sick; those that did once labour are almost worn out, and often only bring themselves into a narrow sphere, and so confine their usefulness. There are few that like to go out in the fields; broken heads and dead cats are no more the ornaments of a Methodist, but silk scarves. Those honourable badges are now no more: the languor has got from the ministers to the people, and if you do not take care, we shall all fall dead together. The Lord Jesus rouse us! the Son of God rouse us all! Ye should show the world the way, and ye that have been Methodists of many years standing, show the young ones, that have not the cross to bear as we once had, what ancient Methodism was.

As for you who are quite negligent about the prosperity of your souls, who only mind your bodies, who are more afraid of a pimple in your faces, than of the rottenness of your hearts; that will say, O give me a good bottle and a fowl, and keep the prosperity of your souls to yourselves. You had better take care what you say, for fear God should take you at your word. I knew some tradesmen and farmers, and one had got a wife perhaps with a fortune too, who prayed they might be excused: they never came to the supper, and God sent them to hell for it too; this may be your case. I was told to-day of a young woman, that was very well on Sunday when she left her friends, when she came home was racked with pain, had an inflammation in her bowels, and is now' a breathless corpse. Another that I heard of, a Christless preacher, that always minded his body, when he was near death he said to his wife, I see hell opened for me, I see the damned tormented, I see such a one in hell, that I debauched; in the midst of his agony he said, I am coming to thee, I must be damned, God will damn my soul,—and died. Take care of jesting with God; there is room enough in hell, and if you neglect the prosperity of your souls, what will become of you? What will you give for a grain of hope, when God requires your souls? "Awake, thou that sleepest;" hark! hark! hark! hear the word of the Lord, the living God. Help me, O ye children of God: I am come with a warrant from Jesus of Nazareth tonight. Ye ministers of Christ that are here, help me with your prayers; ye servants of the living God, help me with your prayers. O with what success did I preach in Moorfields, when I had ten thousand of God's people praying for me; pray to God to strengthen my body: do not be afraid I shall hurt myself tonight: I do not care what hurt I do myself, if God may bless it; I can preach but little, but may God bless that little. I weep and cry

and humble myself before God daily, for being laid aside; I would not give others the trouble, if I could preach myself. You have had the first of me, and you will have the last of me: the angels of God waited for your conversion, and are now ready to take care of the soul when it leaves the rotten carcase. The worst creature under heaven, that has not a penny in the world, may be welcome unto God. However it has been with us in times past, may our souls prosper in time to come; which God grant of his infinite mercy, *Amen.*